

PREFACE

There is a growing sense, both in America and around the world, that we are now nearing a major inflection point in world history, one comparable in its significance to that at the end of the Cold War in 1989-1991, or even to that at the end of the Second World War in 1945. One era, an era often called the American Century, is coming to an end. Another era, yet unnamed and certainly unknown, is about to begin. But whatever this new era's name and nature will eventually be, it will be the era that will be the mid-21st century.

The American Century was dated roughly from 1945 to 2020. It was defined by America being the leading superpower during the Cold War and the sole superpower during the thirty years thereafter, and it is this kind of superpower which is coming to an end. The next era will most likely be defined by conflicts between this much-diminished superpower and new and renewed great powers—in particular, China and Russia—with China even aspiring to be the next superpower. In other words, the next era will be some kind of multipolar one, and there will be conflicts between these poles, or great powers, that will be greater than anything since the Cold War.

However, a central question about this impending era remains. Will these conflicts be some new kind of peaceful but stressful competition, like the brief periods of Soviet-American détente during the Cold War; some new kind of arms races, dangerous crises, and local hot wars, like most of the Cold War; some new kind of terrible and total destruction, like the Second World War; or some new catastrophe now utterly beyond our experience?

This question is still open, awaiting the answers that will be offered by the leaders of the conflicting powers. But the most consequential answer will come from the leaders of the diminished superpower, the United States. That is, it will be how American leaders manage the transition from the old era, when their predecessors were also leaders of the world, to the new era, where American leaders will merely be the leaders of one great power, albeit the leading one, in a multipolar system. In other words, it will be the heirs of the old era who will preside—for good or ill, for reinvention or destruction—over the birth of the new.

The answers that American leaders give to the central question of our time—of what kind of peace and what kind of war—will not come out of a void, however. They will themselves be shaped and limited by certain continuing features of American foreign policy which fully matured during the American Century but which date back in many aspects to the founding of the United States, or even before. The circumstances in which America has deployed its foreign policy have greatly changed from era to era, but much of the character of American foreign policy has remained the same, at least as variations on a theme. It is this American character that will be tested by the challenges of the next era, and—more immediately and more dangerously—by the challenges of the transition to it.

This book is an exploration into that character of American foreign policy as it was formed into distinctive ideological and strategic traditions, and especially as it was expressed and exercised during the American Century. The different chapters present different aspects of American foreign policy, and more specifically of the rise, apex, decline, and perhaps impending fall of the American empire. This empire began at the

end of the 19th century in 1898, with the Spanish-American War and the great leap outward of the United States into the Caribbean and Central America and also into the Pacific and the Philippines. But the American empire was only established on a world scale in 1945, with America's great victory in the Second World War, and it was then that the American Century really began. The empire reached its apex in 1989-1991, with America's great victory in the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union. Its decline noticeably began in 2003, with the U.S. invasion of Iraq and the ensuing Iraq War, and then with the U.S.-originated global economic crisis that began in 2008. And now, at the end of the 2010s, many seasoned analysts of world affairs are anticipating the empire's fall.

In recent years, there have been many useful books published on aspects of the American empire or the American Century, and most of these are included in the Bibliography which can be found at the back of this book. As that empire and that century near their ends, the number of books on these topics have multiplied, illustrating once again the truth of Hegel's famous observation that "the Owl of Minerva begins its flight at dusk." I will mention several of these which I think are especially illuminating, and I will also mention the ways in which my own book is different and distinct from them.

In many ways, the pathbreaker and premier analyst for these topics has been Andrew Bacevich, beginning with his American Empire: The Realities and Consequences of U.S. Diplomacy (2002) and continuing with his recent Twilight of the American Century (2018). Bacevich's works are essential for understanding the workings of U.S. bureaucratic and ideological elites in operating the American empire and for also

understanding their destructive consequences, both abroad—particularly in the Middle East—and at home. My own approach follows him in this, but I place a greater emphasis on the principal importance of particular economic interests and globalist economic elites in the making of U.S. foreign policy. I also place a greater emphasis on America's competition with other great powers, i.e., China and Russia, and on the concept of regional spheres of influence as a basis for some kind of international order.

An essential recent book is Alfred McCoy's In the Shadows of the American Century: The Rise and Decline of US Global Power. Like Bacevich, McCoy focuses on the workings of U. S. bureaucracies—particularly the military and intelligence ones—in operating—and enforcing—the American empire, and he does so with invaluable comprehensiveness and detail. Moreover, he provides a similarly comprehensive, detailed, and systematic analysis of the rapidly growing threat from China. Again, my own approach places a greater emphasis on the principal importance of particular economic interests and globalist economic elites. I also have a more favorable view of the consequences of U.S. foreign policy during the Cold War, particularly within Western Europe and Northeast Asia.

One recent book that does discuss the importance of particular economic interests is A. G. Hopkins' American Empire: A Global History (2018). Hopkins presents a history of globalization by showing the similarities between the globalizing projects of the different Western colonial empires, particularly the British and American ones, and how these imperial projects culminated after the Second World War in American-led globalization. However, his definition of empire is largely limited to territorial ones. Thus, he discusses the territorial empire which the United States acquired after the

Spanish-American War but not the distinctive American way of empire, which is exercised through what I call a hegemonic system, rather than through a colonial system, and which uses such methods as informal and indirect rule, spheres of influence, alliances, and international organizations.

Most of the chapters in this book were initially published as articles during the 1990s-2010s, i.e., during the period of the apex and then the decline of the American empire. They have all been revised and updated, however, to address the realities of the current time, on the eve of the 2020s, and perhaps on the eve of the empire's collapse.

The chapters are grouped into five sections, beginning with an Overview, "Hegemony," which discusses the history of the American empire from 1945 to the present. This is followed by four Parts, which focus upon different dimensions of the distinctive American way of empire. Part I, "Ideology," includes four chapters which discuss the ideological character of American foreign policy, or what has long been called its "idealist" tradition. This ideology has often been defined as liberalism, which indeed it is, but Chapter 2 argues that its origins actually lie in American Protestantism. As for the implementation of this liberal ideology in recent American foreign policy, a central issue has been U.S. democratization projects in foreign countries.

Part II, "Strategy," includes five chapters which discuss the strategic dynamics of American foreign policy, or what has long been called its "realist" tradition. A major tension in composing America's strategy in foreign policy has always been in the defining of "the national interest" of the United States. In particular, is this interest best defined as merely national in scope, or global in scope, or somewhere in between, such as regional in scope? As for the implementation of strategic conceptions in recent American

foreign policy, a central issue has been what should be America's view of regional "spheres of influence" versus global "rules and norms."

Part III, "Insurgency," includes three chapters which discuss the major challenges to U.S. foreign policy and the American imperial project in the 2000s, i.e., Islamist terrorism and the Iraq War, along with a chapter on the related issue of Muslim immigration. In this regard, a central issue has been the conflict between American aspirations for a global economy and universal values, on the one hand, and Islamist resistance and local realities, on the other.

Part IV, "Political Economy," includes three chapters which discuss the interaction of economics and politics—political economy—in American foreign policy. Here a central issue has been the conflict between the drive by international banks and multinational corporations for a global economy, whose virtues are seen by them to be a self-evident truth, versus the resistance by nationally-focused businesses and populations who are desperately trying to maintain some semblance of a viable national economy.

Part IV, and the book, concludes with a vision of how the 21st century might be, or perhaps might have been, a Second American Century of peace and prosperity, rather than what now seems much more likely—the end of the American empire and the beginning of a new era of great-power conflicts abroad and of great socio-economic conflicts at home.

The grand project of the American empire was to redefine, or even reinvent, the traditional American national interest, which preserved American values, into a new American-led global order, which promoted universal values. During the first fifty years of the American Century, the era of the Cold War, it seemed to the U.S. foreign policy

establishment that, with containment and deterrence and with commitment and determination, this project could indeed be achieved. And at the end of the 1980s, it seemed that it had indeed been achieved and that its final and complete realization was merely a matter of time. During the 1990s and early 2000s, during the “unipolar moment,” this project became more and more explicitly seen as an impending American empire on a global scale. But the gap between global ideology and imperial visions, on the one hand, and great-power resistance and local realities, on the other, was soon revealed. The return of Russian and Chinese assertiveness, and the “forever” wars of America in the Islamic world, have now demonstrated once again, as has been demonstrated for centuries, that power and realities almost always confound ideology and visions.

The American world-wide empire and the American Century began in 1945, but there was a precise place and time of their birth. That place was on the deck of the battleship *U.S.S. Missouri*, which was then anchored in Tokyo Bay. And that time was the morning of September 2, 1945, when General Douglas MacArthur, at the head of the representatives of the Allied Forces, received the surrender of the representatives of the Empire of Japan. And so, this book begins, on its front cover, with a depiction of the moment when the American empire and the American Century were born.

