

2011

H-Diplo

H-Diplo Roundtable Review

www.h-net.org/~diplo/roundtables

Volume XII, No. 25 (2011)

6 June 2011

Roundtable Editors: Thomas Maddux and Diane Labrosse
Roundtable Web/Production Editor: George Fujii

Introduction by Thomas Maddux

Philip S. Golub. *Power, Profit, and Prestige: A History of American Imperial Expansion.*

London: Pluto Press, 2010. 240 pp. ISBN: 9780745328713 (paperback, £16.00).

Stable URL: <http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/roundtables/PDF/Roundtable-XII-25.pdf>

Contents

Introduction by Thomas Maddux, California State University, Northridge.....	2
Review by Stephen Burman, Sussex University and UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office..	6
Review by Michael H. Hunt, University of North Carolina	10
Review by Ross A. Kennedy, Illinois State University	14
Review by Richard Saull, Queen Mary, University of London	17
Response by Philip S. Golub, Université Paris 8 and American University of Paris.....	22

Copyright © 2011 H-Net: Humanities and Social Sciences Online.

H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for non-profit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author(s), web location, date of publication, H-Diplo, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For other uses, contact the H-Diplo editorial staff at h-diplo@h-net.msu.edu.

Introduction by Thomas Maddux, California State University, Northridge

In *Power, Profit & Prestige: A History of American Imperial Expansion*, Philip Golub has taken up a major challenge in a field that has a number of contending interpretations by historians in studies that far exceed the length of Golub's essay, 154 pages. In some respects Golub's study is closer to two foundational studies by Richard W. Van Alstyne and William A. Williams than more recent assessments since 2005. Van Alstyne focused on the emergence of a concept of American empire out of the eighteenth century European struggle for dominance and its development through continental expansion into insular imperialism in the Caribbean and Pacific. Williams shifted attention further to internal sources shaping American expansion and the quest for overseas market opportunities culminating in a powerful 20th century drive for an open door for American trade and investment at the expense of American ideals of self-determination and representative government. In two brief chapters that situate the new U.S. in the "World Historical Setting" and explore its rise of dominance before 1945, Golub places the U.S. even more tightly than Van Alstyne in western global expansion and enhances William's open door perspective with a world systems orientation.

In moving rapidly to the post-1945 "Hierarchies of *Pax Americana*, Golub emphasizes continuity with both material and ideational variables shaping imperial expansion with an ever "widening scope rather than a change of character in American ambitions." (45) Many historians, however, have given significantly more emphasis to the challenges raised by the U.S. to European imperial powers and other nations as a result of its beliefs, especially its sense of exceptionalism, and its encouragement of modernity. Robert Kagan, for example, in *Dangerous Nation*, emphasizes not only expansionism but also the revolution's unleashing of an ideology and liberal, commercial society that challenged the Old World. In *The Myth of American Diplomacy: National Identity and U.S. Foreign Policy*, Walter Hixson agrees with Golub on continuity but places far more emphasis on the "Myth of America," a myth of progress, peacefulness in international relations, superiority in all areas, and a belief in self-determination. For Joan Hoff in *A Faustian Foreign Policy from Woodrow Wilson to George W. Bush: Dreams of Perfectibility*, the myth of America is the belief from the Puritans through George W. Bush that America is "an exceptional nation with God always on its side," a view that led to a belief in self-righteous superiority, and the importance of protecting America and its principles when they "were perceived to be rejected or under attack." ¹

The reviewers welcome the European perspective that Golub brings to his thesis on American expansion. As Stephen Burman notes, Golub's study is "engaging and packed

¹ Joan Hoff, *A Faustian Foreign Policy from Woodrow Wilson to George W. Bush: Dreams of Perfectibility* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008). See also William O. Walker III, *National Security and Core Values in American History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009) which emphasizes a "security ethos" from colonial origins to the present that justifies expansionist internationalism and the subordination of domestic rights and liberties. H-Diplo roundtables on Kagan, Hixson, Hoff, and Walker may be found on the H-Diplo webpage at <http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/>

with thought-provoking argumentation and insight.” Michael Hunt approves Golub’s mixture of a “nice mix of interpretively fresh if challenging high-concept sections and familiar, less strenuous but sprightly narrative punches.” Richard Saull concludes that Golub has provided an “interesting and elegantly written examination of the history of the global rise of the United States.” The reviewers do raise a number of questions about Golub’s thesis and the development of it, and Golub’s response offers a good perspective on his thesis and overall perspective on international relations and the United States relationship to imperialism.

1. The reviewers have reservations concerning Golub’s emphasis on the continuity of U.S. imperialism to the present despite brief but ultimately unsuccessful attempts to shift to a more international, cooperative approach. Although welcoming the inclusion of the U.S. in the European imperial expansion and its emergence as a junior partner in the 19th century, Ross Kennedy questions the implied assumption of consensus among American leaders, noting the debates over expansion in the 1840s and 1890s as well as significant disagreements on tariff and trade policies as well as foreign policies “during World War I, the 1920s-30s, or the late 1940s and early 1950s.” Kennedy also questions Golub’s assessment of the motives behind U.S. policy, noting the absence of the inclusion of forces that Golub does not incorporate in his “imperial cosmology”, such as “visions of international hierarchy and world order founded on notions of cultural and racial superiority that were common to all western imperial states.” (9) As Kennedy points out, the importance of security in Washington’s foreign policies receives little attention. Federalists and Jeffersonians never took their eye off the British, who did invade the capital and engage in some burning and looting during the War of 1812. The U.S. acted as an imperial power long before the rapprochement with England at the end of the 19th century. If Golub had more space for the 19th and early 20th century, he would have profited from Richard Immerman’s *Empire for Liberty: A History of American Imperialism from Benjamin Franklin to Paul Wolfowitz* which uses case studies of six Americans from Benjamin Franklin to Wolfowitz to explore how these leaders addressed the U.S. as an empire.²

2. Stephen Burman notes that “there is an air of certainty that gives ... [Golub’s] thesis an enormous drive and sweeps the reader along, but reflection tends to diminish the power of the argument.” Burman would have appreciated more evaluation of different interpretations and explanations for the changes in U.S. policy. “If this [imperial] mentality is so predominant,” Burman asks, “how do we explain the undoubted changes that have taken place in the character of American foreign policy at different periods.” In discussing the policies of recent presidents from Ronald Reagan to Barack Obama, Burman emphasizes that “it is too abstract to subsume the real debates about different strategies for maintaining power under the common rubric of an imperial rubric.”

3. Michael Hunt, who went over the same ground as Golub in *The American Ascendancy: How the United States Gained & Wielded Global Dominance* (the subject of another H-Diplo roundtable), raises three debatable points with Golub which he suggests

² A roundtable on Immerman’s study is available at <http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/>

points to a “reductionist stress on empire.” In his study, Hunt emphasized the U.S. in the 20th century as a hegemonic rather than an imperial power suggesting that “in essential, empire and hegemony seem quite different with one resting on coercion directed at the subordination of particular peoples and the other demanding legitimacy derived from broad provision of public goods.” Golub does discuss this issue at several points, noting that “if it differed in some important respects from the nineteenth-century imperial system, the post-1945 American order, outside of the Soviet bloc, was only hegemonic in its western core and Japan. Beyond these two strategic frontiers, the US acted as an imperial power even if it did not seek to establish direct territorial control.” (62, and 11-15) Hunt also questions Golub’s assessment of globalization, noting that the U.S. did not control this process and that Golub “omits the incredible advances made during the era of globalization.” Finally, Hunt would put more emphasis on “dynamic, divided nationalisms” in the U.S. rather than Golub’s “driven American empire builders operating out of a fundamental consensus.”

4. Richard Saull questions an assessment of U.S. policy as “being driven by a consistent and uniform internally-constituted imperial dynamic encompassing the struggles and political-economic structures of the nineteenth century with that of the post-war era and more recently.” What this approach downplays, and a common problem with assessments that omit the impact of external forces on the U.S., Saull emphasizes is the “way in which shifting developments within and across states outside of the United States have contributed to the dynamic of American global power ... [and] are too easily overlooked by Golub, in what reads, at times, as a form of determinism in the explanation of American global power.” The agency of other powers, most notably Nazi Germany and Japan in World War II, the Soviet Union in the Cold War, al-Qaeda and September 11th as well as historical contingency receive little agency in Golub’s study. “It was not pre-given, then, that the U.S. would establish the geopolitical and economic institutional frameworks that it did after 1945,” Saull asserts, “and that it did so is only explicable with reference to the behavior of other states” and domestic and social forces. Saull also suggests a “theoretical and historical-empirical weakness” in Golub’s evaluation of U.S. power after 1945, most notably in Golub’s “understanding of the institutionalization of the international capitalist economy and the relationship between the geopolitical and socio-economic logics of American power.”

Participants:

Philip S. Golub is Professeur des Universités associé, Université Paris 8, and Associate Professor of international relations at the American University of Paris (AUP). He has a DPhil in international relations from the University of Sussex and an MPhil in contemporary history and international relations from Université Paris-IV Sorbonne. He is currently working on a study of East Asia’s rising role in the world system as well as an essay on the history of globalization.

Michael H. Hunt is the Emerson Professor Emeritus at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. His most recent books are *The American Ascendancy: How the U.S. Gained and Wielded Global Dominance* (UNC Press, 2007) and *A Vietnam War Reader: A Documentary*

History from American and Vietnamese Perspectives (UNC Press, 2010). *Arc of Empire: America's Pacific Wars, 1899-1975*, co-authored with Steven I. Levine, should appear next year. His regular commentary on U.S. foreign relations appears on the UNC Press Blog (<http://uncpressblog.com/category/columnists/michael-h-hunt/>) as well as on his professional website (<http://www.unc.edu/~mhhunt/washworld.html>).

Ross A. Kennedy received his Ph.D. from the University of California at Berkeley. He has taught at the Johns Hopkins University-Nanjing University Center for Chinese and American Studies and is an associate professor of history at Illinois State University. He is the author of *The Will to Believe: Woodrow Wilson, World War I, and America's Strategy for Peace and Security* (Kent State University Press, 2009). Professor Kennedy is currently working on editing *A Companion to Woodrow Wilson* (Wiley-Blackwell, forthcoming).

Stephen Burman was educated at Cambridge and Oxford Universities. He is professor of American Politics and History at the University of Sussex. His most recent book is *The State of the American Empire*, University of California Press 2007. He is currently working on secondment at the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office. The views he expresses in this review are personal

Richard Saull is Senior Lecturer in International Politics in the School of Politics and International Relations, Queen Mary, University of London. He has written and published on the Cold War, international revolution and American hegemony. His major publications include *Rethinking Theory and History in the Cold War* (London: Frank Cass, 2001); *The Cold War and After* (London: Pluto Press, 2007); Co-editor, *The War on Terrorism and the American 'Empire' After the Cold War* (London: Routledge, 2005). Saull is currently working on a book-length project on the historical sociology of far-right political movements in Western Europe tracing the international dimensions of their origin and evolution from the late nineteenth century to the contemporary era.

Philip Golub's book is a *tour de force*. It provides an answer to the inevitable question, do we need another book on American imperialism? We do, if the book is as engaging and packed with thought-provoking argumentation and insight as this one. *Power, Profit and Prestige* is a work of unusual scope and historical range, but it is written by an author who is equal to the task he sets himself. He shows exceptional erudition, mastery of the field and the skill to marshal a vast range of material in service of a consistent argument. He writes with enormous fluency in a style that is dense but never obscure and is a pleasure to read.

The argument is that, while the proximate causes of the imperial urge evident under the George W. Bush administration are contingent, it is rooted in deeper causes that are traceable to empire building and imperial identity construction over long periods. Golub wants to explain the puzzle of Bush's monopoly-seeking behaviour that appears to have no rational justification in terms of U.S. interests and does so by putting the contemporary U.S. imperialist urge into historical perspective. He argues that Bush's expansionism reflects a will to power that is a radical manifestation of a pervasive historical culture of expansion and force, not therefore a new imperialism but rather a reformulation under new circumstances of a set of foundational assumptions about the coincidence of U.S. and universal interests and America's destiny to be at the centre of world affairs.

Golub begins by situating the American Empire in its early world historical setting. He establishes the polycentrism of the pre-imperial world order and challenges the narrative of Western superiority. Europe was not inherently advantaged; other parts of the world were also industrious and could have had their industrial revolutions if it had not been for colonial subjugation. Western pre-eminence arose from specific factors that created a system of world inequality. The American and Transatlantic basin economy, based as it was on slave labour, played a central part in the emergence of Western imperialism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a process characterised in the U.S. and elsewhere by militarism and violence. The evidence is well marshalled, although the underlying ideas are received and the invocation at various points of World Systems theory, the Wisconsin school and other approaches shows an eclecticism that gives a less than systematic feel to the exposition.

Golub then traces the emergence of the U.S. as a shaper of the world order, focusing on the turn from domestic to imperial expansion and arguing that there is a continuum between these phases as they are both underpinned by the same expansionist mentality. This leads to an interesting discussion of the relationship between Woodrow Wilson's liberal internationalism and ultra-imperialism. Golub is surely right to refuse a neat distinction between continental and international expansion but it is not clear whether this is intended to deny the well known theoretical explanations of the imperialism of this period.

Taking the story forward to the post war era, Golub demonstrates how the U.S. was determined to supplant Britain as the leading imperial power and established a tripartite

imperial system in which Europe was rebuilt on a hegemonic basis via a single market and a strong security alliance, East Asia on the basis of authoritarian mercantilism, and the Far Empire of the third world on the basis of almost permanent intervention and war. The taxonomy is enlightening, although the relative absence of consideration of the USSR here, and indeed throughout the book, is puzzling. Golub shows that the U.S. empire was at best only partially hegemonic at the outset of its post war pre-eminence, combining consensual elements we associate with hegemony with strongly authoritarian ones, predatory characteristics and an appalling record of intervention.

The decline debates of the 70s and 80s and the post cold war are Golub's next focus. He establishes the important point that the end of the Cold War demonstrated that the logic of the American security structure, which continued to be extensive and massive, was not to provide defence so much as to be a vehicle to promote, often aggressively, U.S. interests. He argues that the U.S. faced a set of three options in the immediate aftermath of the cold war: neo-liberal globalism, realism, and imperialism. Bill Clinton, in what is described as a liberal interlude, succeeded in shaping a new transnational consensus with the U.S. at its core by adopting the first option. This entailed the elevation of economics relative to security as a policy driver and Clinton's success in embedding American pre-eminence in a global market system set the stage for, although it did not necessarily entail, the limitless ambition of the Bush era.

Illusions of U.S. omnipotence became a broad ideational trend at the turn of the millennium. The acceptance of unipolarity and indispensability was more or less universal in the foreign policy establishment, encompassing liberal intellectuals like John Ikenberry and Michael Ignatieff, in marked contrast to the espousal of declinism by many of the same intellectual followers of fashion just a generation earlier. All of us who write about these matters have to accept that the sound of climbing on bandwagons is more deafening in this field than in most. But whereas the likes of Madeleine Albright, Zbigniew Brzezinski and Henry Kissinger advocated prudence and cooperation to maintain hegemony, ambition was expressed in extreme terms by the coalition that made up the Bush administration. In stark contrast with the jeremiads of just a generation earlier the hubris was ingrained and gave the administration licence to strive for a global monopoly of power, something which Golub demonstrates they were determined upon from the outset of the administration and well before 9/11. This congenial ideological environment gives part of the explanation for the Bush strategy but the author rejects the argument that it was, as realists would have it, merely a normal state reaction to an asymmetry of power. Instead it was the latest manifestation of the imperial cosmology that has been the chief characteristic of U.S. foreign policy from its earliest days.

What of the present and the future? Golub concludes by projecting the current juncture beyond the crisis of legitimacy that Bush's monopoly seeking behaviour engendered, and looks towards the changing structure of international affairs that will emerge from the current global crisis. Bush's hubris showed that a unipolar order is no longer possible. Unlike 1970s when the U.S. was able to recover from a crisis of authority today's emerging powers, notably in Latin America and East Asia, enjoy more autonomy and capacity for cooperation without U.S. tutelage. Bush's overreach produced the opposite outcome of that

envisaged, namely an acceleration of multipolarity. Golub proposes therefore that these trends point towards a possibility of the re-establishment, after hundreds of years, of a new polycentrism, perhaps headed in the first instance by a China-led integration of East Asia outside the U.S. sphere of influence. The choice for the future is not, as the American imperial mentality would have it, between its benevolent hegemony and chaos but between chaos and inclusive, ordered and institutionalised cooperation.

What are we to make of this jam-packed and exhilarating grand tour of U.S. imperial history? For every strength there is an accompanying weakness, and in this case the very breadth of the book gives an inevitable sense of the survey. Although the historical chapters are integral to the argument, by their nature there is a tendency to favour an amalgamation of congenial ideas rather than a sustained engagement with competing arguments. It is not that there is a lack of rigour in the historical exposition but the theoretical currents relevant to the argument are not developed systematically and the choices between various schools are not addressed in sufficient depth. As a result, although I am sympathetic with Golub's impatience with attempts to establish causality as between material and ideational factors governing U.S. expansionism, which he rightly sees as mutually self-constituting, I am not sure where he stands in a theoretical sense.

The substance of the argument is clear but the synthetic approach can appear eclectic at best and promiscuous at worst in selecting points and ideas to support it. There are no obvious criteria grounds for the selection of the historical material cited and this generates concern that evidence is marshalled selectively to support a pre-conceived perspective. This leaves a suspicion that a very different argument could be developed if other evidence were selected from the same range of sources. There is an air of certainty that gives the thesis an enormous drive and sweeps the reader along, but reflection tends to diminish the power of the argument. To be more substantive, the idea of the single trajectory with the new imperialism as a variation on the talk of a Pax Americana a century earlier is a construction that derives from selective emphasis. I would certainly not wish to deny the value of an historical approach and am all in favour of avoiding classic international relations' traps of seeking timeless answers to essentially historical questions, but to emphasize a singular consistent thread comes perilously close to a teleological fallacy. It leaves us with the problem that if this mentality is so predominant how do we explain the undoubted changes that have taken place in the character of American foreign policy at different periods. By flattening the typology of empire to the point of virtually equating territorial and hegemonic models, Golub is thinning out the texture and evolution of American imperialism and this is surely at odds with the reality and with an historical approach to it.

Golub shows awareness of the importance of differences in U.S. policy makers' approaches to empire (pages 13 and 148) but I do not think their full significance is taken on board. He argues that the imperial mentality embedded in U.S. political culture has repeatedly surfaced, most recently with Bush. What is not clear to me is, if this imperial impulse is as strong as Golub suggest why should we have reason to expect the U.S. to accede peacefully to a more plural order. Under threat to its power the U.S. has hitherto sought ways of re-establishing its monopoly. There is no simple formula for success; Ronald Reagan and

Clinton restored U.S. power in quite different ways while Bush and Jimmy Carter failed for very different reasons.

In the current fast changing state of world affairs I would suggest that more flexible approaches are again in the ascendant because the liberal analysis is right at this juncture, the major challenges now are global and beyond the capacity of the U.S. to resolve. Power will have to be shared if it is to be preserved. This is the rationale for Barack Obama's foreign policy with its multilateral trappings and commitment to partnership. The difficulty Obama is having in avoiding a more old fashioned balance of power approach to diplomacy demonstrates that the dangers of a resurgence of nationalism are present, as Golub rightly argues. But my point is that it is too abstract to subsume the real debates about different strategies for maintaining power under the common rubric of an imperial impulse. Clinton and Carter in the modern era represent just as much of the picture of American foreign relations as do Reagan and Bush. The liberal elements are more than an interlude; they too will have their day because they express profound aspects of the U.S. character and sit in uneasy tension with the more aggressive dimension that Golub gives precedence to.

The truth of their importance is evident if we consider possible future orders, or rather the transition to them. If America the aggressor resurfaces, perhaps under a post-Obama administration and the U.S. resists the power shifts that we can all see, then there will be conflict of unknowable dimensions in a situation where the U.S. is less strong and emerging powers are more so. If, on the other hand, the U.S. reacts with flexibility to power shifts, recognizing the fact that, as guarantor of a global market system it can generate genuine rivals without contradicting its own interests, then the stable polycentrism of Golub's projection may well emerge. In other words, for there to be any real prospect of the constructive polycentrism Golub envisages coming to pass we must accept that monopoly seeking is no more the true nature of American imperialism than is benign hegemony. Instead we should take both the liberal hegemonic and aggressive imperialist approach seriously and see the tension between them as the genuine struggle for the soul of America and the real story of U.S. foreign policy. What is to be explained is more the rhythm of declinism and hubris than the long march of one-dimensional imperialism. Greater theorisation of the differences between American regimes would have revealed the contours in what is otherwise too flat a picture of American imperialism. It would not only be truer to complex reality, but would also allow better understanding of U.S. interaction with rest of the world, a struggle whose outcome will mightily affect the future of us all.

So here we go again -- another attempt at making sense of what has become a widely recognized problem: U.S. policy gone haywire. Philip Golub joins others in identifying the 1990s as the point when trouble began. The end of the Cold War tempted policymakers into various kinds of global overreach, a tendency accentuated during the George W. Bush administration. Its militarism failed on the ground and created dismay abroad. Compounding U.S. difficulties, the financial system over which the Bush team casually presided descended into crisis, spreading havoc at home and abroad and further eroding American strength and legitimacy.

Golub has shaped an explanation for these developments apparently guided by the dictum that the simpler the solution to any problem, the better it is. He finds at the heart of the U.S. crisis a legacy of "imperial expansion" (a notion highlighted in the subtitle). *Power, Profit and Prestige* develops this argument singlemindedly in what is less a history of that expansion than a historically and sociologically informed indictment of it. Empire has defined the U.S. experience from its origins down to the present, we are told here. So ingrained has empire become as a way of life that "American policymakers and mainstream theorists appear incapable of thinking outside this conceptual box" (p. 144). The doleful consequences have become evident over the past two decades. Fixated by imperial commitments, precedents, and assumptions, Washington resists setting limits on its actions and ignores consequences that further accentuate those limits. As U.S. policy sinks into deeper and deeper disarray, so the argument goes, "American-centered globalisation" grinds to a halt, portending "a historical reversal of the process of economic internationalisation" (p. 1).

These claims are contained in what amounts to an extended essay. A text of 154 pages is followed by a scholarly apparatus -- notes and bibliography -- that constitutes fully a quarter of this slim volume. The essay unfolds along chronological lines. It begins with the settler colonialism of the seventeenth century that set the imperial pattern, and it continues tracing the seamless transition from continental expansion to overseas empire. In this account as in so many others, World War II is a watershed. Deeply ingrained imperial aspirations now gain free global play. Having devoted half the text to getting to this point, Golub devotes the balance to the institutions, practices, and outlooks that defined the postwar imperium and to the troubles mounting about it over the last decade or two.

The essay tends to operate in two alternating and complementary modes. The volume starts out with broad propositions that require a close and careful reading, even though the author does his best to avoid social science jargon and theoretical obfuscation. This kind of denser material is followed by more conventional, detailed historical narrative filled with shrewd observations and featuring the personalities and outlooks that dominated the American state. That in turn gives way to another patch of abstraction and so forth. Thus the reader proceeds with a nice mix of interpretively fresh if challenging high-concept sections and familiar, less strenuous but sprightly narrative patches.

This imperial tale is told in terms that clearly locate it historiographically -- in an interpretive line that goes back to William Appleman Williams. *Power, Profit and Prestige* insists on continuity in U.S. policy arising from the play of economic forces. World systems theory, which treats U.S. international behavior in terms of a single, integrated pattern of expansion and dominance, provides the interpretive frame. This volume in its sophistication, clarity, and boldness of argument provides a welcome updating of a now venerable line of argument. It leaves readers who may not agree no excuse for dodging the challenges this approach lays down.

So let me take up that challenge. Three major points seem debatable. Taken together, they suggest that the least compelling aspect of this work lies at its core -- its reductionist stress on empire.

Power, Profit and Prestige is emphatic in making hegemony an aspect of empire. I don't find conflating the two persuasive definitionally or helpful analytically. I've indicated why in recent writings.¹ In essentials, empire and hegemony seem quite different, with one resting on coercion directed at the subordination of particular peoples and the other demanding legitimacy derived from broad provision of public goods. It is undoubtedly true, as this volume insists, that the United States has a long, rich record of coercing and controlling others. But it seems also true that the United States has provided public goods even if not to the extent or with the consistency that the author or I might like. Anyone interested in this point might want to consult the scholarship (omitted from this study) comparing British and American dominion that not only insists on the empire-hegemony distinction but also underlines the strikingly different scales of hegemony emanating from Britain and the United States.²

Second, the indictment here rests on a tendentious reading of globalization in relation to U.S. policy. This text seems to credit Washington with more control over globalization than I would allow. As a process from the late nineteenth century onward, the forces of globalization developed considerable inertia driven in large measure by the technological innovations that gave rise to various kinds of integration. American leaders could try to harness and even at points resist this integration -- but only within limits. The text seems in addition to downplay the significance of major powers (increasingly joined by non-state

1. See the Conclusion of *The American Ascendancy: How the U.S. Gained and Wielded Global Dominance* (University of North Carolina Press, 2007) and "Empire, Hegemony, and the U.S. Policy Mess" (post to History News Network, 21 May 2007), <http://www.hnn.us/articles/37486.html>.

2 On this U.S.-British comparisons, long-available works to conjure with include Patrick Karl O'Brien, "The Pax Britannica and American Hegemony: Precedent, Antecedent or Just Another History?" in *Two Hegemonies: Britain 1846-1914 and the United States 1941-2001*, ed. O'Brien and Armand Cleese (Aldershot, U.K.: Ashgate, 2002), 3-64; Patrick K. O'Brien and Geoffrey Allen Pigman, "Free Trade, British Hegemony and the International Economic Order in the Nineteenth Century," *Review of International Studies* 18 (April 1992): 89-113; and Bernard Porter, *Empire and Superempire: Britain, America and the World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

actors) seeking collectively to tame the transnational forces that defined this emerging modern-day globalization. From the outset the United States was intimately involved in that process. In what sense can we label as imperial such activities as setting standards for time, weight or navigation or devising norms to minimize the suffering modern technology had brought to warfare? Finally, this interpretation omits the incredible advances made during the era of globalization. These can be measured, for example, in the crude statistics of life expectancy and per capita income. It is not enough to focus only on growing wealth gaps or to stress the general economic stagnation that went with colonialism. Absolute numbers count as well -- and they show a clear relationship between globalization and human welfare, and at no time has that relationship been more clear than in the post-World War II era of U.S. dominance. More is going on here than Golub allows.³

Finally, nationalism as a force in American life plays a distinctly limited role in the argument advanced by *Power, Profit and Prestige*. It does allow for the existence in recent decades of a tension between hyper-nationalists bent on protecting U.S. sovereignty against the encroachment of the UN and other nefarious international entities and liberal internationalists who value the institutions and norms conducive to cooperation. But both, this work stresses, are at heart committed to imperial goals even as they sometimes disagree on how to get there. Thus in this version even nationalism conforms to the deep-rooted imperatives of empire. I'm not persuaded that this stance takes account of the intellectual and cultural tensions that have marked the long haul of U.S. history or that it captures current circumstances. I have argued to the contrary that American nationalism has come in recent decades to be sharply fractured and distinctly unstable and thus susceptible to some major shift.⁴ My notion of dynamic, divided nationalisms collides with the world on offer here of driven American empire builders operating out of a fundamental consensus.

What are the practical implications of Philip Golub's critique for the options before Americans? It seems fair to conclude that his line of argument offers little that is hopeful. Americans are trapped in what Golub wonderfully terms "an imperial cosmology" (p. 9), and he offers no reason to expect the country to shed that world view in favor of some other more modest outlook even though he himself would like to see the United States "moving away from efforts to maintain military supremacy and economic disparity towards a more democratic pattern of relations with the rest of the world" (p. 154). The future he actually expects is the same long, slow descent from imperial glory that the British experienced through the first half of the twentieth century.

3. The work of Angus Maddison, especially his *The World Economy: A Millennial Perspective* (Paris: Development Centre of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2001), is essential on the absolute rise in per capita income even as relative levels of income not only among regions but also within countries have widened.

4. "Electoral Angst and Nationalist Troubles" (posted to UNC Press blog, 6 December 2010), <http://uncpressblog.com/2010/12/06/electoral-angst-and-nationalist-troubles/>.

The lack of a prescription for how Americans might either engineer a basic policy shift or better manage their decline derives from this volume's emphasis on empire to the neglect of nationalist currents. Differences among various strains of U.S. nationalism seem to me sharp at the moment and give the current situation a political fluidity that Golub underestimates. Now as earlier in U.S. history, the outcome of debates over national identity and values matters -- and it is precisely here, in shaping the direction of this debate, that *Power, Profit and Prestige's* fixation on a single imperial mindset may push the reader toward a needless pessimism. Suppose we take a more optimistic view. Maybe empire does not constitute the entirety of U.S. foreign relations but only a part. In that case, it becomes possible to imagine a debate over the future of the country that puts liquidating the problematic, imperial aspect of U.S. policy high on the agenda. Might such a debate clear the way for a new course of working with rather than trying to subordinate or weaken regional powers and of focusing on the more doable and rewarding tasks associated with global governance and domestic renovation?

The nature of empires, and of the American empire in particular, has been the subject of much academic and journalistic debate recently, including exchanges on H-Diplo. Philip S. Golub's book is an ambitious contribution to this discussion, as it offers a sweeping "historical sociological study of American expansionism" (1). Golub argues that from the founding of the republic onward, the United States was part of an imperial system and culture centered in Western Europe and especially in Britain; that U.S. elites avidly pursued territorial and commercial expansion in ways not unlike the Europeans throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; and that an imperial drive continued to dominate U.S. policymaking beyond the end of the Cold War, to the point that the administration of George W. Bush became "drunk with power" and launched a reckless attempt to establish "a new world order under exclusive American control" (117). As a polemic against recent U.S. foreign policy, this book at times makes for interesting reading, particularly when it discusses various global trends that have run counter to the expectations of the second Bush administration. It also provides some useful information about the development of the international economy in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As an interpretation of the history of U.S. expansionism, however, Golub's argument is unconvincing.

One basic problem with Golub's argument lies in the author's apparent belief that U.S. leaders always agreed on the desirability and need for expansion of one kind or another. There is no mention of any debate about territorial expansion in the 1840s or 1890s or of any substantive disagreements among U.S. leaders over tariff and trade policy or over foreign policy during World War I, the 1920s-30s, or the late 1940s and early 1950s. In reality, however, American policymakers rarely agreed on how much importance to assign to overseas trade or on the tariff policy best suited to economic prosperity. Territorial expansion provoked even sharper debate, particularly in the key periods of the 1840s and 1890s. Reading Golub, one would never know that the treaty to annex Texas in 1844 failed by over a 2 to 1 margin in the U.S. Senate, with all but one Whig voting with the majority. President Tyler had to resort to annexing Texas via congressional resolution; strongly opposed by most Whigs, it barely passed the House of Representatives (120-98) and the Senate (27-25). In the 1890s, lawmakers were likewise divided over annexing the Philippines, although imperialists had greater strength than the Texas annexationists in the 1840s. In the end, the peace treaty with Spain including the annexation provision passed by one vote, chiefly because many Democrats who opposed annexation preferred to end the war first and then take up the issue of what to do with the islands. As in the 1840s, there was nothing close to a consensus in favor of imperialism. Such sharp divisions over key episodes in the history of American expansionism undermine Golub's portrait of U.S. leaders as displaying a "constancy of imperial purpose" in their diplomacy (13).

Golub also oversimplifies the motives behind U.S. foreign policy. He sees an "imperial cosmology" at the heart of U.S. expansionism, defined as a vision of "international hierarchy and world order founded on notions of cultural and racial superiority that were common to all western imperial states" (9). Golub suggests that U.S. imperialism was further spurred

by “material forces,” such as ambitions to expand cotton production, to acquire overseas markets, and to secure raw materials for the American economy. Essentially, in other words, Golub appears to think that expansionism was driven by racism and economic greed.

This argument ignores a variety of other ideas and motives that historians have identified as significant factors behind U.S. expansionism. In the first half of the nineteenth century, for example, historians such as Drew McCoy and Thomas Hietala have shown that expansionism derived in large measure from a close connection Americans made between republican political stability and widespread landownership.¹ During the 1890s, overseas imperialism appears to have been driven at least in part by cultural anxieties having to do with industrialization’s impact upon “manhood” and self-making character traits involving self-control, self-sacrifice, and hard work. Even if one chooses to stress racism and economic desires over these factors, one would at least like to see them discussed, but Golub does not do so. Similarly, during both World Wars, many American leaders justified U.S. intervention overseas in part on the grounds that if Germany dominated Europe, it might then try to establish bases or dependencies in the Western Hemisphere from which it could physically threaten U.S. territory. Faced with such a threat, feared both by Woodrow Wilson and Franklin Roosevelt, the U.S. might have had to militarize its domestic political economy in order to keep its independence, a course that might erode its democracy at home. Fears that a Soviet-dominated Europe could force America into becoming a regimented “garrison state” also animated President Truman in the early years of the Cold War, a point well-documented by Melvyn Leffler in his work.² In Golub’s rendering of U.S. foreign relations, though, none of these security fears existed or, if they did, they had nothing to do with the making of American foreign policy.

The limited character of Golub’s analysis is especially striking in his brief discussion of World War I. Here, he recycles the 1920s-30s “revisionist” interpretation that the United States entered the war on the Allied side “to safeguard her loans and her burgeoning export markets” (58). Aside from one quote from Secretary of State Robert Lansing, no evidence is offered to support this assertion. Nor does Golub engage or cite any of the major works on Wilson’s decisionmaking written in the last fifty years that dispute the revisionist interpretation; Golub, it seems, simply dismisses all of the work of Arthur S. Link, John Milton Cooper, Jr., Lloyd E. Ambrosius, and Thomas J. Knock. In his discussion of Wilson’s peace program, Golub also overstates Wilson’s desire for a world order based in part on “free trade” (actually, the president carefully spoke of lowering trade barriers when possible and non-discrimination in trade) and suggests that the Fourteen Points Address was somehow in part a response to a threat of revolution in “colonial areas,” an

¹ See Thomas R. Hietala, *Manifest Design: Anxious Aggrandizement in Late Jacksonian America* (Ithaca and New York: Cornell University Press, 1985); Drew McCoy, *The Elusive Republic: Political Economy in Jeffersonian America* (Charlotte: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

² Melvyn P. Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration, and the Cold War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992).

interpretation few, if any, Wilson scholars would see as supported by the evidence (58-59). Determined to portray U.S. foreign policy as relentlessly imperialistic, Golub oversimplifies Wilson's complex view of international politics and turns the president into a one-dimensional caricature.

Golub's treatment of recent debates in U.S. foreign relations is as problematic as the historical portion of the book. He does perceive some "policy divides" after the end of the Cold War, but he minimizes the differences between what he calls "neo-liberals," "realists," and "imperialists," suggesting that all three groups had "imperialist" goals and only differed on the tactics the U.S. should use to maintain its empire (95). According to this argument, the fact that the vast majority of realists opposed the Bush administration's invasion of Iraq is insignificant, because the realists, in Golub's view, did not offer a coherent explanation of why the invasion occurred. Why this would make the realists' opposition to the war unimportant is not clear. Golub offers no analysis of the realists' recommended policies for the United States except to identify them with Henry Kissinger's perspective – a figure realists like John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt would hardly consider representative of their views (97; 181, n. 60). To Golub, the details of a realistic foreign policy for the United States are not worth examining because he appears to think that any course aimed at upholding U.S. national interests, however defined, is imperialistic.

In sum, this book does not offer much insight into the history of U.S. expansionism. Golub is quite right to debunk "American exceptionalist mythologies" that the United States somehow stood completely outside of the history of western European imperialism, but there is not much novelty in making such an argument (10). Few serious historians would dispute that the United States built an empire in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and that it did so in a manner at times similar to the imperialism of the Europeans. The interesting historical questions concern why U.S. leaders pursued expansion. How did they relate it to their cultural, economic, political, and security concerns? Why did expansion at times provoke intense debate among U.S. leaders? Why were certain policy options chosen over others? Golub takes a stab at some of these questions, but, unfortunately, the answers he provides too often lack nuance and evidence.

Over the last ten years the scholarly commentary on American global power has been characterized by rather extreme shifts in the assessment of its properties and consequences. Thus, over this period scholars and commentators have gone from labeling the U.S. as a 'unipolar' global empire bestriding the world to, more recently, a rapidly declining hegemon. Such conceptualizations have obviously been associated with the contrasting experiences of American global power. After the 9/11 attacks and the declaration of the 'War on Terror' U.S. actions – through its wars on, and occupations of, Afghanistan and Iraq – suggested a strong imperialist impulse and the establishment of political forms associated with empire. On the other hand, with the onset of the 2008-9 U.S.-centred global financial crisis, U.S. economic leadership and, with it, its neoliberal ideological underpinnings appear to have been shattered. The economic crisis and the sluggish way the U.S. economy has exited it since 2010 have been seen as reflecting a longer-term and more deep-rooted weakness in the U.S. economy that contrasts with the rapid growth and vitality of the Chinese, Indian and Brazilian economies. Such trends, it is argued, demonstrate that the world is moving, rapidly, towards a more de-centred and plural world economy and with it, the ending of two centuries of Western global dominance.

It is into this analytical and political context that *Power, Profit and Prestige* enters the intellectual fray. Philip Golub's conceptualization of the United States bestrides both views. He regards the U.S. as an empire (before and after 9/11) and an empire in crisis, evidenced not just by the global economic crisis, but also due to the geopolitical difficulties resultant from its military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq. What distinguishes Golub's intervention into contemporary conceptualizations of U.S. global power is his claim that the U.S. has always had imperial characteristics; describing the U.S. as a form of empire places *Power, Profit and Prestige* in a longer tradition of writing particularly associated with the Wisconsin School of American diplomatic history. For Golub, the global rise of the United States beginning in the nineteenth century is understood as replicating the behavior and internationalization of hierarchical frameworks of power that characterized the experience of the European imperial powers and, hence, the U.S. was and is an empire (p. 20, 48). Further, for Golub, it is the contradictions resultant from the inter-relationship between and the geopolitical and economic dimensions of U.S. imperial power that have, effectively, caused the current crisis (pp. 5-6).

Golub is, wisely, agnostic about the short and medium-term future of the constellation of global power arrangements – he does not think that China is likely to replace the U.S. as a new *global* hegemon – but he does think that the current crisis is unprecedented and likely to result in a major reconfiguration of global power relations (pp. 1-19, 143-54). Thus, contrasting the current crisis with that of the predicament that it faced in the 1970s – the only other case of combined economic and geopolitical crisis – whilst the U.S. could take advantage of the Cold War structures and institutions of political and geopolitical influence it had over the other major capitalist powers to facilitate a global economic restructuring (neoliberal globalization) from which it was able to regain a material advantage, this is not

possible in the current context and especially so with regard to China (p. 5). The key difference today is thus the relative political and geopolitical autonomy of China (and other developing economic powers) from U.S. political and institutional influence and pressure in contrast to the other major capitalist powers and notably so within the earlier context of the Cold War.

The book is organized through a chronologically-led survey of the experience of U.S. imperialism and, in particular, the evolving inter-connections and dynamic between the economic, ideational and geopolitical dimensions of American global power with each chapter concentrating on a particular historical time-frame that is seen as defining in the evolution of American empire. The discussion, which proceeds, historically, from the establishment of the United States as an imperial power in the nineteenth century, through key historical moments (including the territorial annexations after wars with Mexico and imperial Spain through the nineteenth century) up until the current crisis, manages to combine historical and empirical depth with a relatively sophisticated engagement with IR theory in general and theoretical perspectives on American global power in particular. Thus, in the opening chapter Golub provides a brief survey of conceptualizations of American power/hegemony prevalent within IR theory placing his argument within historical-sociological and neo-Gramscian approaches (pp. 8-10) and, in particular, the way in which such a framework enables the study to weave together the material and ideational, coercive and consensual dimensions of U.S. global power.

In particular *Power, Profit and Prestige* “aim[s] to shed new light on levels of causality and historical patterning and hence make sense of the disorder of the present” (p.8). Whilst the historical discussion through the book does make reference to the theoretical framing outlined in the first chapter, overall, Golub fails to develop, sufficiently, a new theoretical synthesis on U.S. global power and in explaining the current crisis. Throughout the text Golub refers to ideational, (what he refers to as an “imperial cosmology” – a set of ideological and cultural assumptions that emerged through the establishment of American imperial power but which has continued to inform the U.S. political elite in the post-colonial era), socio-economic and geopolitical explanations and combinations to explain U.S. behavior and the overall evolution of American empire. However, these concepts tend to be used to describe what has been taking place rather than as constituting a fully-developed analysis of the U.S. as a capitalist or liberal empire. Although this explanatory pluralism provides a theoretical flexibility that reflects the internal characteristics of the United States as a liberal-capitalist republic, it fails to provide a defining and underlying causal dynamic in the historical reproduction of American power – at the national and global levels that other recent writings on American global power have managed to offer.

Golub’s major claim that the post-war and contemporary character and policies of the United States continue to reflect an imperial dispensation derived from its nineteenth century foundation as part of the more general phenomenon of Western/European imperialism is also questionable. Whilst recognizing that the operations and norms of international relations were different in the post-war era and today to that of the colonial era, Golub insists that the globalization of Western/American power has been and is realized through the shifting combinations of armed coercion institutionalized in the global

projection of U.S. military power and the penetrating and integrating tentacles of the U.S. centered global capitalist economy (pp. 13-15, 57, 80, 103). There are obviously plenty of examples where the U.S. has used force in the post-war era and, in doing so, has opened up societies to the penetration of U.S. capital and integration into U.S.-directed institutions, but it is difficult to see these developments as being driven by a *consistent* and uniform *internally-constituted* imperial dynamic encompassing the struggles and political-economic structures of the nineteenth century with that of the post-war era and more recently.

Indeed, there is a general tendency in *Power, Profit and Prestige* to downplay the way in which shifting developments within and across states outside of the United States have contributed to the dynamic of American global power. Thus, historical contingencies and global developments not reducible to the decisions of the U.S. are too easily overlooked by Golub in what reads, at times, as a form of determinism in the explanation of American global power. That is, what America has done and does is – following the argument of *Power, Profit and Prestige* – explained solely from its internal characteristics rather than through the inter-play of the domestic with international developments, both threats and opportunities. In contrast, then, to Golub's earlier dating of the origin of the American global imperium – in the nineteenth century – arguably, the Cold War was the defining moment and context that determined the character and evolution of American global power and the balance between the geopolitical-territorial and socio-economic logics of power. This is important as it highlights the agency of other major powers in determining the ideological and geopolitical contours of the post-war world and, consequently, the role played by historical contingency and agency in the determination of America's international relations. It was not pre-given that the U.S. would establish the geopolitical and economic institutional frameworks that it did after 1945 and that it did so is only explicable with reference to the behavior of other states (specifically the USSR and the other major capitalist powers), social forces within those states and the overcoming of other domestic tendencies (not least isolationism) and the affirmation of a form of anti-colonialism.

This latter point referring to the development of a post-colonial international order and, with it, the termination of the *project* of territorial empire is important as it highlights a combined theoretical and historical-empirical weakness in Golub's account of the development of U.S. global power after 1945, particularly in his understanding of the institutionalization of the international capitalist economy and the relationship between the geopolitical and socio-economic logics of American power. Let me try to substantiate this. The core argument of *Power, Profit and Prestige* rests on the claim that American global power is realized through the variable combinations of military/geopolitical and capitalist/institutionalist logics of power. Hence, the post-war world is neither a case of purely formal or informal form of empire (p. 15) and the relations of the socio-economic and geopolitical – though distinct – effectively amount to the same thing in the reproduction of a global framework of hierarchy and domination centred on the United States. The key problem in this conceptualization is that it does not provide a convincing account of how and why *Pax Americana* has been characterized by the proliferation of alternative sources of capital accumulation. And this is particularly so with regard to the

claim that the post-war and contemporary forms of American global power, largely, replicate the classical era of Western imperialism.

There is thus a failure to account for the distinct patterns of socio-economic relations, at least between the advanced capitalist powers, since 1945 compared to earlier periods. Whilst there was a plausible geopolitical argument to account for the character of American hegemony over the rest of the advanced capitalist world during the Cold War era, the logic associated with a distinctly *capitalist* dynamic of expansion/integration and *social* power has continued, indeed, intensified, in the altered post-Cold War geopolitical context. What I am suggesting, then, is that American global power has a relatively autonomous capitalist dimension that has tended to operate with varying degrees of autonomy from its military/geopolitical dimension. Whilst Golub alludes to this, in parts of the text, the general thrust of his argument is to conflate the two logics as one of the same driven and directed by a political elite associated with the U.S. state-managers.

The integration of China and wider east-Asia into the global economy over the last two-to-three decades is evidence of this 'relatively autonomous' logic. It is not to suggest that there are not ideological, geopolitical and economic tensions between the U.S. and China but these are of a different order to those that characterized inter-capitalist relations in earlier eras of capitalist development, which suggests that the substance of America's global hegemony should be treated as distinct from the earlier imperialist experiences. That China's rapid growth and insertion into global circuits of production, trade and consumption has been connected, to a significant degree, with the activities of major elements of U.S. capital – off-shoring production – is indicative of a distinctly socio-economic logic independent of the geopolitical concerns of U.S. state-managers. Large sections of U.S. capital provide a domestic lobby for a continuation of an open trade policy with China in spite of concerns over China's exchange-rate protectionism and act according to an economic logic of de-territorialized capital accumulation.

This general conceptual problem is also exposed in Golub's explanation of the 2008-9 economic crisis. First is the implication on pages 5-6 that the crisis is somehow reflective of U.S. 'predatory behaviour' reflected in the contradictions that have emerged between the geopolitical and socio-economic dimensions of U.S. global power. This may be so, but *Power, Profit and Prestige* does not outline an explanation of how a more assertive U.S. geopolitical posture after 2001 contributed to the global economic breakdown. Second is the absence of discussion of the role of China (and other 'surplus' capital exporters) on the origins of the crisis. An alternative account would focus less on the inter-connections between geopolitics and capitalist development and more on the internal contradictions of neoliberal capitalist development that would also involve an examination of the role played by China in facilitating the expansion of neoliberal financial globalization – a key factor in the development of the 2008 financial crisis.

To sum up, *Power, Profit and Prestige* outlines an interesting and elegantly written examination of the history of the global rise of the United States. Whilst focusing on the interconnections between the geopolitical, socio-economic and ideational dimensions of U.S. power in its assertion that the U.S. has been a global empire, it fails to outline a political

economy of U.S. global power that can explain the particular dynamics of capitalist development under American hegemonic arrangements. Further, in down-playing the hegemonic properties of the U.S. global power it fails to properly assess the inter-connections between different fractions of global capital and how the success of American hegemony has rested on a combination of the integration of national capitalist classes into a global historical bloc and the realization of not insignificant material gains for subaltern classes. The United States has imperial characteristics, but the kind of world order that it was chiefly responsible for establishing after 1945 has been different than earlier eras of capitalist development and, as such, its global reproduction has rested on a qualitatively different kind of relationship between capital and geopolitics than *Power, Profit and Prestige* appears to recognize.

I am grateful to the reviewers for their spirited debate of my study of empire and American imperial politics and to the editors for the opportunity to engage in that debate. Many of the reviews bring up important issues such as the relevance of empire as a category of contemporary analysis, the distinctiveness of hegemonic modes of interstate governance, and the problem of continuity and change in world politics. While it is not possible to respond comprehensively in this space to the various remarks of the reviews, I should like to address three interrelated questions they raise: the relationship of empire and globalization; the lineages of *Pax Americana* to the nineteenth century European imperial system; and the problems of theory. I will discuss these issues successively and make a few additional remarks on possible futures.

In different ways, Michael Hunt, Richard Saul and Stephen Burman object, more or less emphatically, to the argument made in *Power, Profit and Prestige* that the history of late modern globalization is largely, if not entirely, coterminous with the process of western imperial expansion that generated a single hierarchical world system structured around a core/periphery polarity. They seem uncomfortable, in particular, with the way in which I trace continuities of outlooks, practices, and motives, which some mistakenly read as sameness or identity, and analogies between the nineteenth century European imperial system and the American order that supplanted it after the Second World War. Hunt thus criticizes “a reductionist stress on empire” and a “tendentious reading of globalization” that ignores the advances in human welfare accomplished over the past two centuries, while Saul maintains that I overlook or understate the historical specificity of the post-1945 “U.S. liberal empire” and the novelty of its “distinct patterns of socio-economic relations”.

My book indeed places “imperialism and empire at the centre of the study of world history and specifically the history of globalization”, to cite the research agenda suggested years ago by Peter Cain and Anthony Hopkins that I made my own and applied to the United States.¹ It situates the U.S. firmly within international history as an integral and dynamic component of European centered late modern globalization in the nineteenth century, then as the systemic center of the second wave in the latter part of the twentieth century, highlighting the persistence over long periods of an imperial cosmology that was consubstantial with the “rise” and subsequent globalization of the “west”. This cosmology, or set of foundational assumptions about world order, cultural hierarchy and historical purpose, outlasted the era of formal empires and continues to inform western cultural discourses and international practices in deleterious ways. The intense albeit brief revival of explicit imperialist discourses on both shores of the Atlantic in the early years of the twenty first century, as well as current diffuse antagonistic representations of the culturally alien and hence dangerous post-colonial other are derived from a past that has not fully passed, from the mappings of difference drawn from centuries of expansion and domination. Rather than on “seamless continuities”, I insist on the ways in which the past

¹ Peter J. Cain & Anthony G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism, 1688-2000* (London: Longman-Pearson, 2002), p. 664.

contaminates the present, on the embeddedness of present visions and practices in historically constructed patterns of international inequality. As Walter Mignolo writes: “coloniality [is quite simply] the reverse and unavoidable side of ‘modernity’- its darker side, like the part of the moon we do not see when we observe it from earth”.² *Power, Profit and Prestige* takes a hard evidence-based look at the American component of this “darker side” of modernity.

The sources stretch back to the overseas territorial colonization of the Americas and the commercial colonization of the British and Dutch East Asian companies in the early modern period, which generated a new consciousness and mental map of the world. The western observer, “trading and conquering as well as looking” began to see “the world as a differentiated, integrated, hierarchically ordered whole”³ rather than as a mosaic of autonomous polities and differentiated socio-cultural spaces. Inextricably intertwined with material interests, this hierarchical vision hardened in the late modern period when expansion became the “permanent and supreme aim of politics”⁴ and imperialism took on a world encompassing scope. Visioning and mapping the world became coterminous with domination as global systems of control and management of populations, resources, and space were put into place. In the mental map of the late modern Euro-Atlantic imperial powers, the “West” was constructed as the centre of the universe as it projected itself onto the world, incorporating or enmeshing ever-larger parts of the “rest” into its constantly expanding and ever-tighter global net. Out of this emerged a picture of a continuously ascending “west” that was the thinking and active subject of history, and a picture of plural others as passive or immobile, history-less or pre-historical objects caged in tradition and circular time, hence locked out of modernity. The intellectual result was the naturalization of hierarchy.

Did this wave of globalization generate “incredible advances”, as Hunt contends? In Europe and the neo-European colonies of settlement, self-sustaining growth impelled by technological innovation certainly produced positive changes over time, seen in rising living standards (though a balanced assessment must take into account the appalling living conditions of the working class in the late nineteenth century). Outside of these “core” areas however it is hard to identify progressive change. There is no question that the collapse of distance made possible by technological advances – steamships, the telegraph, the railroad - made the world smaller and more unified. But it simultaneously sharpened the division of the world into irreducibly different and uneven socio-cultural spaces. The imperial geopolitical imagination of the world as a global playing field – a space of intervention - for the newly industrialized countries was inextricably linked with imaginings of fixed cultural and racial hierarchies. Since direct colonization or indirect

² Walter D Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton, Princeton University Press: 2000), 22.

³ John Agnew, *Re-visioning World Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 18.

⁴ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt. [1950] 1994), p. 125.

entrapment in long distance systems of control arrested “development” and generated “under-development”, colonial expansion provided confirmation of ontological difference between coloniser and subaltern, master and slave. India, to give but one major example, underwent deindustrialization and suffered mass famines in the late nineteenth century that were attributable to the conversion of arable land for the production of colonial staples sold in the international market. Per capita levels of output and consumption in most post-colonial regions were hardly greater in 1950 than in 1800.⁵ Hunt is right of course that there have been great advances in human welfare since the Second World War but they have been unevenly shared and are not necessarily attributable to globalization, which is synchronous but not synonymous with scientific innovation (the rise of life expectancies due to the fortuitous discovery and generalization of the use of penicillin, for instance). *Pace* modernization theory, most of the ‘Third World’ was left out of the developmental progress accomplished during the “post-World War II era of U.S. global dominance”. The comparison of U.S. public aid flows to different world regions from 1948 to 1962 shows near complete indifference to Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin American economic development. The ‘Third World’, John Kenneth Galbraith aptly wrote in the early 1970s, has always been the “disaster area of U.S. foreign policy”.

This brings me to the second contentious issue, the distinction of empire and hegemony and the differences between the nineteenth century European imperial system and the United States’ post-1945 order. Contrary to what a number of the reviews suggest (Hunt, Saull and Burman), I take care in the book not to conflate empire and hegemony, the latter of which implies a measure of consent and deference on the part of subordinate states in a hierarchical interstate system to the choices and preferences of a leading state. In my discussion of the hierarchies of *Pax Americana* (chapter 4), I unambiguously affirm that the United States instituted a hegemonic rather than imperial pattern of relations in the transatlantic area after 1945, when it definitely supplanted Europe at the center of the world capitalist economy. Institutionalized cooperation at bilateral and multilateral levels helped to cement the transatlantic partnership, which was largely if not uniformly based on mutual interests. The post-war western European elites, whose own legitimacy was founded on social democratic compacts between capital, labor and the state, generally shared U.S. objectives – restoring the liberal world economy, containing the Soviet Union, curbing destabilizing class conflict – and for the most part recognized the U.S. as a legitimate source of authority. Speaking of what I call the *hegemonic frontier* of U.S. power, in which post-occupation Japan should be included, I write: “For most European states most of the time, the benefits of hegemony outweighed the costs measured in their loss of political autonomy...The system of hegemonic authority (which) preserved the fiction of equality under conditions of asymmetry proved lasting during the Cold War and beyond”.

I also point out, however, that if hegemony is an operative concept to understand relations between what Saull calls the “advanced capitalist powers”, it is certainly not applicable to U.S. foreign policy practices in post-colonial world regions during and *after* the Cold War.

⁵ For an extended discussion, see Paul Bairoch, *Victoires et déboires, histoire économique et sociale du monde du XVIème siècle jusqu’à nos jours* (Paris: Gallimard Folio, 1997).

This “*imperial frontier*” has been the arena of coercive intervention and constant political and economic intrusion. Even if the U.S. does not claim territory, these practices hardly represent a break with historical patterns of empire. If imperialism is simply defined as coercive intrusion and/or expansion, one can make a strong case, as I think I do, that the spectrum of U.S. interventions, from overt and covert military operations to coercive economic diplomacy or the imposition of economic models, carried out at bilateral level or through the more subtle medium of multilateral institutions, were/are expressions not of hegemony but of empire. The implicit assumption that relations in the liberal capitalist core should define the character of the post-War American system of international relations as a whole reflects, I believe, a western-centric bias. Why should we assign primacy to the concept of hegemony when U.S. foreign relations in South East Asia, Latin America and the Middle East had consistent imperial characteristics? By emphasizing the importance of the “imperial frontier” I am displacing the gaze from the “core” to the “periphery”, to the peoples on the receiving end who, in ways not fundamentally different from the nineteenth century Euro-Atlantic imperial order, found or find themselves enmeshed and/or in collision with empire. For Latin Americans, post-1945 interventions bear a curious resemblance with those of the nineteenth and the early twentieth century.

There is no “teleological fallacy”, as Burman would have it, in tracing the colonial and imperial genealogy of Cold War and post-Cold War U.S. (or European) interventionism, or in contesting the orthodoxy that the post-1945 order represented a radical disjuncture from the imperial past. Recent scholarly revisions of the intellectual history of international law and the logic of the rules-based international institutional system, notably the work of Anthony Anghie and Mark Mazower, convincingly bring to light the colonial archeology of the crowning achievements of western liberal internationalism, the League of Nations and the United Nations.⁶ John Hobson, who has done much to develop historical sociological perspectives in international relations, likewise emphasizes the imperial roots of the post-Cold War enthusiasm for liberal interventions in the “Third World”. I concur with him that they mark a return to a “bipolar imperialist conception of the international, wherein Western states are rewarded with civilizational status and hence hyper-sovereignty (the right to intervene in uncivilised states), while Eastern polities are demoted to the status of conditional-sovereignty...forfeiting the right to self-determination”.⁷ This is not meant to imply that there are no differences, notably the non-territorial character of the post-1945 U.S. system and its degree of multilateral institutionalization. Nonetheless, like Stephen Howe, I find that the “contrast between a formal British or wider European colonialism and an informal American imperium should not be overstated”.⁸

⁶ See Mark Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace: The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009); Anthony Anghie, *Imperialism, Sovereignty and the Making of International Law* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

⁷ John M. Hobson, “Back to the Future”, in *The Global 1989: Continuity and Change in World Politics*, George Lawson, Chris Armbruster and Michael Cox (eds.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 44-45.

⁸ Stephen Howe, “American Empire: the history and future of an idea”, *Open democracy.net*, (June 12, 2003) (www.opendemocracy.net/conflict-americanpower/article_1279.jsp).

Saull makes incisive remarks, on a different plane, on the issue of continuity and disjuncture. He rightly notes that I focus on the realization of American power through “the variable combinations of military/geopolitical and capitalist/institutionalist logics of power”. He argues that the problem of this line of argumentation is that it fails to recognize the “distinctly capitalist dynamic of expansion/integration and social power” of U.S. global power and the “relatively autonomous capitalist dimension that has tended to operate with varying degrees of autonomy from its military/geopolitical dimension”. Hunt makes a similar point in his discussion of globalization and the importance I attribute to the role of the U.S. state. This is a complex question that, indeed, is not sufficiently discussed in the book, the debate over which is unlikely to be settled here. But a few remarks are in order. In the history of modern capitalism (as distinct from the merchant capitalism of the Italian city states), the relative autonomy of the state and of capital has varied from moment to moment. At times, the state has relaxed control, leaving capital to freely roam the world, while at other times it has tamed capital and reclaimed control.⁹ Capital at times works at cross-purpose with the geopolitical aims of the state, while at other moments there is coincidence of purpose. At the height of the internationalization of British capital flows in the late nineteenth century, the respective power and wealth maximization purposes of the state and capital were intertwined, a coincidence of interests that led government to work for capital internationalization (if required by force or the threat of the use of force, as in Latin America) and that led private investors to defer, when needed, to the strategic choices of the imperial state. In my judgment, there was a similar symbiosis in the United States in the 1990s, with the state playing an active and decisive role in instituting and spreading global liberalization. American leaders, Stephen Walt writes, “saw the unchecked power at their disposal as an opportunity to mold the international environment, to enhance the U.S. position even more, and to reap even greater benefits in the future” by using a mixture of persuasion and coercion to get “as many countries as possible to embrace their particular vision of a liberal-capitalist world order”.¹⁰ The state, of course, went on to lose control of money gone mad and is now having a terribly hard time in getting it back into a (minimal) regulatory box.

Alas, I have not worked out a new general theory to account for these rhythms of the capitalist dynamic. Nor have I systematized the insight, briefly discussed in the book, that global capital flows paradoxically contribute to the constitution of the national power of those states that are able to harness them to endogenous developmental purposes. Just as capital flows from Europe in the nineteenth century helped to construct American national power, transnational flows towards China in recent decades have contributed to that country’s reemergence as an active unit of the world system. Like their nineteenth century

⁹ See Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation* (Boston: Beacon Books, 1972).

¹⁰ Stephen M. Walt, *Taming American Power: The Global Response to U.S. Primacy* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006), p. 30. Robert Wade, an incisive observer, has likewise noted that the “increasing mobility of information, finance and goods and services frees the American government of constraints while putting everyone else under tighter constraints”. See Wade, “The American Empire and its Limits”, *DESTIN Working Papers Series*, No 02-22, London School of Economics, 2002.

British counterparts who hardly imagined that the U.S. would outstrip Britain and were not eager to curtail flows that were an indispensable source of invisible earnings, U.S. leaders and state managers have done nothing to inhibit investment in China that has proved so profitable to U.S. capital. Part of the answer is that it is often difficult to distinguish those managers from financial capital (Larry Summers and Hank Paulson, among others, come to mind), which represents a crucial component of the U.S. power elite. But another part is that U.S. leaders believed that they could enmesh China in the disciplines of the world capitalist economy and thereby shape its economic and political path. Moreover, the balance between capital and the state may change. The configuration of domestic social forces in the U.S. that Saull refers to may not prove stable. If the late nineteenth century is any guide, it won't: we are at the very beginning of the story of China's reemergence and its consequences.

Before concluding, some comments are called for on realism and international relations theory. Ross Kennedy faults me for failing to examine the "details of a realistic foreign policy for the U.S." and for downplaying the significance of the scholarly realist opposition to the invasion of Iraq. In IR theory, the various strands of realism offer a simple, parsimonious and deterministic framework to analyze the international, either by emphasizing the ahistorical "lust for power" inherent in the human condition or the Newtonian mechanics of international anarchy. History is tragic insofar as societies are inevitably swept up in logics of interstate competition conflict beyond their volition and control (John Mearsheimer). States being functionally undifferentiated like-units, leaders can at very best exercise prudence and avoid unnecessary conflicts (how this can be achieved remains unspecified). I do not happen to share the theory, but I have no political quarrel with the realist opposition to the Iraq war, or with the founding figure of the American realist school, Hans Morgenthau, who courageously denounced the Vietnam War in 1965.¹¹ Unfortunately or not, even if they shape perceptions, scholars don't make world history.

I contest the realist interpretation that Iraq or Vietnam or manifold other U.S. interventions in the post-colonial periphery during and after the Cold War were either "mistakes", simple responses to external opportunities and threats, or mechanical expressions of imbalances of power. All these disasters were undertaken in the name of the "national interest". Fear of the Soviet Union was certainly an animating factor in U.S. interventionism during the Cold War, but the Soviet Union also gave purpose to American power. I needn't rehearse here the sharp epistemic critiques of realist theory, notably its status quo bias. I stand by my critique that the primary concern of American realist policy makers and many realist scholars is the preservation of the United States' position of world power, which is often spuriously conflated with the global interest. Three years after the start of the 2003 invasion which he rightly denounced, Stephen Walt wrote that the problem of American statecraft was how to get the "rest of the world to welcome U.S. primacy", rather than trying to tame U.S. power, by encouraging other "states to see its dominant position as

¹¹ Hans Morgenthau, "We Are Deluding Ourselves in Vietnam," *The New York Times Magazine*, April 18, 1965.

beneficial (or at least bearable)” and by convincing them that “American power...will be used judiciously and for the broader benefit of mankind”.¹² Is that really the problem? As Robert Cox has famously written, theory is always “for someone and for some purpose”.¹³

State power is the *habitus* of realist thinkers. It is not mine. I chose to mobilize critical theoretical perspectives from a variety of disciplines, using theory as a tool rather than making it an end in itself. Holistic models of the way the world works are perhaps more attractive than “theoretical pluralism”. But, to cite a remark made by Theda Skocpol regarding Karl Polanyi’s historical sociological approach, the aim of *Power, Profit and Prestige* is not so much to “rework or reveal the inapplicability of an existing theoretical perspective...or to generate an alternative paradigm to displace such a perspective”, but to make “sense of historical patterns”.¹⁴ At the time of writing, the U.S. is still engaged in wars in Afghanistan (and Pakistan) that it is finding exceedingly difficult to extricate itself from, and is confronted with a geopolitical mess in the Gulf and the Middle East largely if not entirely of its own making (the European powers left behind their own imperial messes). One might reasonably ask: when has the U.S. not been at war or engaged in intervention in one part or another of the post-colonial world? Interventionism is simply part of the imperial fix, the role that empires always assign themselves to uphold (their) order as part of their worldwide “responsibilities”.

A final remark on optimism and hope. We are reaching the end of two historical cycles, the two and half century long cycle of western predominance and the shorter American cycle that was part of the first. The reemergence of major post-colonial regions is without a doubt the most important systemic change since the Industrial Revolution. It is leading to a decentred plural world system. I agree with Burman that this means that the U.S. will have to “share power”. A hopeful trend in this regard is that the U.S. is undergoing potentially far reaching demographic change. For centuries, the U.S. was predominantly a neo-European nation, with a relatively large subordinate African-American minority. Today, because of large-scale immigration from Latin America, Asia and Africa, the U.S. is fast becoming a post-European country. The U.S. will thus look more and more towards Asia, Latin America and Africa and will look more like the diversity of the world. This could conceivably lead to an evolutionary change of collective mentalities as coming generations negotiate complex cultural *mélanges*, read the history of “others” as part of domestic American history, and hence better grasp the cosmopolitan interest. We are not there yet.

¹² Stephen M. Walt, *Taming American Power: The Global Response to U.S. Primacy* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006), 26.

¹³ Robert W. Cox, “Social Forces, States and World Order: Beyond International Relations Theory”, *Millennium – Journal of International Studies*, 10/2 (1981), 128.

¹⁴ Theda Skocpol, “Sociology’s Historical Imagination” in Theda Skocpol (ed.), *Vision and Method in Historical Sociology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 17.

Copyright © 2011 H-Net: Humanities and Social Sciences Online. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, H-Diplo, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the H-Diplo Editors at h-diplo@h-net.msu.edu.
