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THE WORLD AT THE BEGINNING OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY
CRISIS WITHIN IMPERIALISM

Charles S. Maier

ORIGINS AND CHARACTERISTICS OF THE IMPERIALIST ERA

The history of world societies in the twentieth century presents some extraordinary general features, many of them continuations – in intensified form – of nineteenth-century trends. Among those that must strike even the casual observer would be the continuing revolutionary progress of technology – above all the use of non-human energy sources for production, transport and communication but also the great gap between those who benefited from such advances and those vast numbers still performing their agricultural work and manufacturing in traditional ways. In terms of world political organization, the striking characteristic of the beginning of the twentieth century was the extraordinary control that the relatively few technologically advanced societies came to exert on peoples elsewhere (what we commonly term 'imperialism'), and at least until mid-century, the bitter rivalry and destructive warfare between the imperialist powers.

Nor was imperialism the only pervasive inequality. The progress of technology also transformed social relations within states, establishing a particular sort of stratification in industrial societies based on access to scientific knowledge and on control of financial and industrial resources as well as the more traditional ownership of land or high governmental rank. Thus technological advance, the spread of political control over the less economically developed societies by the more advanced, social inequality, and world war were characteristics of an era that is often designated as the age of imperialism. This does not mean that imperialism alone established global inequality or that it made the world wars inevitable. However, these basic features of the era arrived as a historical constellation of forces and relationships. It is difficult to specify their causal interaction and to imagine that they did not impinge on each other in profound ways. In the chapters to follow, we examine their interrelatedness and their evolution.

THE RESTRUCTURING OF TERRITORIAL STATES AFTER 1850

By 1900, the partition by the imperial powers of Africa and much of Asia as well as the major archipelagos of the Indian Ocean and the South Pacific had just about been completed. After the First World War, the territory of the Ottoman Empire in Asia and the German colonies overseas would be redistributed to other great powers. Increasingly during the interwar years, protest movements in some of the long-standing French and British domains would contest this colonial order. Nonetheless, only after the Second World War did most of the West's colonies achieve independence.

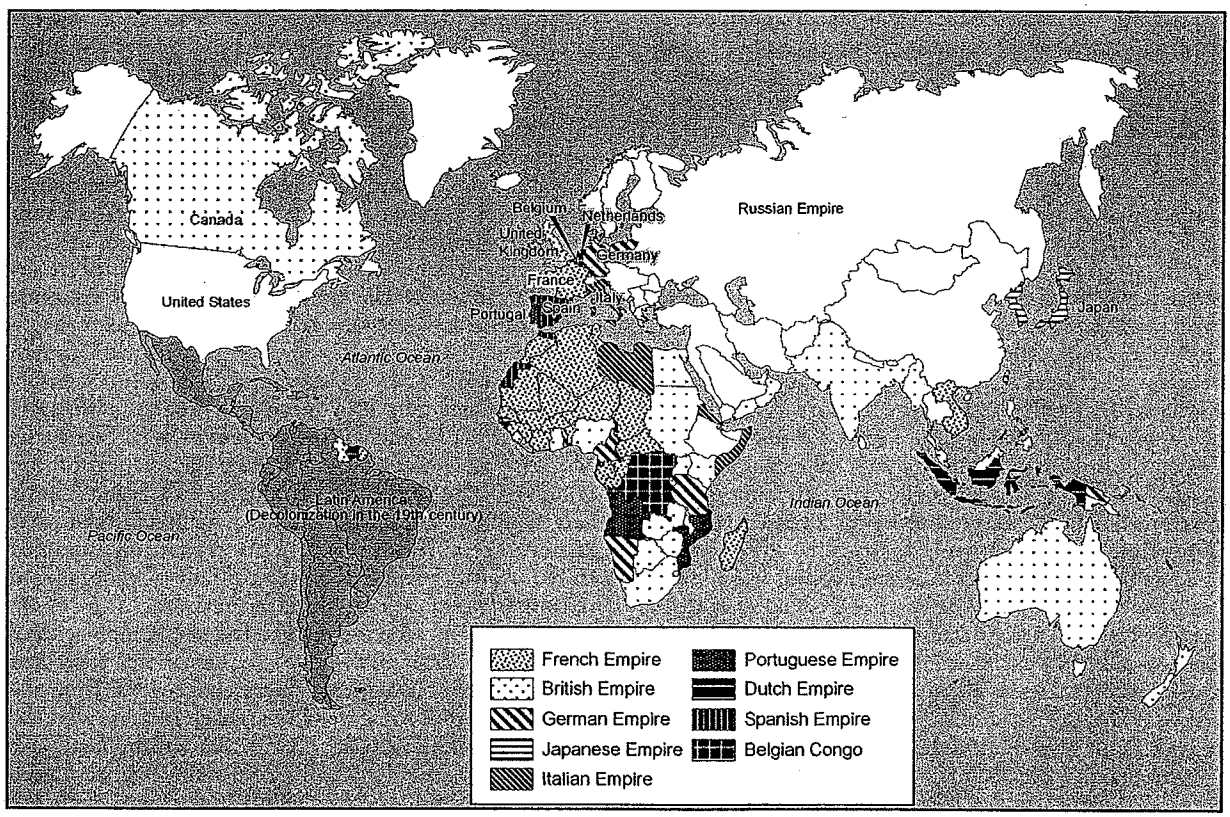
Still, to understand this imperialist world, one cannot simply begin in 1880 or 1890. It is necessary to take account of the great transition in developed state structures that had taken place a generation or two earlier, from the 1850s through the 1870s. The United States – once it overcame the Confederacy's military effort at secession (1861–65) – the states of Central Europe grouped in the German Confederation (1864–71), the states of the Italian peninsula (1859–70), emerging Meiji Japan (1853–68), the British in India after the Mutiny (1856–57), and to some degree, the Mexicans after defeating the French imperial expedition (1862–67), the reorganized Dominion of Canada (1867), and many other societies unified or reunified their state structures in this period. This transition involved transforming, often by force, confederally organized territories into more centralized federations.

The reorganized states applied the new technologies of railroad and telegraph to permeate the national space and establish a greater degree of hierarchic control from the centre. The process involved the social classes that were the agents of technological change, including bankers, industrialists, ambitious civil servants and engineers, who compelled the old governing elites, drawn largely from the landed classes, to share power and office.

The intellectual and governing elites of these cohesive nation-states rapidly adopted the new doctrines of Social Darwinism that inculcated notions of unremitting struggle for survival, not only among animal species, but so-called races and nations, and they embarked on a new period of rivalry and expansion. Once the Crimean War and the wars of Italian and German unification had yielded a new European order, they were soon followed by encompassing alliance systems within Europe and strategic competition to claim territorial possessions abroad. Equally striking was the rapid ascent of the non-European powers that had also undergone modernization. Less than thirty years after the Meiji restoration, Japan defeated the Chinese rapidly in 1895 and fought the Russians to a stalemate after spectacularly destroying their fleet. Three decades after its own long and costly civil war, the United States humiliated the Spanish by its rapid victories of 1898 and divested that long-standing empire of its last colonies, except its Moroccan enclaves.

The European powers (Spain, Portugal, the Netherlands, Britain, and France) possessed colonies since the era following Renaissance exploration. France had already annexed Algeria in 1830. Although for a few decades in the mid-nineteenth century doctrines of free trade had led to relative disinterest in territorial control overseas, by the 1870s and 1880s, the disparity between the power of the technologically advanced states and the more traditionalist and fragmented structures in Asia and Africa invited expansion. The Russians pushed into the multiple jurisdictions in the Caucasus and Central Asia in the 1860s and 1870s. Then, shortly after 1882, Britain asserted financial control and political influence over Egypt. Bismarck was persuaded to support German colonies in present-day Namibia, Tanzania, and Cameroon by the mid-1880s. Pressed into *faits accomplis* by such ambitious imperialists as Carl Peters in East Africa, Cecil Rhodes in South Africa, and George Goldie in what would become Nigeria in the 1880s, the politicians of the metropoles worked to settle their potential rivalries at the Conference of Berlin in 1884, where King Leopold of Belgium won recognition of the settlements he sponsored as the Congo Free State. An Anglo-French treaty and Anglo-German agreement in 1890 cleared the way for British visions of more extensive settlement and development in the Lakes area (Uganda). British-French rivalry in the upper Niger area and all the way across to Chad led to another convention in 1898, whereupon London found itself consolidating British rule in Nigeria and the French hold on Chad. West Africa was no sooner settled than conflict loomed on the upper Nile and in southern Africa between Rhodes and the Boer Republics. The French gave up claims in the Nile region, acquiring, in return, recognition of their primacy in Tunisia and, in effect, Britain's acquiescence in their right to penetrate Morocco – and ultimately the quasi-alliance of the Entente Cordiale, which quickly developed into a mutual strategic tool for limiting German ambitions in Europe. The ambitious governor of the Cape Colony, Alfred Milner, who supported Rhodes and expansion into the Transvaal embroiled Britain in the costly Boer War. The Dutch-descended settlers were eventually forced to concede defeat but in effect won guarantees for the racialist policies within the emerging Union of South Africa. The process

Map 2 **Colonial empires in 1914**



Adapted from R. Chaliand, 1998, *Atlas du millénaire: La mort des empires 1900–2015*, Hachette, Paris.

reveals the underlying historical dynamic of world politics in the forty years before the First World War. While the enhanced power of Western nation-states led to policies of expansion, rivalry, and annexation in Asia and Africa, the conflicts over influence in these regions profoundly heightened the sense of confrontation among European nation-states.

During the same years, the British extended their acquisitions further in Burma, while the French expanded their control over Indochina. The Dutch consolidated their hold over Java, then moved onto northern Sumatra and Bali and the outer islands of 'the Indies'. Although China was too huge and venerable a state to colonize, the European powers forced the weakened Qing dynasty to cede extraterritorial jurisdictions along the coast and in Shandong. Japan would wrest Taiwan (Formosa) and extraterritorial enclaves in Manchuria from China in 1895, and establish the colony of Chosen (Korea) in 1910. The international force sent to subdue the Boxer Rebellion in 1900 served implicitly to demonstrate to China's rulers and citizens the strength of the Western powers and to mutually restrain the Europeans and Americans from unilateral acquisitions. The United States announced its stake in preserving China from partition (the 'Open Door' policy), even as this emerging world player took over Spanish possessions in the Philippines, finally defeating an indigenous resistance movement after several years of struggle. During the same period, the Americans also established a virtual protectorate over Cuba. By 1910, the only scope for expansion was for imperial powers to trade possessions, as in the second Moroccan Crisis, or to take them outright from each other. The Ottoman Empire, losing territory in Europe and lagging economically, seemed the candidate ripest for ultimate partition.[1]

'EXPLAINING' IMPERIALISM

Historians have long wrestled with large questions raised by this creation of the imperialist order. What motivated the sudden surge of colonial takeovers? How could such acts be accomplished and then maintained with such small commitments of men and arms? We can rephrase the issues as 'why imperialism?' and 'how did imperialism prevail?' The third question is perhaps even more difficult to assess and to answer: what effects did the experience have on the colonized, and the colonizers? But we shall address the first two questions here and postpone that of imperialism's legacy.

Why imperialism?

Traditional historians from the imperialist communities have often interpreted this as a question of motivation, and have thus examined the stories and reasons given by the adventurers who set up colonies, the Roman Catholic and Protestant Church representatives who sought to evangelize, the soldiers who sought an opportunity for advancement after the period of warfare ended in Europe, the policy-makers who felt their countries must compete or accept a shameful decline. Justifications, however, are not motivations. One of the major justifications by colonialist enthusiasts was that the colonies provided an outlet for excess population, but these territories were often inhospitable regions, and few Europeans chose to go, preferring the open societies of North and South America.

The more interesting approach to this question involves examining pressures on policy-makers that transcend individual motivation. We can distinguish two or three major interpretations, each with at least two sub-interpretations. Political historians of international relations, such as American scholar William Langer, argued that in effect the European powers looked to colonial acquisition as part of the continuing rivalry between states after 1870s. Since European space was crowded and divided and even the smallest claims involved warfare, it was natural to project rivalry into the non-European regions that seemed weaker. Since the European struggle was a Hobbesian one, states pressed into new territory – as Robinson and Gallagher later argued (1970) – to protect previous strategic commitments or because they were effectively 'sucked in' by continuing challenges at the latest frontier they had reached.[2] Thus an anti-imperialist prime minister, William Gladstone, found himself persuaded to intervene in Egypt lest the French do so and because control of Suez seemed necessary in light of prior imperialist commitments in India. Once in Cairo, expansion up the Nile allegedly followed because of the resistance that always came from beyond the frontier or the weakness that compelled further intervention. Such an explanatory approach had the virtue of allowing for step-by-step reconstruction of policy-making in the European capitals, but even when it discounted allegedly altruistic claims about teaching indigenous peoples self-government or bestowing Christianity or human rights, it also tended to be apologetic in its denial of any real imperialist agenda. Imperialist actions somehow always arose in response to conditions from the periphery that presented unpalatable alternatives: America took over the Philippines lest the Japanese seize them.

The second set of explanations has focused pre-eminently on the economic disparity between what would later be called the First World and the Third World. Non-socialist radicals Henry Wilshire, John Hobson and later Marxist-inspired theorists suggested that the advanced economies sought raw materials, cheap labour and new markets in the colonies. When it was realized that in fact the colonies – with the possible exception of the huge Indian domain – were unlikely to yield markets, another strand of neo-Marxian explanation was introduced by Rosa Luxemburg and others: namely that the process of capitalism involved a long-term tendency for the rate of profit on investment to fall (since surplus was provided by labour not capital, and as employers had to compete through investment in ore efficient production, they also condemned themselves to declining rates of profit).[3] In this perspective, the colonies might offer higher rates of profit. This insight was elaborated in different ways. John Hobson suggested that the search for profitable investment led to colonial expansion and was ultimately a result of the vast inequalities of wealth inside Britain. Rosa Luxemburg argued that the tendency for the rate of profit to fall under capitalist production necessitated a search for newer and more profitable investment arenas to be sought abroad.

Rudolph Hilferding, trained as a physician in Austria but taking up politics in Berlin, proposed that a unique structural fusion of banks and industries (so-called 'finance capital') made this search for higher rates of profit so imperative in the early twentieth century. Lenin borrowed

from Luxemburg and Hilferding but, writing in the midst of the First World War, examined primarily the investment rivalry in Eastern Europe and suggested that imperialism must be understood as a general stage of economic development inevitably leading to territorial conflict and, therefore, so he predicted, to the chance for revolution.[4]

A later variant on Marxist notions of class conflict – but advanced by analysts who would claim to be influenced by, but not adherents of simple Marxism[5] – suggested that the process of industrialization had unleashed such a sharp degree of class-conflict that manipulative governments chose foreign adventures to take the minds of the masses off domestic claims.

In all these views imperialism had a certain logic or rationality within the terms of the capitalist system. This meant that imperialism might end only with the final transformation of capitalism. Only Schumpeter (1915) claimed that imperialism in fact represented a non-rationalistic or 'atavistic' hold over pre-capitalist aspirations (which the existence of protective tariffs in Central Europe helped to preserve) and that ultimately capitalism would destroy imperialism, a theory similar to that proposed by the Norwegian-American economist Thorstein Veblen.[6] Historians have repeatedly sought to test these theories, finding in general that imperialism did not really 'pay' national societies in aggregate, but that, as Hobson or Schumpeter recognized, it did pay key elites who made policy at home.[7]

Most recently, non-Marxist authors have proposed that the long history of British imperialism is best explained as a result of 'gentlemanly capitalism', which refers to an effort by men of property and culture, less involved with industrial management than with banking and services, to sponsor overseas empire that established them as a patrician elite in a conservative social order.[8] Nonetheless, to this author the political motivations – the fear of international political rivalry marked by arms races, alliances, as well as overseas expansion – seem to have provided the more urgent agenda.

How did imperialism prevail?

Why and where did Europeans prevail? How could such small expeditions of Europeans conquer such vast regions and then administer them at such little financial expense? Theories here are less developed. Of course, the European states enjoyed decisive technological advances: gunboats and ships, the latest weaponry. Nonetheless, defenders of autonomy could also acquire at least small arms, and Europeans did meet defeat at the hands of indigenous defenders: the British by the Zulus in the Battle of the Spears (1879), the Italians at Denali (1887) and Avowal (1896). But, in fact, the Europeans also possessed a different sort of resource, which in a broad perspective can also be construed as a technology: that is, the modern state equipped with functionally developed bureaucratic organization, permanent armed forces and obsessed with the notion of frontier and territorial control that the more fluid or even nomadic states had not chosen to develop.

It is too simple to divide states and tribes (which often was a pejorative concept).[9] Africans, of course, had political structures, some very extensive and highly organized, but the states that sent their soldiers and agents into the periphery were of a different order. State structures were unwieldy and sometimes inefficient in modernizing Ottoman Europe or Qing China, in the interior of the Maghreb or 'black' Africa. Often, the states that Europeans encountered (as was the case of the Aztec and Inca empires in the sixteenth century, or the American Indian confederations, Iroquois, Creek, Cherokee, etc., in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries) were themselves recent creations and, in any case, agglomerations where some tribal units aspired to recover independence in league with Europeans. The Europeans had centralized in the 1860s and drawn on new technological resources for territorial domination, whereas the states they encountered had not made this transition. Where Asians or Africans did undertake similar reforms, they did not succumb. Japan was the pre-eminent example, itself becoming an imperial power. The mid-nineteenth century monarchs imposed a programme of state building on Thailand, which had the good fortune to remain a buffer between British and French colonial territory, as Persia (Iran) did between Russian and British. Elsewhere the very ancientness of dynasties and states sometimes gave them the legitimacy to stand up to invaders, as in Ethiopia until 1935–36 and, of course, China.

GLOBAL INEQUALITIES AROUND 1900

All in all, however, the imperialist world reflected a high point of hierarchical distribution of resources: political and economic. If we envisage the imperialist world as a phase of world history, as seems proper, then both in terms of economic resources and political power and both within states and between them, the imperialist world of 1900 incorporated a high if not the highest degree of unequal distribution of resources that the world had seen to date.

The historian cannot claim that such differences would not have existed without imperialism. In a Leninist theory, it is precisely the differences of development that give rise to imperialism (which includes economic penetration and foreign investment). The real role of imperialism was to help perpetuate this differential development. By and large, two theoretical stances have contended in trying to explain the outcomes. The heirs to older theories of imperialism – especially the 'dependency theorists' active thirty years ago – proposed, in effect, that Western enrichment depended upon Third World poverty, that some mechanism existed where the poor nations were poor because the rich were rich and vice versa. It was structurally logical for high-wage societies to maintain the poverty of low-wage societies.[10] Such a view found an echo in the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), although it was always sharply contested.

Since 1980, with the general disillusion with Marxist theories, more culturally oriented notions have become dominant. Such thinking, perhaps represented most succinctly by the work of such specialists as David Landes and Francis Fukuyama, proposes that a commitment to education, thrift and accumulation, the rule of law and honouring of contracts, and networks of trust, have been crucial for economic development.[11] Obviously, the representatives of poor ex-colonial countries can be consoled by the first view, while those proud of First World achievement enjoy the second. The original notion of dependency theorists that wealthy countries had a stake in

Third World poverty seems unsustainable. However, colonial rulers and investors from wealthy countries often tended to freeze levels of development or encourage activity that autonomous elites might have shaped differently. While the proportion of economically active people engaged in agriculture fell by 1910 to about 5 per cent in Britain and Belgium, about 25 per cent in countries that industrialized but kept significant agricultural sectors active, such as the United States and Germany, and remained from 40 to 60 per cent in the less developed European lands, such as Spain and Italy and in Eastern Europe, the countries of Africa and Asia remained overwhelmingly peasant societies (*c.* 65–75 per cent).[12] Still, analytically we cannot know what the hypothetical alternative in the absence of imperialism might have yielded: autonomous national development as in Japan, or no development? What percentage of rent from mineral resources might be considered justifiable for the European owners of mines – that prevailing in developed countries or a higher one, if these resources had otherwise lain undeveloped? Ultimately moral criteria and not historical research must be applied to answer these questions.

The inequality between nations was matched by the inequality within nations. Europe was richer than it had ever been, but income, and even more so, wealth was highly concentrated. In many societies and regions – the southern states of the United States, Romania and the Balkans, southern Italy or Andalusia – agriculture remained backward and landlords controlled a labour force of poor peasants, who themselves had often lost their land, remained in almost perpetual heavy debt, or lived as day labourers on the great estates. Political conditions reflected these quasi-peonage societies: landlords could control the votes of the peasantry and trade these electoral supporters for patronage and favour from the capital. Great landowners received enormous revenues from their tenants and often from the rights to coal and other minerals on their territory. In some societies, these distinctions of wealth did not matter in assuring political representation; but in Germany and its states, political representation was skewed according to tax payments, favouring the wealthy. In Britain, where no revolution had redistributed property, the inequalities were the highest in Europe, although America was on its way towards equivalent stratification. Such inequality was perfectly compatible with economic development, advance, and often growing welfare.

Indeed the European societies were initiating the first stages toward what later became known as the welfare state. Bismarck introduced social insurance for illness and old age in Germany in the mid-1880s; he was motivated by conservative calculations and a concern to weaken the advance of the Social Democrats among the growing industrial working classes. The British Liberal government of 1906 enacted similar measures. In France and Catholic countries, more paternalist schemes of social insurance tied to the employer were launched. While the federal government of the United States would not intervene until the administration of Franklin D. Roosevelt during the world economic crisis, some of the states under progressive control introduced regulations for minimal wages and maximum hours. In fact, throughout the European and American world, women's work, as well as hazardous occupations such as mining, were increasingly regulated. Child labour was being eliminated in most sectors.

However, the non-Western world operated by different rules. Whether in the Congo up to the 1880s or in Latin American mining ventures (the Putumayo scandal broke in 1910), Europeans felt little restraint in imposing the harshest of labour conditions. Joseph Conrad captured the 'otherness' of the imperial experience: the fact that almost every abuse of power might be undertaken because it remained invisible (except for the occasional horrifying scandal, such as that of Leopold's Congo, or the atrocities of the German war to suppress the Herrero) and European military adventurers were effectively uncontrolled. Nonetheless, the more pervasive and widespread effects of imperialism were probably subtler than the horror stories depicted in *Heart of Darkness*. Distinctions were made between those supposedly fit to rule and those destined to serve: the presumption was that colonial subjects were childlike and capable of only certain stages of intellectual or administrative attainment, and that colonial development was designed to serve the purposes and wealth and the ego satisfactions of master races far away.[13] To be sure, thousands of missionaries were motivated to found educational and medical institutions. Still, they pursued their work symbiotically with the traders and the politicians. Essentially imperialist apologists claimed that vast areas and populations must wait indefinitely to enjoy the collective autonomy Europeans had come to take for granted since the Enlightenment and French Revolution. In an era that seemed to prize national independence as a supreme human value, the defenders of imperialism maintained that many of the world's peoples were not yet mature enough to claim it.

CRISES OF THE IMPERIALIST POWERS, 1900–1918

Two types of empire

From antiquity to the twentieth century, empires have played an ambiguous role in international relations. By subjugating fractious ethnic rivals, they can help ensure regional peace within their borders, but their frontiers remain sites of recurrent skirmishes, and as they decay, conflict becomes endemic. International structures at the beginning of the century included two sorts of imperial systems, and each type was becoming more a source of potential conflict than a guarantor of regional order.

The first and older set of empires comprised the extensive land-based monarchies based on a dominant ethnic group that had subjugated peoples on its peripheries. Nineteenth-century nation building in Western Europe had left the ethnic peoples remaining in the multinational empires restive and ambitious. The Austro-Hungarian Empire included about ten recognized ethnic or linguistic groups, governed in two sub-units: the Kingdom of Hungary and the Austrian half of the monarchy. Within the Austrian half, Czechs, Poles, and Italians contested the Germans' hegemony, and the dynasty sought to represent all the peoples. Within the Hungarian half, South Slavs (Croats, Serbs) and Romanians aspired to more rights, and the national groupings outside the border ambitiously looked to influence their *irridente* within the Habsburg realm. By the late nineteenth century, periodic crises over language and school rights paralyzed parliamentary life.

The decomposition of the Ottoman Empire was even more advanced. During the course of the nineteenth century, Greeks, Serbs, Romanians, and Bulgarians had progressively won their independence. The Ottomans attempted periodic reform in the nineteenth century, introducing some parliamentary institutions, but the reformers, who pressed for more parliamentary government, usually supported a stricter imposition of Turkish national policies as well, provoking ethnic discontent.

The Russian Empire, based on the expansion of Muscovy, included: Poles, Ukrainians, Finns and other Baltic peoples in its western areas; Georgians, Armenians and diverse peoples of the Caucasus; the states and former khanates of Central Asia; Buryats in the east; as well as diverse ethnic groups within Russia proper, such as Germans and Tatars, Bashkirs, Udmurts, Kalmyks among others. As of 1900, Russia was less subject to centrifugal decomposition but was caught up in the rivalries over Korea at its eastern limit and the Balkans on its south-western periphery. China, strictly speaking, was less of a multinational or multicultural empire; although its inner-Asian frontiers included Turkish, Uighur, Mongol and other non-Chinese regions, it faced more serious disintegrative threats along its coastal regions, which Europeans were taking over as their own enclaves – by outright cession, long-term lease, or extraterritorial concession.[14]

The other type of empire was precisely the overseas colonial domains and protectorates cited above. As of the early twentieth century, the problem they presented for international relations was less the restiveness of unwilling subject peoples (although major conflicts took place, especially the United States' campaign to subdue a Philippine independence movement after 1898 and the German campaigns in South-West Africa against the Herrera rebéllion) than the competition among the Europeans themselves. The rivalry for overseas empires was one of the considerations that led the Germans to attempt a naval armaments challenge to the British between 1898 and 1910. Colonialism and 'navalism' – now justified by the tracts of the American Admiral Mahan[15] – went hand in hand. Colonial expansion was a stake in the larger strategic competition among the European powers, but it also threatened to make that competition far more dangerous, as the domains available outside Europe for partitioning were successively appropriated. By 1900, most had been carved up, although the Japanese annexed Korea in 1910 and Manchuria in 1931, while the Italians seized Libya in 1912 and Ethiopia in 1936.

Crises over respective colonial domains or conflicting ambitions for potential colonies became more preoccupying. As mentioned above, imperial rivalries shaped European alignments. The French and British confrontation at Fashoda near the headwaters of the Nile in 1898 helped to prompt a rethinking of their relationship. Both powers, after all, were preoccupied by German ambitions, and Britain also watched uneasily as Russia (allied to France) and Japan (its own new ally in the Pacific) moved closer to war over their conflicting ambitions to control Korea. These motives prompted London and Paris to work toward the Anglo-French Entente Cordiale of 1904, designed to forestall any undesired tangles and also to coordinate defensive planning against Germany. The Americans took the Philippines from Spain in 1900; the Germans threatened the French paramount position in Morocco (not formally a colony) in 1905, and again in 1910–11, and the latter confrontation resulted in a frontier adjustment between German and French possessions in Cameroon.

Alliances, armaments, and origins of the First World War

A distinctive feature of the evolution of international relations after the unification of Germany and Italy was the formation of fixed military alliances in peacetime: the Dual Alliance between Germany and Austria-Hungary of 1879 (enlarged a few years later into the Triple Alliance with Italy, which was less likely to function successfully) and the Franco-Russian alliance (1894), which was a response to the former. Through the 1890s, the ruling British conservatives believed that their maritime supremacy allowed it a policy of 'splendid isolation', but the Fashoda crisis, the German naval challenge and the fact that every other power aspired to the colonial position Britain had acquired made it look for support to Russia in 1902 and to France in 1904. In 1907, the British further interacted with the Russians, their long-standing rival in Central Asia, in order to protect against a conflict over Persia or India and Afghanistan. Effectively, although they tended to deny it to themselves, Britain had been locked into the bipolar competition.

Not only alliances but also significant arms races were involved. Conscription levels were raised in Germany in 1893 and 1913 (bringing the peacetime army to 864,000); the French switched from two to three years of mandatory military service in 1912. Given the fact that young men faced reserve requirements for many years after active service, as well as the perfected logistics of railroads (in the French mobilization of 1914, only 20 out of some 4,300 trains were late), the major powers on the Continent could have approximately two million men at battle stations within a few weeks. Their war plans provided for about half to be deployed rapidly and, in the case of Germany, pre-emptively.[16]

Such military alliances and arms increases might have been accommodated without war (after all the Warsaw Pact and NATO confronted each other with high levels of arms from the 1950s through the 1980s). The problem was that the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires were subject to disintegrative pressures, and the conflicts these created involved links to the new colonial powers. Russia and Japan went to war over their rivalry in Korea, itself a stake for their respective aspirations because China had shown itself so feeble vis-à-vis Japan in 1895. Germany attempted to demonstrate the weakness of the Entente Cordiale shortly after its announcement by an ostentatious demonstration challenging the French predominance in Morocco. The Reich, however, emerged isolated, except for its Habsburg ally, thereby guaranteeing closer Anglo-French cooperation. The European situation became even more unsettled when the Austro-Hungarians, concerned by their own failure to share in colonial acquisitions, decided to annex neighbouring Bosnia, the former Ottoman dependency that the Congress of Berlin had awarded Vienna as a form of trusteeship thirty years earlier. Russia was angered at this unilateral expansion, as were nationalist Serbian circles that aspired to unify the ethnic Serbs of the province. Austria's ally, Germany, compelled Russia to

accept the *fait accompli*. The Italian government, preoccupied by Austria's annexation of Bosnia and anxious to win nationalist public opinion at home, took advantage of Turkey's new difficulties to seize Libya as a colony in 1911. Continuing Turkish weakness led the Balkan states of Serbia, Bulgaria, Greece and Montenegro to conquer the territory of Macedonia, and they soon fought a second war among themselves over the division of territorial spoils. Concerned with the growth of Serbian strength, Austria, in collaboration with Britain, forced a settlement that established the new state of Albania, designed to keep Serbia from acquiring an Adriatic outlet. Consequently, by 1914 the international system was very brittle.

Particularly disturbing were the mutual suspicions of Russia and Germany; each believed itself increasingly vulnerable. Berlin military planners were convinced that the modernization of Petrograd's railroad system around 1917 would facilitate rapid mobilization of Russia's massive army and thus undercut their strategy for dealing with the danger of a two-front war. Influential members of the General Staff contemplated pre-emptive war in 1912 and 1914. Russia was certain that Germany was bent on penetrating the Balkans in league with Austria and propping up the Ottoman Empire. French policy-makers actively reassured their Russian allies that Paris was a reliable partner in case of a showdown.

When the Austrian heir apparent, Franz Ferdinand, was assassinated by Serbian-assisted terrorists in Sarajevo on 28 June 1914, it took some time to understand just how critical the crisis might become (Plate 22). The chief of the Habsburg General Staff was determined to thwart Serbian aspirations, and the more cautious heir apparent was no longer around to argue against the chief's reckless policies. In early July, the German ministers believed that they must show support for their Austrian allies, while German military leaders persuaded themselves that this might be the last chance to take on a huge, modernizing Russian army. Russia, with France's implicit support, was determined that it would not accept further *faits accomplis*. The French president and government felt they had to show full support for their allies' firm stance. By the end of the month, when British leaders had become truly alarmed and sought a joint mediation with Germany, Berlin refused to rein in its Austrian ally. By the first days of August, the continental powers were at war, and to Germany's dismay, the British Liberal coalition decided it could not ignore the obligations it had incrementally negotiated with France. With Britain came the 'White' dominions: Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and even the new Union of South Africa despite some Boer hesitations. India and other colonies had little choice. The Ottomans joined Germany by the end of 1914; Italy attacked Austria the following spring; Bulgaria sided with the Central Powers, Romania joined the Entente and the United States finally intervened on the side of the Entente as an associated power in April 1917. Other countries, notably Portugal, Brazil, Japan, and China, soon aligned themselves with the Allies to maintain goodwill.

The war's impact on imperialism

What was the relationship of the war to the imperialist international order? Did the overseas empires exacerbate or displace conflict? For a generation after 1870, the nations of Europe had carried out their rivalries by conquests and competition in the 'periphery', i.e., Asia and Africa, but that competition, of course, magnified the overarching sense of Darwinian struggle at home. The war finally resulted from rivalries among European powers largely over European issues. The nationalist aspirations of the peoples of Eastern Europe, many of whom were still included within the land-based European empires, and the limited capacity for institutional reform on the part of the Ottomans, Austro-Hungarians, and Russians, led to continuing conflicts. The old empires ignited the war as they resisted ethno-national pressures, and the war eventually destroyed them.

The war required an unprecedented mobilization of resources: what General Ludendorff called 'total war', such that by 1918 Germany, Britain, and France were perhaps devoting 40 to 50 per cent of their GNP to military uses. On the western front, the Germans' rapidly invaded Belgium and France with devastating casualties, but after failing to reach Paris, the two sides dug into trenches that remained largely stable (although heavily and disastrously contested) until the great German offensive and subsequent retreat of 1918. Almost one man in four between the ages of 18 and 40 would be killed among the French military. The toll on Germans was slightly lower, but a higher number of men were killed (1.3 and 1.8 million respectively). In Eastern Europe (outside Serbia), the percentages might be lower, but this resulted from the fact that the armies were not frozen into fixed entrenchments and huge numbers of troops were captured en masse.

The Russian Empire collapsed first. Its massive armies enjoyed a few weeks of initial success in East Prussia, then committed some disastrous strategic errors and suffered a major defeat at Tannenberg. German and Austrian victories forced withdrawals in Galicia (a region in present-day Poland and Ukraine) in 1915, and the military recovery under General Brusilov in 1916 could not be sustained. Troops fought stolidly but with inferior equipment. While improved in 1916, industrial support was deficient. Motivation flagged as retreat continued, and with surprisingly little resistance, the prospect of mass mutiny led to the tsar's abdication and the declaration of a republic in the 1917 revolution. In the confused conditions of wartime Petrograd and the sudden political competition, the provisional government lost almost all authority. Its decision to continue the war effort along with its allies cost it major support. Returning from exile, the Bolshevik leadership established its authority in the factory councils ('soviets') as well as in the workers and soldiers councils, while the reformist socialists (Mensheviks), the professorial Liberals, with limited support in middle class and professional circles, and even the would-be representatives of the peasantry, the Social Revolutionaries of Alexander Kerensky, could not establish effective political control. Having maintained the most radical anti-war position, the Bolsheviks knew what they wanted, and seized power in a *coup d'état* in the so-called October Revolution, in which a party with hitherto a weak position took precarious control of the Russian State. Dissolving the recently elected Constituent Assembly in which they had only about a quarter of the delegates, the Bolshevik leaders skilfully announced a new International to win support abroad for an attractive programme of immediate land redistribution to the peasants, and peace without annexations. The new regime accepted huge cessions of the former tsarist realm in Eastern Europe to make peace with Germany, and mobilized

supporters in what became a brutal civil war on multiple fronts. Despite Western support for their adversaries, the Bolsheviks prevailed by 1921. Hand in hand with the most exalted promises of world proletarian revolution came the organization of an effective secret police, the Cheka. Opposition parties and eventually the competing factions of the revolutionary front were successively suppressed. Lenin was ruthless toward opposition, but also understood that in a period when violence had become a worldwide phenomenon, the rhetoric of liberal politicians was limited. To win the civil war, he announced war communism, resorted to class warfare in the countryside, requisitioned property. He ostensibly promised self-determination to the diverse ethno-national components of the empire, which for several years became arenas of struggle on their own before being safely centralized again within the reorganized Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

The Ottoman and Habsburg empires also collapsed under the massive strains of war and economic hardship. The Habsburg armies held up surprisingly well, if assisted by German cadres, but as the Central Powers went into retreat, the empire finally decomposed and the various national leaderships declared independent republics. In Turkey, the Sultanate was left isolated in Constantinople, while Mustafa Kemal's Turkish nationalists seized control in Anatolia, replacing the old regime by 1922. While the German Empire was more of a nation-state, it too collapsed with defeat. The land empires in effect disintegrated.

However, the First World War did not achieve the formal independence of colonial regions overseas. Decolonization was to be achieved only after the Second World War. The situation of the extensive and populous areas of the world still held in colonial dependency was fraught with contradictions after 1918. The ideology of the victors centred on the concept of self-determination – for Serbs, Poles, Czechs and Belgians, but not for colonial peoples. According to British and French imperialist doctrines, colonial subjects would be ready for self-rule only after an indefinitely long period of 'preparation', either through indirect rule by cooperative Christian-educated university-trained indigenous elites, or through inculcation with the French republican values that Paris propagated. But that time was still far off.

No matter how devoted American policy-makers were to Wilsonian ideals, they were hardly prepared to recognize their relevance for the Caribbean and Central America. And the Japanese leaders, who had pursued an imperial agenda since taking Formosa (Taiwan) in 1895 and Korea in 1910, sought to exploit their country's intervention on the Allied side in the First World War to establish their country as the dominant power in Manchuria and the Shandong peninsula at a time when northern China succumbed to fragmenting successor battles after the collapse of the Qing Dynasty. Although Western objections helped China resist Japan's Twenty-one Demands for a protectorate, and the Chinese claimed a place at the Paris Peace Conference by joining the coalition against Germany, the 'Big Four' negotiators still awarded Japan control of the former German possessions in Shandong. Angered by this dismissal of their own country's national rights, Chinese students and protesters organized a huge protest – the 'May Fourth Movement' – against foreigners and the weakness of the fragmented Chinese regime. Still, Western recognition of Japan as a major Pacific naval power helped Tokyo pragmatists maintain decisive power at home through the 1920s and postponed a war for hegemony in the Western Pacific.[17]

The First World War had clearly shaken the premises of colonial rule. The British and the French had brought the indigenous peoples of their African and Asian domains to assist in the Great War: Senegalese troops served in the French occupation forces in Germany; Indian army units had fought in the Mesopotamian campaign against the Turks. The Indian Army was expanded to two million men, and the country was taxed and subject to war loans to pay for their upkeep. Labour battalions recruited from Egypt and the West Indies, or hired on a contract basis from China, built railways, supply depots and unloading ports in France. Colonial subjects who travelled to the theatres of war (or fought themselves in the African and Ottoman campaigns) were plunged into a world where whites no longer presented a united front, as they had during the Boxer Rebellion, but were visibly bleeding each other to death. They were sometimes introduced to Marxist ideologies of pacifism and other underground ideas of anti-war protest. Even when they remained resistant to unrest, they then had to return to their galling subaltern roles in the colonies.[18]

Moreover, Woodrow Wilson and America's role briefly crystallized an almost messianic sense of expectation among many spokesmen for the working classes and for independence worldwide. The Paris Peace Conference was fraught with the sense of a transformed world order, and the representatives of Korea, China, Egypt and many other hitherto colonized nations expected the situation to be redressed.[19] The colonial economies, meanwhile, had been infused with new vigour as the belligerents called for raw materials and manufacturing. Colonial areas were not immune to the waves of working-class and revolutionary unrest that surged throughout the world from 1917 to 1921. In India, above all, the Congress Party had already put self-government on its agenda, and a vigorous labour movement had emerged. Protest movements and strikes were renewed. Nonetheless, colonial authorities were determined to maintain 'order', and the movement ran its course, with several incidents, the bloodiest of which occurred in April 1919 in the Punjabi city of Amritsar, where the heavily armed British commander killed nearly 400 and wounded 1,200 Indian protesters who had rallied in a local stadium.

The victors in Europe, in short, were not prepared to relinquish their domains. The key to the peacemaking process outside Europe was not imperial divestiture, but sufficient agreement on joint approaches by the colonial powers and appropriate redistribution of German or Ottoman possessions to make future conflict unnecessary. By 1916, the French and British had agreed that they would divide Ottoman possessions in the Middle East after an Allied victory. The French, who had long-standing commercial and religious interests in the Christian and Druse settlements of Lebanon and the north-western part of Mesopotamia, were awarded territories south of Turkey, which they divided into the two 'mandatory' republics of Lebanon and Syria. Further to the south along the Mediterranean and extending eastward across the Jordan River, the British took over Palestine and the newly established Kingdom of Trans-Jordan. They also received the long sweep of 'Mesopotamia' from the Persian Gulf to

Syria (to be reorganized as Iraq), making sure to retain the oil-rich area around Mosul.

To reconcile abstract Wilsonian ideals with the colonial appetites that the war had enhanced, the new League of Nations was empowered ostensibly to assign the redistributed German colonies as 'mandates' to the existing imperial powers: France and Britain in Africa, Japan and the United States in the case of Micronesian island possessions. Called on to ratify partition agreements made among the major powers, the very organization that promised a peaceful world order could thus be exploited to sanction a new lease on life for European colonialism.

Organizing political authority in these regions remained a somewhat improvisational task. The British recognized the independence of the Bedouins of the Hejaz, who under Sharif Husayn had thrown in their lot with Britain against their nominal Turkish overlords. Although Husayn's ambition to be caliph of the Arabs did not long survive the war, one of his sons was installed as leader of Iraq, while the other was awarded Trans-Jordan. London retained direct administration of the remaining western area of Palestine, where they had somehow to reconcile the interests of Zionists – who had been promised a Jewish homeland by the Balfour Declaration of 1917 – and resident Arabs. In the Arabian Peninsula, where an eighteenth-century revivalist movement had brought the house of Saud to power, the hereditary leader Ibn Saud consolidated the interior territories, conquered the Hejaz by 1925–26, and in 1932 proclaimed his domains the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.[20] Egypt continued as a kingdom under British protection; like India, it had become an important economic component of the imperial textile industry. Thus London had acquired a vast domain of semi-autonomous protectorates, theoretically ruled by the newly inserted institution of monarchy, but in fact governed by a fitful alliance of influential families and London resident authorities. The Dutch retained their rich possessions in 'the Indies'; the Union of South Africa took over German South-West Africa (Namibia) as a mandate. The French set out to consolidate their influence in Morocco, Lebanon, and Syria and to win over the Syrian elites. For both France and Britain, the training of indigenous military units was a key task.

The demands of the First World War revealed how useful a role loyal colonial forces might play. Indian forces had been critical in the Mesopotamian campaigns; Senegalese formed part of the post-1918 French occupying force in Germany. The armies also offered a channel for training key elites and inculcating a sense of belonging to an overall colonial mission, but positions of command remained reserved for the Europeans. Could the loyalties engendered among the colonial elites overcome the enhanced ideologies of self-determination? After indulging in four years of unprecedented organized violence against each other, could Europeans truly reconstruct a united front to rule so many non-Europeans, especially when their rivalries had contributed to their sanguinary conflict? And after expending so many of the resources offered by the colonial world for that cause? Far-sighted statesmen in Europe as well as nationalist leaders understood that the system had to evolve, but the wager for the colonial powers was that some new form of association that would preserve their cultural and economic ascendancy might painlessly emerge. Had they not been so embroiled among themselves in the wake of the First World War, they might have had a better chance. Once the upheavals of 1919 were suppressed or dissipated, however, the imperial order seemed to have acquired renewed lustre. Empires existed on borrowed time, but even that would eventually seem intolerable to those who were asked to wait.

NOTES

1. H. L. Wesseling, *Divide and Rule: The Partition of Africa, 1880–1914*, trans. Arnold J. Pomerans, Westport, CT, 1996; Y. T. Matsusaka, *The Making of Japanese Manchuria, 1904–1932*, Cambridge, MA, 2001; W. Lafeber, *The Cambridge History of American Foreign Relations*, vol. 2: *The American Search for Opportunity, 1865–1913*, New York, 1993; F. Ninkovich, *The United States and Imperialism*, Oxford, 2001. For the Dutch in Indonesia see M. C. Riklefs, *A History of Modern Indonesia since c. 1200*, 3rd ed., Stanford, CA, pp. 143–89. Other experiences: R. Aldrich, *Greater France: A History of French Expansion*, Basingstoke, 1996.
2. The debates over the theories of the imperialism of free-trade and the 'open-door' and the troublesome frontier can be found in Wm. Roger Lewis (ed.), *Imperialism: The Robinson and Gallagher Controversy*, New York, 1976.
3. As of 1914, however, foreign investment flowed 51 per cent to Europe and North America, 19 per cent to Latin America, 16 per cent to Asia, only 9 per cent to Africa and 5 per cent to Oceania (including Australia and New Zealand). See R. Cameron, *A Concise Economic History of the World from Paleolithic Times to the Present*, New York, 1989.
4. J. Hobson, *Imperialism*, London, 1902; R. Luxemburg, *Die Akkumulation des Kapitals* (1913), trans. A. Schwarzschild, *The Accumulation of Capital*, New York, 2003; R. Hilferding, *Das Finanzkapital* (1910), trans., London, Boston, 1981; V. I. Lenin, *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*, 1916.
5. H-U. Wehler, *Bismarck und der Imperialismus*. Cologne, 1969.
6. J. Schumpeter, 'Imperialism,' in *Imperialism; Social Classes: Two Essays*, trans. H. Norden, New York, 1955; T. Veblen, *Imperial Germany and the Industrial Revolution*, New York, 1916.
7. P. K. O'Brien, 'The Costs and Benefits of British Imperialism 1846–1914,' *Past and Present*, No. 120, Aug. 1988, pp. 163–200; L. E. Davis and R. A. Huttenback, *Mammon and the Pursuit of Empire: The Economics of British Imperialism*, Cambridge, 1988; D. K. Fieldhouse, *Economics and Empire, 1830–1914*, London, 1973; M. De Cecco, *Money and Empire: The International Gold Standard, 1890–1914*, Oxford, 1974; W. G. Hynes, *The Economics of Empire*, London, 1979. For a balance of the French experience, J. Marseille, *Empire colonal et capitalisme français*, Paris 1984.
8. P. J. Cain and A. G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism 1688–2000*, 2nd ed., London, 2002.
9. P. S. Khoury and J. Koistiner (eds), *Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East* (Berkeley, 1990), esp. the essay by R. Tapper, 'Anthropologists, Historians, and Tribespeople on Tribe and State Formation in the Middle East', pp. 48–73.
10. See C. Furtado, *Accumulation and Development: The Logic of Industrial Civlization*, trans. S. Macedo, Oxford, 1983; A. Gunder Frank, *Dependent Accumulation and*

Underdevelopment, New York, 1979; T. K. Hopkins, I. M. Wallerstein et al., *World Systems Analysis: Theory and Methodology*, Beverly Hills, CA, 1982; S. Amin, *Unequal Development: An Essay on the Social Formations of Peripheral Capitalism*, trans. Brian Pearce, New York, 1976; *Imperialism and Unequal Development*, New York, 1977.

11. D. S. Landes, *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations. Why Some Are So Rich and Some Are So Poor*, New York: W.W. Norton, 1998. F. Fukuyama, *Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity*, New York, 1996.

12. P. Bairoch, *The Economic Development of the Third World since 1900*, Berkeley, 1975. pp. 13–48.

13. A. Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, H. Greenfeld, trans., 3rd ed. London, 2003.

14. For recent surveys: D. Lieven, *Empire*, London, 2003; D. Quataert, *The Ottoman Empire,1700–1922*, Cambridge, 2000; R. A. Kann, A *History of the Habsburg Empire, 1526–1918*, Berkelely, CA, 1974; J. D. Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, New York, 1990.

15. A. T. Mahan, *The Influence of Seapower on History, 1660–1783*, London, 1965.

16. The literature on the origins and course of World War I is immense and does not abate. For the preceding arms race see D. Herrmann, *The Arming of Europe and the Making of the First World War*, Princeton, 1996; D. Stevenson, *Armaments and the Coming of War: Europe, 1904–1914*, Oxford, 1996; and most recently H. Strachan, *The First World War*, Vol.1: *To Arms*, Oxford, 2001, with extensive bibliography. The figures on soldiers and trains are from Strachan, pp. 175, 206–07.

17. Chinese events in Spence, op.cit.; A. Iriye, *After Imperialism: The Search for a New Order in the Far East, 1921–1931*, Cambridge, MA, 1965.

18. See R. W. Kilson, *Calling up the Empire: The British Military Use of Non-White Labor in France, 1916–1920*, Cambridge, MA, 1990; M. Michel, *L'appel à l'Afrique: Contributions et réactions à l'effort de guerre en A.O.F. (1914–1919)*, Paris, 1982.

19. E. Manela's forthcoming study surveys these developments. For now see, 'The Wilsonian Moment and the Rise of Anticolonial Nationalism: The Case of Egypt,' *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 2001.

20. D. Fromkin, *A Peace to End All Peace: Creating the Modern Middle East, 1914–1922*, New York, 1922.

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