

# Kenneth Pomeranz

## *Empire & 'civilizing' missions, past & present*

'Imperialism' is a frustratingly vague term, but a useful one – and not only for outside observers and protesting subjects.<sup>1</sup> Historically, rulers have often sought to make their empires visible as such by following regional – and in recent centuries, global – standards for acting imperially. Even the past century, in which empires often shunned that designation, is only a partial exception.

Imperialism is also topical. While some compare the contemporary United States to imperial Rome, more analysts see it as the latest of a series of military-mercantile hegemony that set the rules for their eras' global political economies. Depending on where they locate the start of the world economy, some stretch that series back many centuries, while most identify only an Anglo-American succession spanning two centuries of liberal industrial capitalism. Others

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mark out the last two hundred years for a different, though complementary, reason: as an era in which Western empires, influenced by the Enlightenment, cast themselves as agents of progress.

In this essay I will also emphasize the self-assigned 'civilizing' mission of modern empires, but will argue that the two-hundred-year, Atlantic-centered framework is both too narrow and too broad. On the one hand, civilizing empires have emerged outside the Enlightenment West; an East/West dichotomy often proves less useful than one between contiguous and overseas empires. On the other hand, since the 1970s the American government's approach to 'development' and 'nation building' – the twentieth-century version of 'civilizing' – has broken with basic ideas about how empire could confer benefits on subject peoples that had evolved over the previous two centuries. This makes today's American empire different both in word and deed.

In empires, leaders of one society rule directly or indirectly over at least one other society, using instruments differ-

<sup>1</sup> My thanks to Walter LaFeber, Robert Moeller, Jeffrey Wasserstrom, and R. Bin Wong for exceptionally helpful comments on earlier drafts of this essay, and to Mark Elliott for clarifying specific questions of Qing frontier policy.

ent from (though not necessarily more authoritarian than) those used to rule at home. For empires, varied kinds of rule are not just concessions to large spaces and limited means, but appropriate to differences among their subject peoples. Many contemporary states rule less accessible regions very differently from their capital districts, but this is considered a temporary failing; in theory, nations should have one kind of government and citizen from border to border. Empires, by contrast, may plan to modify differences among their domains, but not to extinguish them.

In modern times, one particular difference increasingly overshadowed others: most empires came to have at their core one nation conceived to be 'free' and 'modern,' while other domains were 'unfree' and 'backward.' This distinction became more pronounced in the nineteenth century than it had been before: most of those whom we anachronistically call the 'German' or 'Spanish' subjects of the seventeenth-century Hapsburgs, for instance, had not been notably more enfranchised than many of the other Hapsburg subjects. Even in the eighteenth-century British Empire, which may have come closest among pre-nineteenth-century empires to having a nation at its core, the majority of Britons were neither economically nor politically more privileged than their North American cousins, or even perhaps than the white residents of various other British colonies. The citizen/subject dichotomy only became sharp when the thirteen colonies broke away, many local representative bodies in the rest of the empire were either emasculated or abolished,<sup>2</sup> and the rights afforded

2 See C. A. Bayly, *Imperial Meridian: The British Empire and the World, 1780–1830* (London: Longman, 1989), who labels many of the new

to citizens were expanded in Britain itself.

Nonetheless, the distinction between a supposedly civilized core nation and backward others was not new in 1800. Indeed, the groups most closely tied to historic imperial centers often made their alleged cultural superiority a justification for empire. Some tried hard to 'civilize' their subjects. For instance, a civilizing agenda has been part of Chinese imperial statecraft for more than two thousand years. Insistence on this civilizing mission waxed and waned over time, but not on the strength of rival claims for the allegiance of border peoples. Recent scholarship emphasizes how Qing (1644–1912) expansionism in the southwest resembled many contemporaneous expansionisms, and how Eastern and Western empires self-consciously adopted standard ways of claiming territory and peoples, such as increasingly standardized ethnographic and cartographic conventions.<sup>3</sup>

Around 1800, the imperial stake in 'civilization' got higher – for at least two reasons. First, Europeans and Americans (North and South) increasingly accepted the idea that civilized peoples should rule themselves. (The Romans had never worried that respecting Greek civilization conflicted with imposing outside rule on them. In fact, as far as the Romans were concerned, being too civi-

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and reorganized colonies of the 1800–1840 era as "proconsular despotisms."

3 Laura Hostetler, *Qing Colonial Enterprise: Ethnography and Cartography in Early Modern China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); James A. Millward, "'Coming onto the Map': 'Western Regions' Geography and Cartographic Nomenclature in the Making of Chinese Empire in Xinjiang," *Late Imperial China* 20 (2) (December 2000): 61–98.

lized – i.e., decadent – could be a disqualification for self-rule.) The Atlantic revolutions both promulgated this idea and spawned expansionist states, producing strange new locutions: Jefferson described American westward expansion as “an empire of liberty,” and Napoleon insisted that French conquests brought “freedom.”

These locutions paralleled tensions in the metropolises, where liberal regimes acknowledged certain universal rights but then denied many groups those rights in practice. It was frequently argued that those whose rights were denied lacked reason or self-control or were in some other way not fully human. By the same token, if civilized people should rule themselves, societies ruled from afar had to be labeled uncivilized. Empire was then justified as tutelage that would eventually make those societies fit either for self-rule or full union with the metropole. Though civilizing remained a vague, contested goal, most nineteenth- and twentieth-century empires invoked this rationale much more than their predecessors had.

The second reason why the imperial stake in civilization got higher was that an alternate model for empire was vanishing. For centuries, nomadic cavalry experts had periodically conquered the sedentary empires they lived near, but this pattern was disappearing by 1800. The Qajars in Persia, the Saudis in western Arabia, and, more briefly, the Marathas and Nadir Shah in India faintly echoed processes that had put the Mongols, Mughals, and others in power, but record population growth and intensified land use put nomads on the defensive thereafter throughout Eurasia.

Existing empires that had descended from tribal conquerors also became less prone to claim they had virtues that resulted from being relatively uncorrupted

by civilization; increasingly they also saw themselves as civilizers. Decades before the Tanzimat reforms of the 1830s, the Ottomans began working to standardize administration and property law, reform social practices, and rein in mystical and enthusiastic forms of Islam in their outer provinces. The Romanovs undertook ‘Russification’ efforts in Poland and the Ukraine around 1830 and in Central Asia thereafter.

The Qing, descended from Manchu invaders, had long made ‘civilizing’ efforts on some frontiers – replacing tribal chiefs with appointed magistrates, imposing Han Chinese marriage customs, and promoting Chinese education for elites; but they had also criticized excessively civilized Han Chinese. This latter stance became harder to sustain after spectacular corruption and high living among elite Manchus were exposed in 1799. After 1800, Han literati became more interested and involved in frontier management, emphasizing the superiority of Chinese civilization rather than commonalities among the Qing and their Central Asian subjects. Many Manchu officials followed suit, invoking earlier Mongol precedents less frequently.<sup>4</sup> (Implementation of more aggressively ‘civilizing’ policies came slowly, however, due to a series of nineteenth-century invasions, rebellions, and other crises.) Thus, nineteenth-century empires that did not share Enlightenment notions about progress, tutelage, and self-rule also worked to ‘civilize’ their subject populations.

4 On Qing disdain for decadent Han Chinese, see, for instance, Philip Kuhn, *Soulstealers: The Chinese Sorcery Scare of 1768* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990). On the increased assertiveness of Han literati in frontier and foreign policy, see James Polachek, *The Inner Opium War* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992).

But accepting a civilizing justification, even rhetorically, created a distinctive tension in which any empire claiming complete success would in effect be calling for its own dissolution.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, modern empires have claimed to be readying ‘natives’ for self-rule, while simultaneously asserting that the empires’ continued presence is essential for maintaining this direction. (This problem has appeared in Iraq, as the U.S. government has insisted on rapid progress toward Iraqi self-rule – even as it also insists that a continued American military presence is essential.)

By 1900, perceived readiness for self-rule involved social, economic, and cultural characteristics of whole populations: readiness to be self-disciplined free laborers, patriotic soldiers, practitioners of modern hygiene, etc. These civilizing projects went well beyond Macaulay’s famous proposal, in his 1834 “Minute on [Indian] Education,” that Britain should aim to create a class of people in the subcontinent who would share its outlook. In focusing on training a ‘civilized’ ruling class, Macaulay’s assimilationist imperialism was, despite its Enlightenment origins, not unlike that of Wanyan Yun Zhu (who wrote in 1833 that finding a few Yunnanese women who could write decent Chinese showed the glories of Qing expansion) and that of Chen Hongmou, the eighteenth-century official who tirelessly promoted classical education on China’s southwestern frontier.

Whatever their similarities, all these projects for creating new gentries were

5 The most influential formulation of this is Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper, “Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a Research Agenda,” in Cooper and Stoler, eds., *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 1 – 56.

quite remote from later ambitions to create new citizenries. As Christopher Bayly has shown, despite the growing importance of commercial interests in early-nineteenth-century Britain, the empire’s dominant ideas were evangelist and agrarianist.<sup>6</sup> Taking Britain’s concentrated landholding as a model, agrarianism sought to build colonial societies that would also be led by an elite of large landlords dedicated to improving their properties and to setting an example for their neighbors. Meanwhile, evangelist rhetoric often held that imperial rule would ‘awaken’ its subjects.

Many, including Macaulay, equated awakening with rejecting local tradition to embrace superior Western ideas. Others – from colonial officials such as Thomas Munro, who hoped to revive an ancient “Hindoo constitution,” to intellectuals such as F. D. Maurice and James Legge, who saw anticipations of Christian monotheism in various ancient civilizations – regarded imperialism as helping people rediscover truths their cultures had forgotten but that Europeans had meanwhile enlarged upon. Many Westerners, for instance, considered China a ‘sleeping giant,’ thus justifying the Opium War (1839 – 1842) as a way to rouse that country from its slumber.

Increasingly, colonial nationalists picked up this metaphor, which conveniently implied that the long-sleeping nation was old enough to be historically authentic. ‘Awakening,’ as this appropriation of the term showed, was an unstable justification for empire; it could theoretically happen instantaneously, making foreign rule suddenly superfluous.

‘Development,’ by contrast, implied a need for continuing guidance. It fit an understanding that whole societies had to be transformed, and it had more ob-

6 Bayly, *Imperial Meridian*, 133 – 163.

jective, measurable correlatives. Development could also serve metropolitan economic interests, making an empire a valuable market for the metropole's manufactures and financial services rather than just a source of raw materials.

Amidst increasingly restive 'nationalities' and growing metropolitan queasiness about the ethics and feasibility of relying on force, pomp, and often improvised 'tradition' to sustain European rule, a mission stressing economic development provided a seemingly defensible basis for a colonial social contract. A fundamentally socioeconomic notion of empire's purpose also suited metropolitan professionals seeking opportunities abroad as well as the desires of some of the colonized. The commitment of many colonial nationalists to developmentalism is among modern imperialism's most important legacies. It is striking how many twentieth-century arguments about North-South relations came to assume that good regimes create sustained per capita economic growth – a relatively novel and narrow measure of human well-being.

Meanwhile, non- or semi-European states that wanted to be recognized as great powers, including old empires like the Ottoman and new ones like Japan, also assimilated many Western notions of what constituted appropriate imperial behavior. The resulting fusions of Western and indigenous notions reoriented these states' policies toward their Miao, Palestinian, Kazakh, Taiwanese, and other 'backward' subjects – and thereby gave attempts to recast empire as a developmental effort a truly global scope.

Many late-nineteenth-century colonial regimes believed that creating and enforcing a more liberal property rights system constituted a sufficient develop-

mental effort – but this was hardly simple. Herders, shifting cultivators, and forest peoples – many of whose traditional practices were construed as criminal trespassing under that system – suffered greatly; so did tenants who lost customary guarantees against eviction and access to common lands. Liberalization could also undermine local elite collaborators central to cost-saving indirect rule (those, for instance, with rights to collect tribute goods or use unpaid labor), or white settlers for whom coercion kept labor cheap amidst still plentiful land. For these and other reasons, colonial powers rarely implemented full-fledged liberalization. (In fact, the late Ottoman and Qing Empires, which were cautious but persistent about extending the sway of markets, were probably more successful in this respect than some European empires.)

The part of laissez-faire most firmly upheld in many empires was stinginess on the part of the state. The most notorious example was the near-total absence of relief during India's massive late-nineteenth-century famines. Growing trade may have raised aggregate income and lifted some boats; but more generally, the combination of minimal famine relief, incentives to export crops, new property rights that sometimes placed emergency 'wasteland' food sources off-limits, and new migration patterns that spread epidemics, made the late nineteenth century a particularly deadly era for much of the developing world – and guaranteed resistance to a narrowly liberal developmentalism.<sup>7</sup>

Efforts to increase raw materials exports often created enclaves, built and maintained in ways that kept costs low

7 See Mike Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts* (London: Verso, 2001), for a harrowing account of the Indian episode and similar ones during the same period.

but hardly created market economies. Forced labor on infrastructure projects and some plantations continued into the 1940s in French Africa; such unpaid ‘apprenticeships’ were justified by the argument that the ‘natives’ were not yet self-disciplined enough to be motivated by wages.<sup>8</sup>

The Dutch Cultivation System, in which Javanese export crops were extracted as tribute with help from local elites, was officially abolished in 1870, but coerced labor continued in Java well into the 1880s. Mines and plantations often utilized immigrant workers isolated in barracks rather than paying local workers the family-supporting wages demanded by (and gradually conceded to) North Atlantic workers. Outside capital and skills often came from other colonies (for instance, in British Africa) rather than the metropole.

Where exported raw materials began to be locally processed, these infant industries were often undone by post-World War I protectionism. Thus, while gross output grew significantly in many colonies and semicolonies during the 1870–1914 trade boom, this dynamic would probably not have proved self-sustaining even if World War I had not intervened, and even if people had accepted the massive human costs of keeping social spending minimal.

A combination of circumstances elicited broader developmental efforts after 1900, and especially after World War I. Movements among the colonized often demanded basic public services. In the

8 Frederick Cooper, Thomas Holt, and Rebecca Scott, “Introduction,” and Cooper, “Conditions Analogous to Slavery,” in Cooper, Holt, and Scott, *Beyond Slavery: Explorations of Race, Labor, and Citizenship in Post-Emancipation Societies* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 1–32, 107–149, develop this point – and the metaphor of apprenticeship in particular.

metropolises themselves, faith in government planning, rising liberal/Left political coalitions, and interest in colonies as social laboratories were all factors. But if a civilizing mission were to include building infrastructure, educating people, promoting public health, channeling investment, and buffering social dislocations, its costs would rise considerably. Moreover, by claiming as a mission’s aim the need to transform the entire population, even in such intimate aspects of their lives as hygiene and marriage, modern empires undertook tasks at which they were particularly likely to fail, potentially raising embarrassing questions about their own superiority in the process. (By contrast, the Qing had backed off a campaign against Han Chinese footbinding in the late 1600s, allowing even their own women to adopt shoes that made their feet look bound.)

Meanwhile, the colonial development initiatives were mostly locally funded (as witness, for instance, the rapid post-1900 growth of India’s public debt). This limited their scale, and usually meant relying on fiscal instruments available to states weak at the grassroots, including tariffs, monopolies, sin taxes, and price-fixing export control boards. These often had unfortunate social effects or imperiled other developmental efforts – for example, discouraging export production by taxing it. But once established, these measures frequently became the way for postindependence regimes to support themselves. (Opium monopolies, which provided anywhere from 15 to 50 percent of revenue in various colonies and protectorates,<sup>9</sup> were an exception, being so

9 For sample figures, see Carl Trocki, “Drugs, Taxes, and Chinese Capitalism,” in Timothy Brook and Bob Tadashi Wakabayashi, eds., *Opium Regimes: China, Britain, and Japan, 1839–1952* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 82; John Richards, “The Opium Indus-

strongly associated with national weakness that they rarely survived independence.)

Nonetheless, when developmental imperialism chose cost-effective projects – for example, vaccinations, sanitation, clean water, and basic literacy efforts – it could contribute significantly to human well-being. While life expectancy often stagnated or declined during early colonial rule, it generally improved near the end of it.<sup>10</sup> The empire that probably has the strongest claim to having laid firm foundations for its colonies' economic success – albeit often very coercively – is Japan, which conquered Taiwan, Korea, and southern Manchuria and took a very interventionist stance from the start, targeting entire populations for social, economic, and cultural change.<sup>11</sup>

Whatever its merits and demerits, this activism was short-lived, curtailed by the Depression and World War II. Twentieth-century enthusiasm for social engineering notwithstanding, empire was not supposed to cost metropolitan taxpayers money.

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try in British India," *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Special Issue: Essays in Memory of Dharma Kumar 39 (2, 3) (2002): 149–180. See especially charts 2 and 3.

10 See, for instance, Norman Owen, ed., *Death and Disease in Southeast Asia* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1987), 13–14, 82–84, 276–277; Leela Visaria and Pravin Visaria, "Population (1757–1947)," in Dharma Kumar and Tapan Raychaudhuri, eds., *The Cambridge Economic History of India, Volume 2: 1757–1970* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 471, 501–502.

11 The essays in Mark R. Peattie and Ramon H. Myers, eds., *The Japanese Colonial Empire, 1895–1945* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984), are a good starting place; Samuel Ho's contribution on economic development is particularly useful.

Nor could developmentalism prevent growing nationalist movements from making empire increasingly costly, in blood as well as money. Once it became clear how difficult broad-gauged development would be – and that even activist tutelage would not guarantee lasting deference – most colonial powers quit. Cold War competition, which made the Soviet Union and the United States eager to create societies that could be attractive 'showcases' of either state socialist or capitalist development, sustained some nation building and development efforts into the 1970s, but these rarely approached what would have been needed to make the hoped-for transformations or to legitimate continued direct rule.

The forms of imperialism that flourished in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries encompassed more than ruling colonies and long-term protectorates. Imperial powers often intervened militarily in formally independent states that committed or permitted 'uncivilized' acts: piracy on the North African coast, the Boxer Uprising in China, or occasional kidnappings of Westerners. The resulting invasions also claimed an educational purpose; the eight-power Boxer intervention, for instance, was supposed to teach China an unforgettably violent lesson about respecting 'civilized' norms.<sup>12</sup> But these were understood as short-term missions to redress 'outrages' and inflict instructive traumas, not as long-term developmental commitments. Certainly nobody expected development aid to follow the Boxer expedition; on the contrary, a huge indemnity was imposed, in part

12 James L. Hevia, *English Lessons: The Pedagogy of Imperialism in Nineteenth-Century China* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2003).

to reinforce the lesson. While in practice punitive excursions sometimes became lengthy occupations, in theory they were quite distinct.

Decolonization, however, muddled this distinction. On the one hand, surrendering sovereignty allowed metropolitan powers to limit their responsibility for development, even when they remained influential. On the other hand, the characteristically modern imperial idea that violating self-determination creates moral and economic obligations had become widely accepted. While many in the Bush administration quite likely wanted an Afghan war that resembled the Boxer expedition – an exemplary punishment for Western civilian deaths, followed by a relatively quick exit – this was not broadly acceptable. Even in a decolonized and post-Cold War world, imperial powers cannot completely abjure nation building – especially when failed states become potential terrorist bases.

Western developmental imperialism had parallels in Eurasia's great land-based empires both before and after the Russian and Chinese revolutions – empires where capital for such efforts was particularly scarce. As noted earlier, even Macaulay's quintessentially liberal "Minute on Education" shared several assumptions with Chinese agendas for civilizing conquered societies. Both assumed that there was one truly civilized way to live; that one could find an elite anywhere (if not necessarily the current elite) sufficiently rational to embrace that way of life; and that such an elite could then legitimately rule their society in accordance with universal (imperial) values. Macaulay's formulation suggests that once civilized, India's elite would rule its own country, while the Qing imagined civilized Miao being incorpo-

rated more fully into the empire – but this difference is not logically necessary, nor does it sharply divide East from West. The French envisioned incorporation rather than independence for civilized colonies, while the Chinese imagined their influence civilizing both separate tributary kingdoms (for example, Vietnam) and minority peoples within the empire.

But the breadth and depth of socioeconomic transformation imagined by late-nineteenth-century civilizing missions created new differences between capital-poor and capital-rich empires. While the correlation is not perfect, the capital-poor empires tended to be contiguous and land based, while the capital-rich ones were more often noncontiguous and maritime. Russians, Chinese, and, to some extent, Turks found the costs of developmental imperialism in their borderlands particularly challenging. But because no oceans separated their empires from their metropolises – nor did strong representative institutions sharply distinguish their core polity from their other domains – they also found it harder than Western Europeans to declare success and pull out. Moreover, the USSR and revolutionary China – even more than their Western rivals, who also invoked individual rights and religion – staked their legitimacy on a universally applicable formula for economic progress. Especially relative to the countries' resources, central government spending to develop Soviet Central Asia and the post-1949 Chinese Far West was quite impressive, though the results were much less so. (The same, of course, was often true of their investments at home.) And with other methods falling short, Russia and especially China often encouraged immigration to their borderlands – not just for basic labor power, but also to improve work skills, 'civi-

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lization,' and loyalty in 'backward' regions.

Thus China's recently accelerated "Go West" initiative – aimed at both extracting raw materials and securing the region by raising living standards – has seen previous restrictions on Han immigration replaced by encouragements, and minorities' exemptions from China's "fewer, later, better" birth control policy rescinded. With state-led development for western China emphasizing natural resource production for sale to the semicapitalist, consumer-driven East, contemporary China has many features of imperial dualisms, with large differences in average wealth, the degree of local autonomy, the scope allowed to dissent, and the prominence of military priorities between core and periphery. It has some of the features of settler colonialism as well, with Han Chinese immigrants increasingly reshaping much of the landscape to their liking. Any ambivalence about exporting Han values (now including consumerism) to Central Asia seems gone, despite serious political and ecological risks.

Imperial Japan combined features of contiguous and overseas empires. Although water separated it from Korea, Taiwan, and southern Manchuria, Japan considered these close enough to be part of its metropole's security zone – areas that had to be kept stable and in friendly hands at almost any price in order for the home islands to be secure. The low transport costs and ecological complementarity between Japan and these nearby colonies also facilitated plans for more thorough economic integration than was easily imagined for Europe and its tropical colonies. And early-twentieth-century Japan, though capital-poor relative to Western Europe, was less so than China and probably Russia. Finally, while the Japanese, like other colonial

masters, were quick to claim racial superiority over their colonial subjects, they also often asserted a racial solidarity that allowed their Asian subjects to join the 'imperial race'; this differed sharply both from European assertions of unbridgeable difference from their subjects and from universalist assertions that anyone could be Europeanized. Japanese leaders and intellectuals always imagined their empire as regional, naturally suited to only some 'backward' peoples.

In this context, Japan pursued both cultural aggression (including, for instance, plans to eliminate the Korean language) and broad developmental efforts (which consumed over 40 percent of Taiwan's colonial budget, versus miniscule amounts in most European colonies), mobilizing people and resources with an intensity more often found in independent mid-twentieth-century states that claimed a mandate to fundamentally transform their societies. Massive Japanese settlement in the colonies was also considered, though not much had been carried out by 1945. And since Japan's empire ended with defeat in World War II rather than with defeat at the hands of anticolonial insurgents, we will never know how doggedly Tokyo would have resisted decolonization.

In recent decades, Western imperialism has moved in a different direction, weakening the link between empire and developmentalism. While this shift has been most starkly evident since Cold War competition for third-world clients ended, it seems to have originated in the 1970s when, roughly speaking, Portugal's withdrawal from Africa and the ouster of the West from Indochina essentially completed decolonization.

Great powers continue to abridge the sovereignty of others, often by force or

threat of force. With American military bases in over 120 countries, we have hardly seen the end of empire. Like other modern empires, the United States today invokes a rationale of benevolent transformation, but the nature of the rationale has changed in recent decades. Defeat in Vietnam, stagflation, and political backlash reduced American interest in 'nation building' from the 1970s on; meanwhile, the structural adjustment policies increasingly favored over Keynesian development strategies mean that market-oriented advice has come to be considered more useful than material assistance.<sup>13</sup>

From the 1970s on, American geopolitical concerns shifted toward the Middle East, where some key client states had substantial wealth. Those that did not, such as Egypt, received economic aid that rarely aimed for more than stabilization, in contrast to the grander developmental plans of earlier decades for favored clients such as Taiwan, South Korea,<sup>14</sup> and (much less successfully) the Philippines. U.S. foreign economic

13 For a fascinating discussion of how Americans as far back as the 1890s misunderstood their own economic history in a way that made such an approach to development seem logical, see Emily Rosenberg, *Spreading the American Dream* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1982), and Rosenberg, *Financial Missionaries to the World: The Politics and Culture of Dollar Diplomacy, 1900–1930* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999).

14 From 1945 to 1984, South Korea and Taiwan received almost as much U.S. aid as all Africa and Latin America put together (Bruce Cumings, "The Origins and Development of the Northeast Asian Political Economy," *International Organizations* 38 [1] [1984]: 24). But as Taiwan and South Korea became more prosperous, the U.S. relationship with China stabilized, and oil imports became more critical (U.S. production peaked in 1970, and imports doubled in the next three years), American geopolitical concern shifted toward the Middle East.

aid, which never reached its target levels, is down more than 25 percent since 1962; as a percentage of either GDP or the federal budget, it is down more than 80 percent.<sup>15</sup>

Indeed, since the Mayaguez incident of 1975 (the first post-Vietnam use of U.S. troops abroad), most U.S. military interventions have been presented as one-time rescues or retaliation for uncivilized behavior (as in Grenada, Somalia, Panama, Haiti, etc., plus various bombings without ground troops), whatever additional motives there were. Even in tiny and highly literate Grenada, which earlier might have seemed an ideal place to create a postinvasion showcase, the United States undertook no substantial developmental program – and that was in 1983, when Cold War tensions were high. When the Soviet Bloc collapsed a few years later, U.S. policymakers became even less interested in concrete development assistance.

Some still argue that U.S. hegemony serves developmental and civilizing purposes. But rather than promising to transform any particular place through difficult 'nation building,' American policymakers now argue that U.S. power creates opportunities for any society to transform itself by underpinning a global order of security and free markets.

While the idea that underdevelopment breeds terrorism has been more salient since September 11, the U.S. commitment to an almost exclusively private-sector development model means that this has not led to much aid. Indeed, current American emphasis on privatization of basic services, on openness to

15 Isaac Shapiro and Nancy Birdsall, "How Does the Proposed Level of Foreign Economic Aid Under the Bush Budget Compare with Historical Levels?" Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, <[www.cbpp.org/3-14-02foreignaid.htm](http://www.cbpp.org/3-14-02foreignaid.htm)>, accessed July 5, 2004.

foreign bidders, and on removing subsidies for basic goods (most recently water) is so unpopular that even a government that endorses these as long-term strategies is unlikely to want to implement them unless publicly forced to.

The downsizing of secular nationalist governments has also contributed to the rise of ethnoreligious mass movements that provide alternative services, from Hezbollah in Lebanon to the B.J.P. in India. Current U.S. development strategies are thus much harder to integrate into strategies for stable rule than were twentieth-century colonial development efforts or New Deal-influenced Cold War development efforts.

Moreover, as in the late nineteenth century, the invisible hand alone has had limited success. 'Free markets' have also notably excluded open borders for migrants and the elimination of subsidies for farmers in wealthy countries. Global income inequality has soared since 1973, and poverty reduction has been slight outside of China – which has relied on heavy state investment and other measures to stimulate its economy while shielding some of its more vulnerable sectors from foreign competition, thus violating the 'Washington consensus' in favor of growth strategies based on minimal government intervention and maximum openness to the global economy.<sup>16</sup>

As a result, the globalizing imperial vision the United States now pursues is quite different from earlier imperial visions, though proponents ranging

16 See Robert Hunter Wade, "The Rising Inequality of World Income Distribution," *Finance and Development* 38 (4) (December 2001). On numbers of people in poverty in 2001 versus 1981, see Shaohua Chen and Martin Ravallion, "How Have the World's Poor Fared Since the Early 1980s?" <<http://www.worldbank.org/research/povmonitor/index.htm>>, especially table 3, accessed July 8, 2004.

from Niall Ferguson to Deepak Lal, and critics such as Immanuel Wallerstein and Giovanni Arrighi, have cast the United States as the latest in a succession of hegemons guaranteeing a global order facilitating trade. But even the nineteenth-century Pax Britannica never involved comparable efforts to lay down global rules.<sup>17</sup> Britain promoted free trade within its empire, made bilateral agreements with a few countries – some freely negotiated, others products of gunboat diplomacy – and kept Britain's own markets open. But much of the world, including rapidly growing Germany, Russia, and the United States, was protectionist – certainly there was nothing remotely comparable to the World Trade Organization.

Britain's claims to upholding human rights were likewise more modest than the United States' rhetoric in recent decades, though using the Royal Navy in a sustained campaign against the slave trade may have actually done more than contemporary developed-world governments (as opposed to NGOs, the United Nations, and so on) can claim.<sup>18</sup> And

17 Patrick O'Brien, "The Governance of Globalization: The Political Economy of Anglo-American Hegemony, 1793 – 2003," CESifo Working Paper No. 1023 (Center for European Studies, University of Munich, and Ifo Institute for Economic Research), October 2003.

18 Parliament outlawed the slave trade within the British Empire in 1807 and authorized the Royal Navy to collect fines for slaves found on any British ship. In 1827, it declared participation in the slave trade to be a form of piracy punishable by death. At first, British action was limited to British ships and ports, but Britain gradually claimed the right to board other countries' ships as well. For British policy with respect to the Brazilian slave trade (the world's largest), see Leslie Bethell, *The Abolition of the Brazilian Slave Trade: Britain, Brazil and the Slave Trade Question, 1807 – 1869* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970).

today's vast archipelago of U.S. military bases policing access to raw materials far exceeds nineteenth-century British ambitions. Britain's imperium consisted of specific, albeit numerous, colonies and clients; the American imperial vision is much more global, and yet makes fewer commitments involving any particular place. While the United States has pressed the governments of other wealthy nations (which of course share a stake in stability, especially in the Middle East) to provide postwar aid in the Balkans, Afghanistan, and Iraq, it has provided very little such aid itself and has not offered much political influence in return for aid. And though private foundations, firms, and international organizations carry out many development projects, most have a distant relationship to the United States and other governments and often prefer it that way.

We thus have some multilateral development efforts, but they are separate from what is essentially a unilateral imperialism. As long as the United States keeps political power for itself, its retreat from hands-on 'nation building' will break the link between hegemony and the promise of development that was central in most other modern empires, and accelerate the widespread loss of hope that secular nation-states can both transcend ethnoreligious identifications and promote material progress. This gives the Bush administration's current imperial vision an oddly pre-Enlightenment cast: one that offers a particularly stingy understanding of development, subverts negotiated exchanges of assistance for the acceptance of hegemony, and inadvertently encourages violent efforts to escape empire altogether.