GEIR LUNDESTAD

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1 THE NEW WORLD

THE RISE AND FALL OF GREAT POWERS

Whether we call them superpowers, Great Powers, empires or hegemons, one thing seems certain: they come and go, they rise and fall. No state has managed to remain permanently Number One; although few, if any, historical laws exist, it is most unlikely that any state will in the future be able to remain permanently on top. As we learned from our Eurocentric history books, the Roman Empire rose and fell; so did the Carolingian Empire (732–814), the Habsburg Empire, and, allegedly, three German Reichs; so did the British and the French colonial empires; and by 1991 the Soviet empire had not only collapsed, but the Soviet Union itself was dissolved into its 15 constituent parts.

In a wider geographical context, after the fall of the Roman Empire the vast Muslim expansion started with Mohammed in the 620s, and ended with the fall of Baghdad to the Mongols in 1258. The conquered territory stretched from the initial base in Saudi Arabia, to Spain in the west, and Uzbekistan in the east. The Mongols under Genghis Khan (1162–1227) and Tamerlane (1336–1405) established one of the biggest empires ever, combining ruthlessness with surprising ethnic and religious tolerance. As John Darwin has argued, Tamerlane's 'empire was the last attempt to challenge the partition of Eurasia between the states of the Far West, Islamic Middle Eurasia and Confucian East Asia.' Yet that vast empire was soon divided into several different parts. Empires in Byzantium (395–1453), and various versions in different centuries in Iran, rose and fell. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the Ottoman Empire (1299–1922) threatened even Vienna, until it started its protracted decline that ended with modern Turkey.

The Mogul Empire in India flourished for a few centuries until even its last formal remnants were abolished in 1857. China remained dominant much longer. Centuries earlier its position had been quite similar to that of the Roman Empire. The two empires were broadly comparable in terms of size and population, and for a certain period even somewhat alike in chronological terms, although the Chinese empire lasted well beyond the fall of Rome in 395.

It has been estimated that as late as 1800 China's share of world manufacturing output was still 33.3 per cent, and India's 19.7, while Europe as a whole produced

28.1 per cent. With the exception of Britain, even at this late stage production was still primarily a reflection of population. The greater the population, the greater was generally the production. As a matter of course China viewed itself as the leader of the world, as could be witnessed in Emperor Qianlong's reply to Lord Macartney in 1793 when the latter, on behalf of King George III, asked for the establishment of trade and diplomatic relations between Britain and China:

> We have never valued ingenious articles, nor do we have the slightest need for your country's manufactures. Therefore, O king, as regards your request to send someone to remain at the capital, while it is not in harmony with the regulations of the Celestial Empire we also feel very much that it is of no advantage to your country.

With the financial and industrial revolutions throughout the nineteenth century, this situation changed rapidly, so that in 1900 China's and India's percentages had been reduced to 6.2 and 1.7 per cent respectively, while Britain's share alone was 18.5 and that of the United States 23.6 (see Table 1.1).

Thus, the Eastern expansion was replaced by a huge Western wave that, to simplify matters vastly, could be said to have started in 1492 when Columbus discovered America and the *Reconquista* in Spain was completed with the fall of Granada, reversing the wave of Muslim expansion. First Spain and Portugal, then Britain and France, and even smaller European countries, established their vast colonial empires. From its small base, Britain came to control about 20–25 per cent of the world's territory and population. North and South America, Australia, much of Asia, and even more of Africa, came under European control. Colonial control appeared to last forever, but of course it did not. The United States was the first colony to establish its independence.

Europe's supremacy rested on several pillars. European powers took the lead in technology and finance. Weapons technology was certainly an important part of this. Small Western forces could defeat large non-European ones. The development of relatively effective nation states was also important. They were able to use the available resources more effectively than other units. Finally, most non-European systems of government were in various stages of decline from the sixteenth–seventeenth century onwards. This was the case in China, in India and in several parts of Africa.

In many ways Europe still dominated the world during the years between the two world wars. The European empires still ruled much of the world, with the British Empire reaching its maximum extent in the interwar years. International politics to a large extent still focused on relations between the European Great Powers. Many of the dominant issues were resolved by the leading European powers. Thus, in the summit at Munich in September 1938, Germany, Britain, France and Italy participated to decide the future of Czechoslovakia – and about war and peace, at least in Europe. In Asia, Japan had become the preeminent power.

After its intervention in the First World War, the United States had chosen to revert to 'isolationism' in security matters vis-à-vis Europe. After the revolution in 1917 that turned Russia into the Soviet Union it too had become largely an outsider in international politics. The Kremlin concentrated on building 'socialism in one country.'

Table 1.1 Relative Shares of World Manufacturing Output, 1750–1900

	1750	*1800*	*1830*	*1860*	*1880*	*1900*
(Europe as a whole)	23.2	28.1	34.2	53.2	61.3	62.0
United Kingdom	1.9	4.3	9.5	19.9	22.9	18.5
Habsburg Empire	2.9	3.2	3.2	4.2	4.4	4.7
France	4.0	4.2	5.2	7.9	7.8	6.8
German States/ Germany	2.9	3.5	3.5	4.9	8.5	13.2
Italian States/Italy	2.4	2.5	2.3	2.5	2.5	2.5
Russia	5.0	5.6	5.6	7.0	7.6	8.8
United States	0.1	0.8	2.4	7.2	14.7	23.6
Japan	3.8	3.5	2.8	2.6	2.4	2.4
Third World	73.0	67.7	60.5	36.6	20.9	11.0
China	32.8	33.3	29.8	19.7	12.5	6.2
India/Pakistan	24.5	19.7	17.6	8.6	2.8	1.7

Source: Kennedy, 1987, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*

THE WORLD IN 1945

The world that emerged after the destruction of the Second World War was rather different from this previously Euro-centric one. The United States and the Soviet Union now emerged as the two leading powers. For more than a century observers had speculated that inevitably this was bound to happen. Only the United States and Russia, it was argued, had the resources and the population required to dominate great parts of the world. So powerful were these two powers that they now dominated even Europe itself. The United States came to take overall charge in Western Europe while the Soviet Union ruled with a firmer hand in the East. Outside Europe, the Second World War led to huge changes in the colonies, particularly in Asia. With India in the lead, the colonies were to become independent, although it took time before the world understood how truly momentous these changes were to be.

The most striking new feature of the world following the Second World War was the role of the United States. Even during 'isolationism,' US influence had been great in certain geographic areas, such as Latin America and the Pacific. Economically in terms of production, trade, and investments, the United States had long been a superpower. Economic relations with other countries increased after the Second World War, but not more than the overall growth of the national product.

What was new was first and foremost the military and political role the United States would play, not only in certain parts of the world, but virtually throughout the globe. In 1938 the US defense budget totaled slightly more than one billion dollars. The United States was not a part of any military alliance and had no troops stationed outside US-controlled areas. During the first years after the war the defense budget stabilized at around 12–13 billion dollars. The Rio Treaty and NATO were established, with the

United States as the dominant member in each of them. US forces participated in the occupation of Germany, Japan, Italy, and Austria. Bases were established in many different parts of the world.

The next major development in the role of the United States evolved from 1950 onwards, primarily due to the outbreak of the Korean War. The defense budget was tripled. Numerous treaties were established with countries around the world, especially in Asia. The United States took the initiative for the establishment of the South-East Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) and was more loosely associated with the Baghdad Pact. In 1955 the United States had approximately 450 bases in 36 countries. Complementing these military commitments was its cultural influence, which was not easily quantifiable, but which was nevertheless highly significant.

The spread of US influence was due to the fact that it was the strongest country in the world. While all the other major powers had suffered heavy material losses during the war, the US economy had prospered. The gross national product increased (in 1958 prices) from 209.4 billion dollars in 1939 to 355.2 billion dollars in 1945, representing almost half of the total world production of goods and services. With 6 per cent of the world's population, the United States had 46 per cent of the world's electricity supply, 48 per cent of the radios, and 54 per cent of the telephones, and US companies controlled 59 per cent of the world's known oil reserves.

Until 1949 the United States had a monopoly on nuclear weapons, and after 1949 the country continued to have a considerable technological lead over the Soviet Union in both the military and nonmilitary spheres. The United States had the world's strongest air force and the world's leading navy. The United States and the Soviet Union each had about 12 million men under arms at the end of the Second World War.

Although US interests were not equally great in all parts of the world, and although remnants of isolationism persisted after 1945, the United States became a global power during this period. The United States had influence in more and larger parts of the world than the Soviet Union did. This influence often went deeper in the societies affected, economically and culturally as well as politically. The US expansion was thus more comprehensive than that of the Soviet Union. Several decades would pass before the Soviet Union was able to play a global role.

The power base of the Soviet Union was not comparable to that of the United States. The USSR had suffered enormous losses during the war. Its population was reduced by approximately 25 million. Whereas steel production in the United States had increased by 50 per cent during the war, Soviet steel production had been cut in half. Similar conditions existed in agriculture. In some areas they were two different worlds. The Soviet Union produced 65,000 cars a year, the United States seven million. According to extremely rough estimates, the Soviet national product in 1950 was less than one-fourth as large as that of the United States.

Nevertheless, the fact that the Soviet Union was now second-ranking among world powers represented something new. It was a superpower primarily in terms of military strength, especially the number of men under arms. After demobilization the Soviet Union had more troops than the United States, although Soviet demobilization was more extensive than was assumed at the time. Soviet strength was also ideological. The leaders in the Kremlin were convinced that history worked in their favor and that 'the contradictions among the capitalist powers' would greatly benefit the Communist

cause. In most countries in the world significant groups supported the Soviet Union and communism. Yet, whereas the United States could choose from a broad arsenal of instruments, economic and cultural as well as political and military, the Soviet Union had to depend primarily on its military and, less so, ideological strength.

Soviet expansion was geographically less comprehensive than US expansion. On the other hand, it was more firmly established in the areas which were most important for the Soviet Union. The country increased its territory considerably: the Baltic countries, Eastern Karelia and Petsamo, the eastern parts of prewar Poland and the northern part of East Prussia, Carpathian Ukraine, Bessarabia and northern Bukovina, southern Sakhalin, and the Kurile Islands.

The Soviet role in countries beyond its neighboring areas was limited. But with its size and geographical location, this still meant that several central areas of the world almost automatically became significant for the leaders in Moscow. Moscow insisted on virtually complete control over large parts of Eastern Europe. Europe was most important for the Kremlin, as it was for the White House, but the position of the Soviet Union was strengthened in Asia as well, where it was dominant in North Korea and would gain significant influence in North Vietnam.

In 1948–49 the Communists, under the leadership of Mao Tse-tung, were victorious in China, the most populous country in the world. This was a victory won with little support from Moscow. However, Mao's assertion in 1958 that 'the Chinese revolution was victorious against the wishes of Stalin,' was an exaggeration. In 1950 China and the Soviet Union entered into a 30-year alliance. The leadership of Stalin and the Soviet Union within the Communist movement was indisputable, although the first cracks appeared with the break between Stalin and the Yugoslavian leader Tito in 1948.

After 1945, world politics was characterized by the conflict between the two new superpowers. Of course, unfriendly relations between the United States and the Soviet Union were nothing new. The rapport between these two countries had not been good after 1917. Diplomatic relations were not established until 1933. Previously, however, the temperature of such relations between the United States and the Soviet Union had had little significance for the overall international climate. Both the United States and the Soviet Union were outsiders in international politics. Both countries isolated themselves, and the Soviet Union was also isolated by the other major powers.

After the Second World War, the United States and the Soviet Union faced each other directly in various parts of the world. They were the two main actors in the international arena; the geographic distance separating them was gone, but the political distance would soon be greater than it had ever been. During the first years after the war, the Cold War between these two countries and their allies, between East and West, was concentrated on Europe, where both sides had their most important interests. The front lines froze quickly here. Outside Europe major changes could still take place without the superpowers being involved to any great extent. The civil war in China was the most obvious example of this. The Soviet Union gave some support to the Communists; the United States gave more support to its side, but compared with later events the restraint of the superpowers is striking.

The war had weakened the old major powers. Much of Germany and Japan lay in ruins. Germany was divided into zones controlled by the United States, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, and France, respectively. The intention was that these four

should cooperate in governing the country until the Germans at some time in the future were capable of doing so themselves. However, the split between East and West resulted in a division into a large Western part and a smaller Eastern part. This division helped solve the traditional German problem in European politics, a problem which had been an important factor in the outbreak of both the First and Second World Wars. Germany should never again be allowed to become strong enough to dominate Europe. For some time it was accepted that Germany should remain demilitarized. But with the rapid escalation in superpower rivalry, East and West began to compete for German support. Thus even this aspect of occupation policy was subject to pressure.

In Japan the United States had things its own way, despite the formal apparatus that was established to give the other allies a certain degree of influence. The war in the East had been ended with the two atomic bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki. A new era had begun. Here, too, occupation policy was based on the premise that the occupied country should never again be given the opportunity to start a war. The United States was so firmly decided in this matter that a provision prohibiting military forces was included in the constitution. The war, and not least the two atomic bombs, had also caused fundamental changes in the attitudes of the Japanese.

In 1945 the United Kingdom was considered the third major power. Britain's contribution to the war had been considerable; no other country had so persistently fought against Hitler's Germany. Prime Minister Winston Churchill played an important role in wartime diplomacy. The United Kingdom was the head of a global empire, of the Commonwealth, as it was now called. The country also held a leading role among the other Western European countries and had the advantage of close relations with the United States.

However, in July 1945 Prime Minister Churchill was replaced by Clement Attlee, the leader of the Labour party. This change symbolized a new direction, with less emphasis on world politics and a greater focus on domestic affairs. Britain's position was clearly weakened compared to the period between the wars. A major reason for this decline was the cost of the war. War destruction totalled about £3 billion. Assets worth more than £1 billion had been sold overseas to finance the war. Revenue from investments abroad was halved. In 1945 the UK spent more than £2 billion abroad, while revenues were only £350 million. In order to rectify this imbalance, London had to ask other governments for help. In practice that meant Washington.

The United Kingdom was not the only country in Western Europe to pursue such policies. Almost without exception, they all asked the United States for support, both economic and political. In 1948–49 the European countries also exerted pressure on the United States to play a more active role in the military sphere.

Western Europe feared that the United States would return to isolationism. A new isolationism would be extremely harmful, most Europeans felt, much more so now than after the First World War. Destruction had been great in many areas. The need for economic assistance was correspondingly great. It became increasingly evident that Europe needed a counterpart to the local Soviet dominance. Only the United States could provide such a counterweight.

France had suffered a humiliating defeat in 1940. Despite the efforts of General Charles de Gaulle, the country could never regain the position it had formerly enjoyed. If Paris were to play a central role in international politics once more, it would have to

do so as a spokesman for a concordant Western Europe. But despite the foundation the war had laid for such cooperation, there were many barriers: France itself was divided in its attitudes; the role of Germany was problematic; Britain was only mildly interested when all was said and done.

In one area the old European major powers could apparently still bask in the glory of the past. They had their colonies. The war was bound to mean changes for the better for the colonial subjects. But with the exception of India, where Britain had promised independence when the war was over, the colonial powers did not have the intention of freeing their colonies – at least not in the near future. Reforms were one thing, independence something quite different. In 1942 Churchill had pronounced the memorable words, 'I have not become the King's First Minister to preside over the liquidation of the British Empire.' Many British politicians and people were willing to go further than Churchill in terms of reforms. On the other hand, the other colonial powers were even more determined to regain control over their colonies than the United Kingdom was. In fact, France and Portugal claimed that the ties were to last forever. Colonies and mother country should merge and become one.

Surprisingly quickly, however, all this was to prove an illusion. The war had destroyed the old colonial magic, both for those ruling and for those ruled. What happened in India was soon to have dramatic consequences in Africa too. How Britain responded to her colonies was bound to affect the other colonial powers as well. The Euro-centric world of previous centuries was about to disintegrate.

THE NEW WORLD: THE LITERATURE

The bibliography and recommended literature supplied at the end of the various chapters has a limited objective. In the first place, it shows what works have been most important for this book, chapter by chapter. An exhaustive list of all the literature that has been used would have been much longer than the present one. In the second place, the aim is to give the interested reader ideas for further reading. Experience has told me that if the number of titles recommended or supplied is too great, it merely tends to discourage the reader. Those who may desire further suggestions will find many more in the books mentioned in the individual chapter bibliographies.

GENERAL SURVEYS

For the most recent example of the broad sweep of history, see John Darwin, *After Tamerlane – The Global History of Empire Since 1405* (London, 2007).

For a stimulating survey of the 'short' twentieth century, see Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1914–1991* (London, 1994). Peter Calvocoressi, *World Politics Since 1945* (London, 2009) contains a wealth of information. More focused on the Cold War is P. M. H. Bell, *The World Since 1945: An International History* (London, 2001).

Among the abundance of surveys on US foreign policy after 1945, I recommend: Seyom Brown, *The Faces of Power: Constancy and Change in United States Foreign*

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Policy from Truman to Clinton (New York, 1995). For many years the standard work on Soviet foreign policy was Adam B. Ulam, *Expansion and Coexistence: Soviet Foreign Policy, 1917–73* (New York, 1974). A useful version of history from the perspective that long prevailed in Moscow is *Soviet Foreign Policy: Volume II: 1945–1980* (Moscow, 1981). We lack an updated standard work on Soviet foreign policy from 1945 until the present based on all the new material that has been made accessible in recent years. Vladislav M. Zubok, *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2007) comes the closest.

Joan Edelman Spero, *The Politics of International Economic Relations* (New York, 1981 and subsequent editions) has been most useful, as it deals with economic relations between East and West, within the West and between North and South.

Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (New York, 1987) aroused debate in the late 1980s. A response to Kennedy may be found in Joseph S. Nye, *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* (New York, 1990). My own interpretation of the US role after 1945 in a comparative perspective has been presented in *The American 'Empire' and Other Studies of U.S. Foreign Policy in a Comparative Perspective* (Oxford–Oslo, 1990). The debate on the rise and fall of Great Powers is pursued further in Geir Lundestad (ed.), *The Fall of Great Powers: Peace, Stability, and Legitimacy* (Oslo–Oxford, 1994) and in Charles S. Maier, *Among Empires: American Ascendancy and its Predecessors* (Cambridge, MA, 2006); Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, *World Out of Balance. International Relations and the Challenge of American Primacy* (Princeton, NJ, 2008); Fareed Zakaria, *The Post-American World* (London, 2008) and in my own *The Rise and Decline of the American 'Empire': Power and its Limits in Comparative Perspective* (Oxford, 2012).

Much of the statistical material in this book has been derived from the World Bank, *World Development Report* (New York, 1983 and subsequent annual editions); the US Department of Commerce, *Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1970* (Washington, DC, 1975); the annual *Statistical Abstract of the United States* (Washington, DC, 1985 and subsequent editions), and from Herbert Block, *The Planetary Product in 1980: A Creative Pause?* (Washington, DC, 1981).