

CHAPTER I

The Philippines, China, and US Global Objectives (The Conant Factor)

One of the most important [results of the Spanish–American War] is the friendly relations which have been established with England. Another is the expulsion of Spain from this hemisphere. Another is our entrance into the Pacific by the annexation of Hawaii and our securing a foothold . . . in the East [Manila] . . . Lastly, we have risen to be one of the great world powers . . . We are certainly going to have a very powerful navy.

Senator Henry Cabot Lodge (1898)¹

SETTING THE STAGE

In the several years after the military victory over Spain in April–August 1898, the US government engaged in a course of action in the Philippines directly related to broader global objectives. These global objectives, and particularly those related to China, formed the operative context of the US engagement in the Philippines.

The outcome of the Spanish–American War, including closer working relations with Britain and the projection of a sustained US military force in the Caribbean and East Asia, placed the US in a new position in world politics. It was now a nation with hemispheric *and* global interests that were not, as in the past, largely inchoate and prospective, but tangible and immediate, and, therefore, strategic and compelling, both to the other great powers, and in its own day-to-day policy planning.

The US went to war against Spain explicitly over the situation in Cuba, but its first formidable military strike was Admiral George Dewey's naval victory at Manila, on May 1, 1898, six days after the formal US declaration of war, and almost two months *before* major US combat in Cuba.² For over three centuries, since the 1560s, the Spanish Empire had connected

the New World – particularly the Caribbean and Mexico – with East Asia. The US now succeeded to the control of that connection, which along with the Spanish Empire had been withering away, and poised itself to rehabilitate and transform the connection into a vital sinew of a new global system.³ As Theodore Roosevelt stated, with the Manila victory already in hand, and as his “Rough Riders” embarked with the US armed force from Florida to Cuba: “It is a great historical expedition . . . [and] if we are allowed to succeed . . . we [will] have scored the first great triumph in what will be a world movement.”⁴

In its defeat of Spain, its military occupation of Cuba, its annexations of Puerto Rico, Guam, Hawaii, and Wake Island, its Pago Pago base at Samoa, its Midway Island possession (since 1867), its campaign of conquest and annexation in the Philippines, its now more realizable isthmian-canal intent, its growing battleship navy, and its huge, diversified, and industrializing economy, the US acquired both the reality and the prestige of world-power ranking, and particularly in Asian affairs. From London, as early as July 1898, US Ambassador, not yet secretary of state, John Hay observed to President William McKinley, “We have never in all our history had the standing in the world we have now.”⁵

The new US strategic position and rising world-power prestige played dramatically on the global stage in a wink of the historical eye, with President Theodore Roosevelt’s mediation in the ending of the Russo–Japanese War, in 1905. But in scarcely a blink, the new US position played diplomatically in Secretary of State Hay’s “Open Door” notes regarding China, in 1899–1900, which those recipient powers that since 1897 had been hardening their spheres-of-influence claims, could not now simply ignore. It played diplomatically, also, in the renegotiated US–UK (Hay–Pauncefote) treaty giving exclusive US control and fortification of a Central American isthmian canal that would connect US Atlantic and Gulf Coast ports with Far Eastern Asia by a route shorter than Britain’s connection via the Strait of Gibraltar and the Suez Canal. The new US position also played, once again militarily, with the impressive US participation in the multination intervention in China against the anti-foreign Boxers, during the late spring, summer, and fall of 1900. In due course, the powers made policy-bending adjustments to the “Open Door” notes, softening their spheres of influence, and receding from inclinations to partition and divide China among themselves, a la Africa.⁶

As a result of the new US strategic position, the “Open Door” notes, and the anti-Boxer intervention, the US, in making only a minor monetary claim in the multination Boxer-damages indemnity imposed upon

The Philippines, China, and US Global Objectives

5

China, sat at the table, with a heightened moral tone, and a stronger hand, as one of the major “Indemnity Powers” in China’s affairs. With US military power now projected along a line of Pacific bases in Hawaii, Midway, Samoa, Wake, Guam, and the Philippines, it was not lost to the notice of military and political leaders of the other great powers, and of China itself, that the initial US military expedition dispatched to Tientsin and Peking against the Boxers came directly from patrolling US warships (marines) and from infantry and artillery units engaged in the conquest of the Philippines. The latter deployment temporarily weakened US military forces in the Philippines, to the chagrin of the Army command under General Arthur MacArthur, but it demonstrated with a signal eloquence the order of priority embodied in US policy in East Asia.⁷

It may be less abstractly counterfactual than a factual historical inference to say: no Spanish–American War; no large US military presence in the Philippines; no chain of US Pacific naval bases; no “Open Door” notes of consequential impact; no significant US engagement in China’s affairs before World War I; and, feasibly, no continuing existence of a greater China.

The US interest in China, the Caribbean–Pacific connection, and the global implications, led the McKinley administration to a strategic determination to preempt another great power – in particular, Germany or Japan – from controlling the Philippines in whole or in part, directly or indirectly, which would thereby jeopardize or prevent a US base at Manila, and accordingly, to the decision (with Britain’s encouragement) to conquer and annex the entire archipelago. In taking possession of the Philippines, the US government pursued not only military-strategic, but also political-economic, objectives, and implemented social, economic, and governmental reforms in the islands, which, combined with its new world-power standing, provided both a model and a lever for US initiatives beyond the Philippines – in China, in East Asia, and thence on a global scale.

US policy makers conceived their objectives in the Philippines in the larger global framework, which combined interoceanic strategic planning with a sustained commitment to opening nonindustrial societies to, and making them essential components of, an ongoing process of worldwide modernizing development deemed vital to the industrial societies’ own continuing development. Central to this larger framework was preventing an imperialist dismemberment of China, preserving its unified national entity, and attaining a leading US participation in China’s development. In practical terms, this larger global framework meant tying China and

other nonindustrial societies into an international system of capitalist investment and trade, and initiating within these societies requisite and facilitative governmental, fiscal, legal, educational, and social reforms. It implied revolutionary transformations in “traditional” and largely non-bourgeois societies – or in recent phrasing, modern nation-building. In this sense, as well as the strategic, US policy in the Philippines was a part of the formation of US global policy, what Senator Henry Cabot Lodge indeed called “the large policy,” and what came to be regarded as the quest for an “Open Door” world, and as the substance of an “American Century.”⁸

Although the conquest and annexation of the Philippines partook of the “old colonialism,” the policies undertaken – with whatever degree or lack of success – bespoke a new imperialism, a new internationalism, of a modern industrial capitalism moving into a corporate-administered stage of development, and looking toward a post-imperialism age.⁹

THE MCKINLEY–ROOT FRAMEWORK OF DEVELOPMENT

President McKinley’s instructions of April 7, 1900 to the Philippine Commission, appointed by the president as the impending US governing body in the islands, took the form of a long letter from the president to Secretary of War Elihu Root for transmission to the commission. A War Department sub-agency, the commission was headed by McKinley’s fellow Ohio Republican, hitherto federal circuit court judge and *anti*-annexationist, William Howard Taft.¹⁰ Root actually wrote the instructions. A skeptic may tend to glide over or ignore this kind of instrument as a routine formality, or worse, as an arrogant sham, but the instructions repay some detailed attention as embodying the developmental intent and correlative objectives of the new imperialism. Like the US Constitution itself, the instructions mandated a framework of both government and economic development. But in an imperial departure from previous constitutional tradition and practice, the instructions promulgated an organic law for a numerous people not expected to form a coequal state of the union, and not permitted to exercise the usual territorial powers of self-government.¹¹

The instructions authorized the Taft commission to make “rules and orders, having the effect of law,” on specified matters with fundamental modernizing implications: “the raising of revenue by taxes, customs, duties, and imposts”; “the appropriation and expenditure of public funds”; “the establishment of an educational system”; the inauguration

The Philippines, China, and US Global Objectives

7

of an “efficient civil service”; the establishment and organization of courts of law and of municipal and provincial governments; “and all other matters of a civil nature,” including the appointment of officers at all levels.¹²

The instructions intended the commission to establish a form of government that ultimately would resemble that of the US, and thus be conducive to modern development and eventual self-government. In the distribution of powers, “following the example . . . of the United States,” the Philippine central government “shall have no direct administration except of matters of purely general concern,” and except for “such supervision and control” necessary to security and “efficient administration.” In local government, officers “are to be selected by the people.” In the selection of officers of more extended jurisdiction, Filipinos were to be preferred but, because of the “many different degrees of civilization and varieties of custom and capacity” among them, it “will be necessary to fill some offices for the present with Americans,” but eventually to be replaced by Filipinos. The instructions directed that “as soon as practicable,” a civil service system be established as the basis of a modern salaried government bureaucracy.¹³ Among the standards of proficiency, an “absolute and unconditional loyalty to the United States” was to be a prerequisite of “merit and fitness” for office. To assure loyalty, “absolute [the word again] and unhampered authority and power to remove and punish any officer deviating from that standard must at all times be retained in the hands of the central authority of the islands.” The Lincoln “One-Tenth Plan” loyalty standard, deployed in the post-Civil War US South, was to be applied and enforced with respect to officeholders in the Philippines.¹⁴

The instructions anticipated conflict between modernization and tradition, as had also been the case in North–South relations before, during, and after the Civil War, and in relations and wars with Indians from colonial times – a strong leitmotif in US history. Philippine traditions should be recognized and respected, but not to the extent of obstructing modern development. The commissioners were to “bear in mind that the government which they are establishing is designed not for our satisfaction or for the expression of our theoretical views, but for the happiness, peace, and prosperity of the people of the Philippine Islands.” Given an American idea of these terms – happiness, peace, and prosperity – although the measures adopted were to conform to the people’s “customs, their habits, and even to their prejudices,” nevertheless, they were to do so only “to the fullest extent consistent with the accomplishment of the indispensable requisites of just and effective government.” On the meaning of this, the

instructions were definitive and emphatic: the Philippine people “should be made plainly to understand, that there are certain great principles of government which have been made the basis of our government system, which we deem essential to the rule of law and the maintenance of individual freedom, and of which they have, unfortunately, been denied the experience possessed by us.” Accordingly, there were “practical rules of government which we have found to be essential to the preservation of these great principles of liberty and law,” and these rules and principles “must be established and maintained in their islands for the sake of their liberty and happiness, however much they may conflict with the customs or laws of procedure with which they are familiar.”¹⁵

The instructions expressed confidence that these rules and principles would “inevitably within a short time command universal assent” among the Philippine people. Therefore, it directed, “Upon every division and branch of the government of the Philippines . . . must be imposed these inviolable rules”: then followed a listing of rights and protections contained in the US Constitution, with the significant and explicit exception, for the duration, of the right of trial by jury and the right to bear arms (potent weapons in the Americans’ own struggle for independence). Due-process protection of life, liberty, and property headed the list. The ban on the establishment of religion and the guarantee of the right of religious freedom interdicted the previous power of the Spanish Catholic Church in the Philippines, and at the same time they were equally adverse to Islamist dictation or establishment in southern parts of the islands.¹⁶

To deepen the secularization, democratization, and modernization of the social order, and for this purpose, to reduce Catholic and Islamic control of education, the instructions directed “that the separation between state and church shall be real, entire, and absolute” (the word again), and, while “no minister of religion shall be interfered with or molested, in following his calling,” that nevertheless “no form of religion and no minister of religion shall be forced upon any community or upon any citizen of the islands.” More than this, further, and proactively, “a system of primary education” shall be established “which shall be free to all, and which shall tend to fit the people for the duties of citizenship and for the ordinary avocations of a civilized community.” Although educational instruction should be provided “in the first instance . . . in the language of the people,” nevertheless, given “the great number of languages” among “the different tribes,” it would be “especially important to the prosperity of the islands that a common medium of communication” be introduced, “and it is obviously desirable that this medium be English.”¹⁷

The Philippines, China, and US Global Objectives

9

Governor Taft explained the English-language policy as essential to US plans for Philippine development and self-government. In testimony before the Senate Committee on the Philippines, chaired by Republican Senator Henry Cabot Lodge of Massachusetts, Taft stated that “the teaching of English . . . is now being done throughout the islands” in the public school system and was integral to “our great hopes in elevating” the Philippine people. It was closely tied to the establishment of “a popular assembly” and hence to “the gradual growth of popular government,” those Filipino males learning English becoming “at once,” if adults, “entitled to vote.” Public education in English also facilitated the Filipinos’ “taking in modern ideas of popular government and individual liberty,” and it thus served modernizing development in general. As Charles A. Conant, the US special commissioner for Philippine currency and banking reform, further explained in testimony before the House Committee on Insular Affairs, the Spanish Catholic friars “refrained from teaching them [the Filipinos] Spanish, but did teach them . . . Tagalog . . . the object being, of course, largely to prevent their coming in contact with the ideas of Western civilization, because there are very few if any books in Tagalog relating to . . . political-economy and to political conceptions.” Taft summed it up in saying that with English as their “common language,” and their “reading its literature . . . [and] becoming aware of the history of the English race,” the Philippine people “will breathe in the spirit of Anglo-Saxon individualism.”¹⁸ *In lingua vince*.

Addressing modern economic development more specifically, the McKinley–Root instructions stipulated that government strongly protect property rights and nurture incentives to investment and enterprise. Taxes that “penalize or repress industry and enterprise are to be avoided.” The commission was to abide by the provision of the Treaty of Paris of December 1898, for “the protection of all rights of property,” as well as “the principle of our own Government which prohibits the taking of property without due process of law.” The “welfare of the people” was to be “a paramount consideration,” but it was to be “attained consistently with this rule of property right.” In taking lands for public use, the commission should allow both “due legal procedure” and “due compensation.” Here, however, the instructions gave the commission some wide latitude in the interests of facilitating development. Too meticulous a regard for due process might inhibit investment and enterprise. For example, the instructions authorized the commission to redistribute land from nonproductive to productive uses. The commission was to make a thorough investigation into “the titles of large tracts of land held or

claimed by individuals or by religious orders,” and into “the justice of the claims and complaints made against such landholders by the people,” and to seek “a just settlement of the controversies and redress of the wrongs which have caused strife and bloodshed in the past.” In carrying out this land reform to spur enterprise and development, the commission, while “enjoined to see that no injustice is done,” was nevertheless directed to attain “substantial right and equity,” if necessary by “disregarding technicalities so far as substantial right permits.” Delineating in further detail the overall program of economic development, the instructions directed the commission to formulate and adopt appropriate “mining laws, homestead and land laws, general transportation laws, and banking and currency laws.”¹⁹

The McKinley–Root instructions to the Philippine Commission amounted, in effect, to a “patent-office” blueprint for constructing what the Americans took to be the political-legal framework of a modern society and modern development. The essentials were all there: the protection of private property, of investment and enterprise, and of individual liberty, under a rule of law suited to capitalist market relations, the establishment of public schools, the inauguration of civil government with appropriate legislative and fiscal powers, with courts of law, and with a bureaucracy based on civil service norms, and provision for increasing Filipino participation in self-government. As Root and McKinley stated in more general terms, “The great agency to bring industrial activity and awaken enterprise and prosperity and contentment to the country of the Philippines must be, not a military government, but the same kind of individual enterprise which has built up our own country.”²⁰

Principles or ideals often described as “Wilsonian” in US foreign relations were already established policies, regarded as practical and realistic, in the time of McKinley, Hay, and Root, and continued to be so in the administrations of Theodore Roosevelt and William Howard Taft. By the time Woodrow Wilson became president in 1913, what historians and others have thought to be uniquely or newly “Wilsonian” – markets and modernizing development, universal rights, liberties, and rule of law, self-government, representative democracy, and an internationalism of open trading relations and intergovernment cooperation for development and peacekeeping – was already a “tradition” in US foreign-policy making, or an “antiquity,” as Walter Bagehot (the supreme realist and one of Wilson’s favorite political-historical thinkers) might have phrased it. In other words, Wilson and Col. Edward M. House were not originators, but practitioners, of an already established US policy framework,

The Philippines, China, and US Global Objectives

11

although at an early stage of its global application, and acting (as did prior and subsequent leaders) with a need and an opportunity for initiative, improvisation, and innovation that, in their case, went with the circumstances of historical beginnings – the US as a great world power. That need and opportunity were already in play with McKinley, Hay, Root, Roosevelt, Taft, and Philander C. Knox, but moved to a higher level and a broader national and world canvas by the time of Wilson and House, which coincided as it did with World War I. Had the Great War erupted earlier, what we think of as “Wilsonianism” could as well have presented itself as “McKinleyanism,” “Hayianism,” “Lodgianism,” “Rootianism,” “TRianism,” or “Taftianism.” Admittedly, “Wilsonianism” has the better ring.²¹

An anecdote concerning the appointment of Root as secretary of war illuminates the intent of US policy at the time. Upon Root’s learning, in the summer of 1899, that President McKinley wanted to appoint him, the New York Republican proreform leader and partner in the patrician “Wall Street” law firm of Root and Cravath demurred that he knew “nothing about war . . . [and] nothing about the army.” McKinley conveyed to Root that the president was “not looking for any one who knows anything about war or . . . about the army,” but “a lawyer to direct the government of these Spanish islands.” The War Department was to be, in effect, and indeed in fact, the new US colonial office. On that basis, Root accepted the appointment, and he made a study of leading writings on colonial governments, especially those under British law. He quipped to Attorney-General John W. Griggs that they were about to form the “new law firm of ‘Griggs and Root, legal advisers to the President, colonial business a specialty.’”²² The anecdote is well known among scholars and oft-repeated, but together with the substance of the McKinley–Root instructions to the Philippine Commission, inter alia, its significance for the theme here invites particular notice: McKinley’s appointment of Root, and also of Taft, signified his understanding, and that of US policy makers in general, of the close relationship between a capitalistic market system and the appropriate political-legal rule of law. By the same token, it signified the commitment to fostering what they regarded as a regime of modernizing political-economic development in US colonial policy.

CONANT’S APPOINTMENT

The McKinley–Root framework of government and modern development lacked, not necessarily in its principles but in its provenance, a firm

foundation in the Philippine people. While some Filipinos preferred not to be modernized at all, and some not exactly in the American meaning of the term, most of those who composed the leadership of the multifaceted nationalist movement did want modern national development. It was an essential reason for their rebellion against Spain. But many of them preferred to provide for it themselves through the establishment of national independence and their own processes of government.

Philippine resistance to annexation by the US proved a stubborn obstacle to American plans for development. It is by now a familiar matter of history that the real “Spanish–American” war in the East was not Admiral Dewey’s quick victory over the Spanish naval and land forces at Manila. It was the war of conquest waged by the US against the Philippine national movement and its declared statehood and military forces. The war is nominally dated 1899–1902, but substantial combat persisted for another decade, and recurrent armed conflict continued in ensuing years.²³ The war ravaged the economy. Agriculture suffered from land damage and disuse as well as from drought, locusts, and plague. By late 1902, about 90 percent of the islands’ carabao, the draft animal essential to rice cultivation, perished from hostilities, neglect, and disease. The bitter and often brutal conflict gutted the labor force with continuing effect, especially as a result of the US military policy of at times relocating village populations, and of high Philippine casualties, which, out of a total population of about 8–9 million, included over 200,000 killed, either directly by the war, or indirectly from war-related disease, pestilence, malnutrition, and social dislocation.²⁴

Apart from the devastating impact of the war, and compounded by it, there remained the serious impediments to development common to pre-industrial and nonbourgeois societies in general, and some that were specific to Philippine society. Lands held by the Catholic friars, for example, containing some of the best cultivable soil in the islands, would be subject to redistribution.²⁵ Roads and railways would have to be built, and telegraph and telephone lines installed, to furnish the islands’ economy with a transportation and communications system suited to modern development. New harbor facilities would have to be built. Sewage, sanitation, and waterworks awaited construction, improvement, or repair. A civil service system was to be installed. School buildings would have to be repaired, built, or acquired, teachers recruited and paid, books suited to the propagation of a modern curriculum and the English language commissioned and bought.²⁶

All these programs and projects would require financing, the success of which would depend upon the establishment of appropriate government