

Introduction

That afternoon the Observatory had hoisted the typhoon warning cone before we had even foolhardily left the jetty. The choppy waters forced the coxswain of the Marine Department launch to make a couple of dummy runs before he could put us alongside the pitching wooden ladder of the grey-hulled warship. With collection tins around our necks, my mother and I jumped. Seconds later we clambered on board to be promptly greeted by the officer of the watch on what must have appeared a quite ridiculous mission. His frigate had only just anchored in Hong Kong's outer harbour and already he and his crew were being pestered by European expatriates for contributions to local charities. Explaining that the sailors carried nothing but US dollars made no difference to my mother. I was instructed to pin the small paper flags in the lapels of the men, who, I realize now, doubtless thought that to protest overmuch might greatly impair their chances of going ashore at Wanchai pier. It was November 1950, the first autumn of what would prove to be the lengthy and costly Korean War, and my own introduction as a young boy in the Far East to both American hospitality and American power.

What follows is a survey of American foreign relations with the Asia-Pacific region from the end of the Pacific War in August 1945 to the first hundred days of the George W. Bush presidency in April 2001. It is written for undergraduates and the general reader who may be curious to learn how the United States first became involved and has long since remained at the centre of this vast area. The text is a product of lecturing at the chalkface in Tokyo, though it attempts what is the near impossibility of going beyond its author's domicile and nationality. Since I invite my students to discard their passports at the start of each term, the least I can do is attempt to follow my own advice. It may be that an outsider in both Asia and the United States stands a slightly better chance of viewing events in the round. I suspect, however, that Asian audiences may regard my views as too complimentary to the United States and American readers may see my approach as overly critical of their nation's performance.

One additional word of caution is in order: historians loot. It is their task to excavate and examine selected material in the pursuit of

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knowledge of the past. Since no one individual can hope to dig up more than a few trowels-worth of artefacts on his own, I readily plead guilty to the public exploitation of earlier studies. The text rests very largely on the exertions of others. I have incorporated their scholarship and mixed it with a sprinkling of personal findings from presidential and state papers in an attempt to straddle the gap between diplomatic history and international relations.

It is, however, hard to avoid the risk any historian faces of letting the documents dictate his story for him, and the alternative danger that the international relations specialist encounters of rushing to describe the picture in over-generalized, theoretical terms. It should also be stressed that since contemporary history is based on fragmentary and contradictory sources, most of my conclusions are tentative at best. Supposedly confident assertions on, for example, the continuities in future US policy towards Asia or what Stalin said to China in the hours before Mao Tse-tung (Mao Zedong) launched his attacks on UN forces in Korea in October 1950 deserve to be taken with a pan of salt. Given that all governments prefer to restrict access to sensitive state documents and all Asian governments are particularly unwilling to allow anything but the circulation of their version of events, there are instances where we may never know for certain. Potential readers may wish to refer to the short bibliography to see how others in various disciplines and with varying viewpoints have tackled portions of the subject on offer here. I apologize in advance for mangling their arguments and purloining their evidence without due attribution.

A second word of warning on methodology is also necessary. Throughout the book I have endeavoured to demonstrate that the United States' objectives in the Asia-Pacific region (defined simply as those parts of Asia that are adjacent to the Pacific Ocean from the Russian Maritimes to Indonesia) are hierarchical in form. The claim is that for most of the postwar era, successive American administrations have regarded political and security considerations as of the greatest importance, both during the Cold War decades and in the yet untitled years since the collapse of Communism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. It follows, therefore, that the establishment and maintenance of security alliances, particularly today in Northeast Asia, but a generation and more ago in Southeast Asia, took near automatic priority over economic, financial or cultural affairs. The result, to adapt the remarks of Edwin Reischauer, the distinguished Japanologist and ambassador to Tokyo during the 1960s, was that in both American and Asian eyes, US military commanders were seen to outrank diplomats. These officials in turn stood above expatriate businessmen, and all these gentlemen (very few women ever got a look-in) could claim seniority over the assorted academics, journalists, clerics

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and resident eccentrics at the bottom of the pile. Naturally Reischauer, who had been born in Japan of missionary parents, felt that as a Harvard professor he was deserving of greater respect, but, his complaints notwithstanding, that was the order of things.

Wars and rumours of war are central to my story. This is a tale more of high politics between major armed powers than the low politics of trade and finance and the still novel politics of cultural diplomacy and human rights. For two generations fears of Communism, either in the shape of a monolithic Sino-Soviet bloc or in its several national components, have prompted the United States to intervene repeatedly in Asian affairs. Time and again US presidents have had to remind domestic audiences that the Pacific War, the Korean War and the Vietnam War were fought to uphold American national interests and honour in the region and to underline the United States' position in the wider international system. The collapse of the Soviet Union and frequent predictions on the end of the Cold War system in the Asia-Pacific region in the 1990s have yet to radically alter such strategic premises. However, watching President Clinton, on a sweltering summer's day in Honolulu, take the salute to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of VJ Day, it was difficult not to wonder if the American era in the Pacific would endure much longer. The presence in August 1995 of regular units marching with the jubilant veterans on their last parade was designed to reassure doubters on that score. So too was the sight of units of the Pacific fleet assembled off Diamond Head and the Stealth bombers and F-16s flying in close formation across the bluest of skies. It is less certain whether the huge crowds would have been quite so impressed had they known that each of the classified Stealth bombers, shaped like back-to-back boomerangs, came with a price tag of over \$1 billion.

Six months before these extensive Honolulu ceremonies, the US Department of Defense had released the so-called Nye Report on regional security, in an attempt to answer those critics of what might be termed 'continuing commitment'. The document argued the case for US involvement in the Asia-Pacific in order to engage the People's Republic of China (PRC) from a position of greater strength, in conjunction with a renewal of the US-Japan alliance structure. Indeed, Joseph Nye would note in a brief reassessment in February 2001 that the growth of Chinese military strength means that 'China is likely to look more intimidating to its neighbours, and its enhanced capabilities will mean that any American military tasks will require greater forces and resources than is presently the case'. Provided, however, that the United States is prepared to remain in the region in strength, the author felt confident that regional changes, particularly with regard to the Korean Peninsula, could be managed and the prospect of future interdependence even welcomed.

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For all the determination of the Clinton administration to campaign under the banner of geo-economics, there is little evidence to suggest that the United States' first post-Cold War president was ever contemplating a reversal of established policies in the Asia-Pacific. Trade mattered, as it has always done, but even at the most confrontational moment of economic 'warfare' with Japan, the basic premise of US strategy in the region did not shift. Clinton's predecessor, George Bush, emphasized this reality when noting after protracted and bitter negotiations that had eventually led to the signing of a major trade agreement with Tokyo, how first and foremost the United States and Japan shared close strategic ties. Bush explained with satisfaction in April 1990 that the new arrangements would 'strengthen our security relationship and enhance the US–Japan global partnership, while simultaneously facilitating the solution of outstanding economic differences'. Remarks of this nature are deeply embedded in the current thinking of the United States towards Japan, South Korea, and other Asian nation-states. Such attitudes, it will be argued, have persisted for the past half-century.

The Cold War, indeed, proved to be the catalyst for the extraordinary economic reconstruction of first Japan and then other pro-Western states in Asia, as the United States deployed its technological and financial muscle to encourage their rapid growth. Such material assistance by Washington to promote sound economies was premised on the strategic value that Japan, South Korea and later the Southeast Asian countries held for the United States. While no one would wish to claim that the United States alone was responsible for the unanticipated hyper-growth of the region, it is doubtful if progress could have been made and then sustained without sure access to American funding and markets. The richer such Asian societies became, the closer, it was felt, would be their overall ties to the United States and the weaker the prospect of domestic turmoil or subversion. It should be noted that the Cold War and the associated 'hot' wars in Korea and Vietnam proved to be a major boost for the Japanese economy, much as Tokyo's earlier wars against China, Tsarist Russia and its actions in the First World War had played important roles in propelling Imperial Japan forward from 1894 to 1918. American procurement orders to Japanese industry in the early 1950s helped stoke the fires of growth, just as the presence of free-spending servicemen on US bases in South Korea and the Philippines would also contribute to other regional exchequers.

Sceptics, however, have long questioned both the desirability of the American presence in the Pacific and its specific priorities. Yet the historian, unlike the analyst or commentator, is obliged to accept the evidence in front of his eyes and recall the combat of the past and the high troop levels and associated host nation support of the present.

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To date, the picture remains one of military commitment and alliance cooperation that undoubtedly leaves many critics within the United States and in the region disappointed. Chalmers Johnson, for example, argues that the continuation of what he sees as expensive and short-sighted policies is unsustainable. Perhaps the only brief response is to note that numerous American politicians, generals and executives have long thought otherwise and held that the consequences of withdrawal would be too damaging to American power and prestige, both in the Asia-Pacific and the wider world. Any American attempt to quit Asia would likely produce regional confrontation and conflagration, mass migrations and widespread misery, as well as the more prosaic factors of the loss of markets and capital investment.

If the policies of the past fifty years were discarded and the region were to be left to its own devices, it is difficult to see how governments traditionally friendly to Washington could avoid moving increasingly into the orbit of the People's Republic of China. A severe power imbalance is surely unavoidable without a substantial American commitment to the Asia-Pacific that is designed to continue to reassure friends and discourage possible foes. Contemporary attention to the globalization of goods, services, peoples and information does little to alter the unpleasant realities of force in international relations, particularly as the proud sovereign state gives few indications of withering away in Asia. The internet may serve as a battering ram for the new economy, but fear of neighbouring nations is a far stronger phenomenon than dot.com cooperation and the promise of sharing overseas markets. Tensions remain high. The European Union model of creeping federalism is a non-starter – the letters USA are not about to stand for the United States of Asia. Governments continue to require the reassurance of visible foreign military support on or near their borders, while the supertankers and bulk carriers of international trade still require the hidden hand of naval power to sail unencumbered through contested and piratical waters. Attempts to move beyond the suspicions of history to the assumed salvation of Asian multilateralism have a long way to go. The possibility of the Asia-Pacific even agreeing to work in concert towards a less antagonistic series of political, military and economic measures is far from likely in the medium term. It is hard to envisage how a contemporary Asia that still relies heavily on the United States for the maintenance of its stability and economic prosperity can easily shift gears. Attention to regional or subregional cooperation is unlikely to bear fruit, unless the United States is first convinced that it too wishes to give such initiatives its blessing. To discuss security practices in the Asia-Pacific or to envisage a zone of peace and prosperity without reckoning with the probable reactions of Washington is to ignore contemporary realities.

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Hopes for the future should rest on an accurate perception of what present-day policy-makers are obliged to face, before jumping to the easy pleasures of recommending how the region ought to behave in an imaginary tomorrow of happier days.

One final caveat. Given the extended time-span and the breadth of this survey, it will be immediately obvious that events have had to be severely truncated and short paragraphs made to stand duty for what could easily serve as the basis for an entire chapter in a more specialized monograph. Yet students have to begin somewhere and I can still recall the inappropriateness of being presented as an undergraduate with a closely typed, dozen-page bibliography on the day that I signed up for a basic course in early American history. Since my knowledge of the subject was zero, I could only think that, doubtless, well-intended, transaction to be a combination of the theatre of the absurd and the theatre of cruelty. Perhaps this brief guided tour will prove slightly less intimidating and a little less painful.

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1 Postwar: Asia-Pacific, 1945–1950

After the people who have come under the domination of Japan's armed forces are liberated our task will be that of making the Pacific and eastern Asia safe – safe for the United States, safe for our Allies, safe for all peace-loving nations.

Memorandum for Secretary of State Cordell Hull, 18 April 1944

Nowhere, even in Europe, is there greater possibility of future difficulties that may involve the United States in serious friction or even in war than in the Far East.

Dr Arthur Young, American adviser to the Chinese Ministry of Finance, Washington, 2 April 1945

Our material might was exemplified by the atomic bomb; our moral might is exemplified by General MacArthur. I am confident that when the hour of decision comes, the Japanese people in the light of these exhibits will elect to become dependable members of the world that is free.

John Foster Dulles, Tokyo, 22 June 1950

The Rise of the USA in a Contested Asia

The ending was abrupt. The dark age of carnage across the Asia-Pacific region ceased suddenly with the Imperial Japanese government's belated decision to surrender unconditionally on 14 August 1945. While Allied commanders prepared for the complex business of disarming entire Japanese armies across a still vast empire, rival politicians and diplomats from victor and vanquished states alike scrambled to make plans for the new Asia. Yet the welcome prospect of peace after years of battle brought few guarantees of stability to the demoralized peoples of a devastated continent. The defeat of Japan obviously spelt the demise of the brutal titan but provided few clues to what might follow beyond the near certainty of political change and the pressing challenges of economic reconstruction. The formal surrender proceedings of 2 September underscored, however, the central power reality of the newly transformed

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Asia-Pacific region. By virtue of the American war effort against Imperial Japan, the United States was in a position immediately to influence the fate of much of the region. In a brief ceremony on borrowed British chairs under 16-inch American guns, and with Commodore Perry's ensign on display as a reminder of an earlier US encounter with Japan, General Douglas MacArthur spoke of his wish for a better world. Allied generals, crew members and journalists watched in silence from the crowded decks and turrets as the senior Japanese representatives boarded the battleship USS *Missouri* in Tokyo Bay to sign the instrument of surrender. After Foreign Minister Shigemitsu Mamoru and General Umezu Yoshijiro had committed the Japanese government and the imperial forces to its terms, the Pacific War was finally over.

In his remarks MacArthur had stated his conviction that mankind needed to transform itself or face an atomic Armageddon. Yet MacArthur's statement went unheeded, since there was little prospect of either the winners or the losers immediately considering the spiritual revolution envisaged by the newly designated Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (SCAP) in occupied Japan. (Later MacArthur would certainly alter these views and during the Korean War urged that he be permitted to deploy tactical atomic weapons. He was also most careful to censor information on the consequences of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings to prevent the Japanese public from gaining a full picture of the horrors of the attacks on their cities.) The speed with which events moved during the next few weeks left the region's leaders at the mercy of a succession of fresh developments. There had been little opportunity to think beyond the immediate horizons of ending the war and devising some approximate schemes for the future of the war-ravaged region. Inevitably, this led to improvisation and imprecision. Hasty decisions that might have been subject to greater scrutiny or even cancellation slipped easily through the bureaucratic net. Exhausted men made a series of hasty responses and obvious mistakes that were to have massive consequences. President Truman, for example, complained to his secretary of commerce Henry Wallace that faced with having to read 'a million words', he was suffering 'bad headaches every day'. Equally, senior members of the newly formed Labour government in London found themselves continuing with the same punishing schedules they had already been subjected to from their lengthy war years in the coalition cabinet.

The concluding scenes of the Pacific War followed with perfect logic from the manner in which it had long been conducted. Even before the start of hostilities, it had been widely recognized among the powers that any major anti-Japanese war in Asia would prove to be an American-dominated business. Winston Churchill and Chiang Kai-shek, for example, both rejoiced once it had become apparent immediately after the attack



The Asia-Pacific, September 1945

on the Pacific fleet’s key naval base at Pearl Harbor that the United States would commit itself whole-heartedly to the defeat of Imperial Japan. The destruction on 7 December 1941 of portions of the American fleet in Hawaii’s ‘battleship row’ by Admiral Nagumo’s carrier-launched aircraft left Britain and China in far stronger positions. Chiang declared war on the Axis powers on 10 December, stating that China too was involved in the common struggle, following Japan’s ‘dastardly and treacherous’ assaults on the Americans and British. He added for good measure on 15 December that ‘Chinese resistance and the world war against aggression have now merged into one conflict’, where ‘we find ourselves allied to

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other friendly countries in a common cause'. Churchill might express his sentiments in different style and admit privately to holding very different perceptions of China than those popular in the United States, but the Prime Minister was enormously relieved that the United States was at last committed to fighting with its friends in a world war. Germany's gratuitous declaration of war on Washington, in support of its Asian semi-ally, ensured that Britain would no longer have to struggle on alone. 'So we had won after all' was Churchill's famed remark after Pearl Harbor, but as the war progressed he would have to stomach a growing inequality in the Anglo-American relationship. For his part, President Roosevelt reckoned that whatever global strategies were to guide the Allied war effort, 'Europe first' was both his and, of course, Churchill's preference. He possessed the priceless advantage of knowing that revenge for Japan's day of infamy was indelibly stamped on the national consciousness. 'Remember Pearl Harbor' would remain a rallying cry in the troubled years ahead.

The leaders of Britain and China were fully aware that it would require the might of the United States to crush Tokyo and compel it to disgorge its newly acquired empire. Only by a huge concentration of American resources and manpower in the Pacific could the British and Chinese hope to see the deliverance of the region from Japanese imperialism. Since the Pacific War was so overwhelmingly an American war, it necessarily followed that the fate of post-surrender Japan would be largely decided by the US government. General MacArthur, for example, was appointed to his new post in Tokyo and instructed on his duties by the US government after only perfunctory discussion with British officials. MacArthur, although grandly titled as Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, was answerable in reality only to Washington. He insisted on conducting business on a very long leash with, in the first years at least, little more than the occasional nod in the direction of his nominal superiors.

Yet no American viceroy, however self-confident and secure within occupied Japan, could afford to ignore the wider changes taking place in the Asia-Pacific. The Soviet Union, much to the dismay of the Truman administration, had greatly strengthened its hand in the last days of the Pacific War. This was the direct result of Stalin's commitment to President Roosevelt that the USSR would enter the war against Imperial Japan three months after the end of the war against Nazism in Europe. It had been agreed at the Yalta conference of February 1945 that the Soviet Union would end its long-standing neutrality pact with Japan and join forces with the United States and Britain in exchange for what it had lost after the humiliations of the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–1905. The price that Stalin extracted for this arrangement was high and has