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In the Shadows of the American Century: The Rise and Decline of US Global Power (Dispatch Books)

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23 Highlight(s) | 0 Note(s)

Yellow highlight | Location: 289

As the child of a wealthy New York family, Meyer moved in elite social circles, meeting and marrying Mary Pinchot, the niece of Gifford Pinchot, founder of the US Forestry Service and a former governor of Pennsylvania. Pinchot was a breathtaking beauty who later became President Kennedy's mistress, making dozens of secret visits to the White House. When she was found shot dead along the banks of a canal in Washington in 1964, the head of CIA counterintelligence, James Jesus Angleton, another Yale alumnus, broke into her home in an unsuccessful attempt to secure her diary. Mary's sister Toni and her husband, Washington Post editor Ben Bradlee, later found the diary and gave it to Angleton for destruction by the agency.¹²

Note:

Yellow highlight | Location: 987

With the annexation of Hawaii in 1898 and the acquisition of the Panama Canal Zone in 1903, the United States suddenly had an island empire that stretched along the Tropic of Cancer nearly halfway around the globe. Washington then developed a distinctive form of imperial rule for its new colonies in the Canal Zone, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines that left a lasting imprint on governance, at home as well as abroad.

Note:

Yellow highlight | Location: 1,116

Adding a distinct, even novel dimension to US global power was a clandestine fourth tier that entailed global surveillance by the NSA

and covert operations on five continents by the CIA, manipulating elections, promoting coups, and, when needed, mobilizing surrogate armies. Indeed, more than any other attribute, it is this clandestine dimension that distinguishes US global hegemony from earlier empires.

Note:

Yellow highlight | Location: 1,165

After shifting the CIA's focus from an attempt to penetrate the Soviet bloc, which had failed badly, to controlling the emerging nations of Asia, Africa, and Latin America, which succeeded all too brilliantly, Eisenhower authorized 170 major covert operations in forty-eight nations during his eight-year term. In effect, clandestine manipulation became Washington's preferred mode of exercising old-fashioned imperial hegemony in a new world of nominally sovereign nations. In industrial societies, the agency cultivated allies with electoral cash, cultural suasion, and media manipulation, thereby building long-term alliances with the Christian Democrats in Italy, the Socialist Party in France, and above all the ruling Liberal Democratic Party in Japan, recipient of "millions of dollars in covert C.I.A. support." In the developing

Note:

Yellow highlight | Location: 1,179

According to a compilation at Carnegie Mellon University, between 1946 and 2000 the rival superpowers intervened in 117 elections, or 11 percent of all the competitive national-level contests held worldwide, via campaign cash and media disinformation. Significantly, the United States was responsible for eighty-one of these attempts (70 percent of the total)—including eight instances in Italy, five in Japan, and several in Chile and Nicaragua stiffened by CIA paramilitary action.⁹⁵

Note:

Yellow highlight | Location: 1,495

the years that followed, his regime slid into an ever-deepening state of corruption and incompetence. As a flood of \$114 billion in US development aid poured into Kabul between 2002 and 2015, a mere trickle escaped the capital's bottomless bureaucracy to reach impoverished villages in the countryside.²¹ In 2009, Transparency

International ranked Afghanistan as the world's second most corrupt nation, just one notch above Somalia.²² The August 2009 presidential elections were an apt index of the country's problematic "progress." Karzai's campaign team, dubbed "the warlord ticket," included Abdul Dostum, an Uzbek warlord who had slaughtered "several thousand" prisoners in 2001; vice presidential candidate Muhammed Fahim, a former defense minister linked to drugs and human rights abuses; Akhundzada, the former governor of Helmand Province, who was caught with nine tons of drugs in his compound in 2005; and the president's brother Ahmed Wali Karzai, reputedly the reigning drug lord of the southern city of Kandahar. "The Karzai family has opium and blood on their hands," one Western intelligence official told the New York Times during the campaign.²³

Note:

Yellow highlight | Location: 1,594

Under what the New York Times called the collective "weight of these blunders" the US occupation erupted in a violent insurgency within a year. After auditioning a succession of diffident allies, the United States finally settled on the Shia sectarian leader Nouri al-Maliki, whose eight years of corrupt, repressive maladministration (2006–14) were crowned by the disastrous ISIS offensive of June 2014. For nearly a decade, the United States had spent \$25 billion building a modern Iraqi army with the full panoply of armor, artillery, infantry, and special forces. Within a week, however, just five thousand Sunni guerrillas routed a hundred thousand of these Iraqi (largely Shia) troops, capturing billions of dollars of advanced weaponry, cities with five million people, and a full third of Iraq's sovereign territory. It would take two full years to rebuild this army sufficiently to retake many of these captured cities, and even then sectarian troops—Shia militia and Kurdish Peshmerga fighters—did much of the fighting.³⁹

Note:

Yellow highlight | Location: 1,796

In the early 1970s, President Richard Nixon declared a "war on drugs," expanding prohibition efforts beyond American borders to the Mediterranean basin and Southeast Asia—an ill-fated effort that would ultimately serve to stimulate an increase in trafficking. While heroin supply in the United States was temporarily reduced, this "stimulus of prohibition" expanded drug trafficking on five continents, largely in response to unmet demand.¹⁶ A decade later,

President Ronald Reagan redirected the drug war toward coca eradication in South America, while intensifying domestic enforcement.¹⁷ Through the unfortunate combination of narcotics suppression and covert operations in drug source regions, the global supply of illicit opium increased sevenfold from 1,200 tons at the start of the drug war in 1972 to 8,870 tons by 2007.¹⁸

Note:

Yellow highlight | Location: 1,898

Such enforcement doubled the US prison population, which rose from 370,000 in 1981 to 713,000 in 1989. Driven by Reagan-era drug laws, the number of the nation's prisoners continued to climb to 2.3 million by 2008, with over half (53 percent) of all those in federal penitentiaries sentenced for

Note:

Yellow highlight | Location: 1,900

drug offenses.⁴² Such mass incarceration led to significant disenfranchisement, starting a trend that would, by October 2016, deny the vote to 6.1 million people and nearly 8 percent of all African Americans, a liberal constituency that had voted overwhelmingly Democratic for more than half a century. In four states—Florida, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Virginia—more than 20 percent of all African Americans were disenfranchised for felony convictions. Moreover, this carceral regime concentrated its prison populations, both guards and prisoners (who were enumerated yet disenfranchised), in conservative rural districts, creating something akin to latter-day “rotten boroughs” that reliably supported the Republican Party.⁴³ By fusing covert and overt, foreign and domestic, the clandestine netherworld invested President Reagan's drug policy with an implicit synergy, strengthening his conservative political base at home while securing critical peripheries abroad.

Note:

Yellow highlight | Location: 2,014

While Washington turned away from Afghanistan to other foreign policy hot spots in Africa and the Persian Gulf, a vicious civil war broke out in a country that had already suffered 1.5 million dead, three million refugees, and a ravaged economy. During the years of devastating civil strife among the bevy of well-armed warlords the

CIA had left primed to fight for power, Afghan farmers raised the only crop that ensured instant profits: the opium poppy. Having multiplied twentyfold to 2,000 tons during the covert-war era of the 1980s, the opium harvest would double during the civil war of the 1990s.⁶⁵

Note:

Yellow highlight | Location: 2,053

Although the US air attacks did considerable physical and psychological damage, many other societies have withstood far more massive bombardments without collapsing in this fashion. In retrospect, it seems likely that its opium prohibition had economically eviscerated the Taliban, leaving its theocracy a hollow shell that shattered with the first American bombs.

Note:

Yellow highlight | Location: 2,056

To an extent not generally appreciated, Afghanistan had, for two full decades, devoted a growing share of its resources—capital, land, water, and labor—to the production of opium and heroin. By the time the Taliban banned cultivation, its agriculture had become little more than an opium monocrop. The drug trade accounted for most of its tax revenues, much of its export income, and a significant share of its employment. In this context, the Taliban's sudden opium eradication proved to be an act of economic suicide that brought an already weakened society to the brink of collapse. Indeed, a 2001 UN survey found that the ban had "resulted in a severe loss of income for an estimated 3.3 million people," 15 percent of the population, including 80,000 farmers, 480,000 itinerant laborers, and their millions of dependents.⁷⁷ A UN mission that May reported an "alarming situation in the former poppy-growing areas" marked by "hardship for many small farmers" and unemployment forcing itinerant workers to seek "refuge in major urban centres, in other countries or enlisting in the Afghan conflict."⁷⁸ As farmers had to sell cattle and trade daughters to pay their crop loans while going hungry through a long, cold winter, it became, according to the UN, "easier for Western military forces to persuade rural elites and the population to rebel against the regime."⁷⁹

Note:

Yellow highlight | Location: 2,165

Indeed, the 2013 opium crop covered a record 209,000 hectares, raising the harvest by 50 percent to 5,500 tons and holding the price per kilogram at \$172, nearly three times the record low of \$60 that had depressed production back in 2007.¹⁰³ This massive harvest generated some \$3 billion in illicit income,¹⁰⁴ of which the Taliban's tax took an estimated \$320 million—providing well over half its revenues.¹⁰⁵ The US Embassy corroborated this dismal assessment, calling the illicit income “a windfall for the insurgency, which profits from the drug trade at almost every level.”¹⁰⁶

Note:

Yellow highlight | Location: 2,398

During its pacification of the capital city, the army also created a metropolitan police force that would apply military intelligence and data management to domestic counterintelligence. When colonial rule by civil officials began in 1901, Manila's police added the most advanced American crime control technologies—a centralized phone network, the Gamewell system of police-fire alarms, incandescent electrical lighting for city streets, Bertillon's photo identification, and fingerprinting. Within just twenty years, they would amass two hundred thousand alphabetized file cards covering 70 percent of the city's population.¹⁸ The first US civil governor, William Howard Taft, oversaw the elaboration of these military intelligence methods into a modern surveillance state, creating a colonial regime that ruled by controlling information through draconian libel laws and pervasive counterintelligence. Only weeks after taking office in July 1901, Taft established the Philippine Constabulary with 325 officers, many of them Americans, and 4,700 constables, all of them Filipino. Taft assigned this new force the dual mission of counterinsurgency and colonial intelligence.

Note:

Yellow highlight | Location: 2,490

Meanwhile, General Van Deman's methods were perpetuated inside the FBI, particularly after 1940 when J. Edgar Hoover's bureau gained control of counterintelligence and used wartime conditions for illegal break-ins, wiretaps, and mail intercepts. To curtail enemy espionage, President Franklin Roosevelt authorized Hoover, in May 1940, to engage in a program of limited wiretapping that the bureau expanded into widespread surveillance. During the war, the bureau planted 6,769 wiretaps and 1,806 bugs that provided the president

with transcripts of the conversations of his domestic enemies—notably, aviator Charles Lindbergh, Senator Burton K. Wheeler, and Representative Hamilton Fish. Upon taking office in early 1945, President Harry Truman soon discovered the extraordinary extent of FBI surveillance. “We want no Gestapo or Secret Police,” Truman wrote in his diary that May. “FBI is tending in that direction. They are dabbling in sex-life scandals and plain blackmail.”³³ Yet after only a few months in office, Truman himself ordered FBI phone taps on Thomas G. Corcoran, President Roosevelt’s trusted aide whom Truman now regarded as “poison.”³⁴

Note:

Yellow highlight | Location: 3,114

In its most important contribution, the Senate report sifted through some six million pages of classified documents to rebut the CIA’s claim that torture produced all-important intelligence. All the agency’s assertions that torture stopped terrorist plots or led us to Osama bin Laden were false, and sometimes knowingly so. Instead of such spurious claims, CIA director John Brennan was finally forced to admit that any link between torture and actionable intelligence was, at best, “unknowable.”⁵³

Note:

Yellow highlight | Location: 3,606

When former CIA director Robert Gates became secretary of defense in 2007, the drone revolution accelerated. Pushing aside what he called the “flyboys with silk scarves” who then filled the Pentagon, he fought to change priorities “so from now on, the watchword is: drones, baby, drones!”³⁸ Just as Gates fought for drone procurement, so CIA director Michael Hayden, a former air force general and NSA director, won White House agreement to put ever fewer restraints on lethal drone strikes in 2008 and soon made drone targeting one of the widest career tracks inside the agency. By 2009, the air force and the CIA had deployed a drone armada of at least 195 Predators and 28 Reapers inside Afghanistan, Iraq, and Pakistan, flying thirty-four patrols daily, transmitting 16,000 hours of video every month, and firing Hellfire missiles at confirmed targets.³⁹ From 2006 to 2016, according to one source, there were 392 attacks inside Pakistan, largely by CIA drones, that killed 2,799 insurgents and 158 civilians.⁴⁰ According to another tally, 424 strikes killed up to 3,035 insurgents and 966 civilians.⁴¹ One marker of the torrid pace of

drone development was total flying time for all unmanned vehicles. Between 2004 and 2010, it rose from just 71 hours to 250,000 hours.⁴²

Note:

Yellow highlight | Location: 3,624

2011 as well, the air force and CIA had ringed the Eurasian landmass with a network of sixty bases for Reaper and Predator drones—all the way from the Sigonella naval station in Sicily⁴⁴ to the Incirlik Air Base in Turkey,⁴⁵ Djibouti on the Red Sea,⁴⁶ Qatar and Abu Dhabi on the Persian Gulf,⁴⁷ the Seychelles Islands in the Indian Ocean, Jalalabad, Khost, Kandahar, and Shindand in Afghanistan,⁴⁸ Zamboanga in the Philippines,⁴⁹ and Andersen Air Base on the island of Guam.⁵⁰ With a flying range of 1,150 miles when armed with its full payload of Hellfire missiles and GBU-30 bombs, the Reaper could now strike targets almost anywhere in Europe, Africa, or Asia. To fulfill its expanding global mission, the air force planned to have 346 Reapers in service by 2021, including eighty for the CIA.⁵¹

Note:

Yellow highlight | Location: 4,155

To capitalize such costly development plans, in October 2014 Beijing announced the establishment of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. China's leadership sees this institution as a future Eurasian alternative to the US-dominated World Bank. Despite pressure from Washington not to join, fifty-seven countries—including close American allies such as Germany, Great Britain, Australia, and South Korea—signed on, contributing \$100 billion in capital, which made the new institution half the size of the World Bank on its opening day in January 2016. Simultaneously, China began building long-term trade relations with resource-rich areas of Africa, with Australia, and with Southeast Asia. After a decade of such sustained development, in May 2017 China's president, Xi Jinping, convened an historic conference of sixty nations that make up the "world island" to proclaim Beijing's new trillion-dollar commitment to building the infrastructure—ports, pipelines, power plants, and rails—for the economic integration of Asia, Africa, and Europe. Despite reservations from India and the European Union, President Xi himself hailed it as the "project of the century" that would "add splendor to human civilization," while the Los Angeles Times headlined it as the "groundwork for a new global order."

Note:

Yellow highlight | Location: 4,334

In his second term, however, Obama unleashed a countervailing strategy, seeking to split the world island economically along its continental divide at the Ural Mountains through two trade agreements that aimed to capture nothing less than “the central global pole position” for “almost two-thirds of world GDP and nearly three-quarters of world trade.”⁵⁹ By negotiating the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), Washington hoped to redirect much of the vast trade in the Asian half of Eurasia toward North America. Simultaneously, Washington also tried to reorient the European Union’s portion of Eurasia—which still has the world’s largest single economy⁶⁰ and another 16 percent of world trade⁶¹—toward the United States through the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). Finally, in a stroke of personal diplomacy that much of the US media misconstrued as a sentimental journey, Obama was aggressive in his diplomatic courtship of Africa—that third continental component of China’s would-be world island—convening a White House summit for more than fifty of the continent’s leaders in 2014 and making a state visit to East Africa in July 2015.⁶² With its usual barbed insight, Beijing’s Global Times accurately identified the real aim of Obama’s Africa diplomacy as “off-setting China’s growing influence and recovering past U.S. leverage.”

Note:

Yellow highlight | Location: 4,357

Not surprisingly, Obama faced ferocious opposition from progressive leaders within his own party, like Senator Elizabeth Warren, who were sharply critical of the highly secretive nature of the negotiations for the pact and the way it was likely to degrade American labor and environmental laws.⁶⁵ The left-leaning Economic Policy Institute estimated that the TPP would eliminate 370,000 jobs in the industrial heartland of the upper Midwest.⁶⁶ So scathing was this critique that, in June 2015, the president needed Republican votes to win Senate approval for “fast track” authority just to complete the final round of negotiations on the treaty.⁶⁷ Obama also aggressively pursued negotiations for the TTIP with the European Union to similarly secure its \$18 trillion economy.⁶⁸ The treaty sought fuller economic integration between Europe and the United States by meshing government regulations on matters such as auto safety in ways that

might add some \$270 billion to their annual trade.⁶⁹

Note:

Yellow highlight | Location: 4,536

Through eight major air and naval bastions in Japan, the construction of a joint naval facility on Jeju Island in South Korea, and access to host-country naval bases in Australia, Singapore, and the Philippines, Washington had, by the end of Obama's second term, rebuilt its chain of military enclaves along the Asian littoral, positioning its forces to challenge China's navy in the East China and South China Seas.⁹³ To operate these installations, the Pentagon announced plans to "forward base 60 percent of our naval assets in the Pacific by 2020" along with a similar percentage of air force fighters and bombers, as well as "space and cyber capabilities."⁹⁴ As Obama himself observed in 2016, "If you look at how we've operated in the South China Sea, we have been able to mobilize most of Asia to isolate China in ways that have surprised China, frankly, and have very much served our interest in strengthening our alliances."⁹⁵

Note:
