

# American and Russian Imperialism

## American Imperialism

At the end of the 19th century, the USA tried successfully to enlarge its spheres of influence\* inside and outside the Americas. It started to play a more active role in global politics than it did before and used military force to achieve its goals. But which driving forces were responsible for such a change?

5 First, the industrial revolution\* had created challenges that required a new outlook. The production of more goods and the need for additional sources of raw materials and new markets called for Americans to begin to look further than their home country. Second, the USA had been driven by the idea of Manifest Destiny,\* the idea that the U.S. was to expand over the whole continent of North America. With the ending of the frontier\* and the completion of westward expansion, the conviction grew that the United States would have to find new outlets for its increasing population as well as its agricultural and industrial production. Other reasons to take part in the  
10 Imperialist struggle were national prestige as one of the global powers and also security concerns. The seizure of the Philippines from Spain was – at least in part – driven by an American desire to keep the islands out of Japanese hands.

To promote its new policy of expansion, the USA needed more military power, especially sea power. This was in part due to the success of Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan, founder of the Naval War College in Newport,  
15 Rhode Island. He wrote a popular book – *The Influence of Sea Power upon History* – that called for the USA to improve its strength on the basis of sea power which he thought to be a decisive force, making nations and empires great and able to stand the test of time. A strong navy required naval bases abroad where vessels could be repaired and refuelled and where supplies could be stored. Thus, advocates of a strong navy also supported the idea to acquire foreign territories with good harbours.

20 At the end of the 19th century, the USA began to expand: The Samoan Islands\* became an American colony in the Pacific, and the Hawaiian Islands\* became an American Territory in 1898. When American settlers had gained control of the sugar industry, they began to seek political power. After a constitution had been signed that favoured wealthier white settlers and disenfranchised many poorer Hawaiians, the Hawaiian Queen Liliuokalani\* wanted to strengthen the monarchy, but was deposed in January 1893. After five years, the islands  
25 were officially annexed and the islands became the Territory of Hawaii. In August 1959, Hawaii joined the Union as the 50th US state.

## The Spanish-American War

The main adversary of US expansion was Spain with its possessions in Latin America and the western Pacific, but Spain lost its colonies in America as a result of the Spanish-American War. It took place in 1898 after the mysterious sinking of the American battleship *Maine* in Havana harbour.

30 The origins of the war lay in the Cuban struggle for independence from Spain. In 1895, an anti-Spanish rebellion had broken out which initially met little support from the American mainland. U.S. business interests in Cuba were too valuable to be harmed by confusion on the island. Business investments on Cuba were estimated at 50 million dollars, and trade with Cuban ports was valued at 100 million dollars annually. The American public, however, became sympathetic to the Cuban cause after a series of newspaper articles was published about the  
35 brutality of the Spanish forces on Cuba. Sensationalist articles in newspapers by Joseph Pulitzer\* and William Randolph Hearst\* fuelled American sentiments against Spanish atrocities.

All attempts to reach an agreement with Spain were pointless. In January 1898, the U.S. battleship *Maine* was sent to Havana, Cuba to protect U.S. interests during a time of local insurrection and civil disturbances. On the night of February 15, 1898, a huge explosion destroyed the *Maine*. A navy inquiry blamed an underwater

mine for the explosion and advocates of war used the rallying cry, “Remember the Maine! To hell with Spain!” President McKinley had no interest to rush things, but in April, Congress recognized Cuban independence and finally Spain declared war on the USA.

5 Although the main issue was Cuban independence, the ten-week war was fought in both the Caribbean and the Pacific. A series of American naval and military victories followed on all fronts, but more than 5,000 American soldiers died of diseases like malaria, yellow fever, and food poisoning during and after the war, whereas only 379 died in battle. The casualties for the Spanish were even higher: More than 13,000 Spanish soldiers are estimated to have died of yellow fever alone between 1895 and 1898.

10 In December 1898, the war ended with the Treaty of Paris. Spain recognized Cuban independence and ceded Puerto Rico, the Philippines, and Guam to the United States after a payment of \$20 million to Spain.

## A Continuing Expansionist Venture

After the Spanish-American War, the United States continued to intensify its expansionism: in the Philippines, the USA fought a war against the Filipino independence movement, in China, an “open door”\* policy was supposed to support business interests, and President Theodore Roosevelt believed that a US-controlled canal across Central America was a crucial strategic interest to the US.

15 The USA continued to govern Cuba for four years after the Spanish had left the island, but even when the troops eventually left, Cuban sovereignty was limited. Cuba had to promise not to sign any treaty that limited its independence and not to contract a public debt. The US also reserved the right to intervene in Cuba and to establish a naval base at Guantánamo Bay.\*

20 Another consequence of the war with Spain was the guerrilla war in the Philippines. During the war, a Filipino independence movement had successfully fought Spanish troops, conquered large parts of the main island and drafted a democratic constitution. After the Treaty of Paris, the rebels felt betrayed and attacked the American base in Manila in February 1899. The ensuing guerrilla\* war lasted until 1902 and cost the lives of 4,000 Americans and 20,000 Filipinos. Filipino Independence was eventually gained in 1946.

Further to the west, the USA turned its attention to China. After the Opium War\* between China and Britain, the ruling Manchu\* dynasty failed to deal effectively with growing internal unrest, and when the partition of China by the European powers and Japan seemed imminent, the United States felt its commercial interests in China threatened. US Secretary of State John Hay sent notes to the major powers (France, Germany, the United Kingdom, Italy, Japan, and Russia), asking them to declare formally that they would uphold Chinese territorial and administrative integrity and would not interfere with the free use of the treaty ports within their spheres of influence in China. This “open door” policy stated that all European nations and the United States could trade with China. Hay’s Open Door notes show the American quest for an “informal empire” where Washington supported private enterprise, but played a subordinate role. At the same time, business interests of all foreign powers were threatened in China because of the Boxer Rebellion.\* After the defeat of the Boxers, the Chinese government was further weakened and Hay issued more important Open Door notes, reaffirming the principle of free and open trade as well as the USA’s determination to preserve China’s integrity.

40 US business interests were crucial in the next expansionist move – the construction of the Panama Canal. For a long time people had dreamed of eliminating the dangerous voyage around South America. In 1879, a French company secured the rights to build the canal across the Isthmus\* of Panama, then a part of Colombia. But ten years later, the canal was only half finished and the company went bankrupt. To get back some of its money, the company tried to sell the Colombian concession\* to the USA. The Colombian senate, however, rejec-

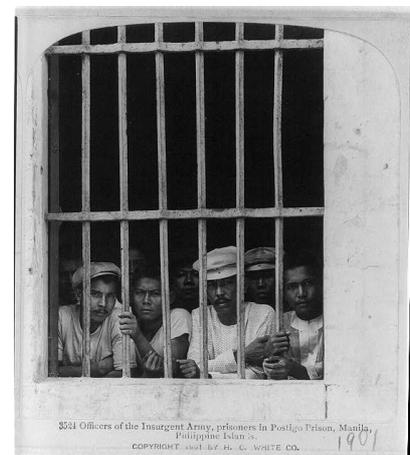


Image 1: Officers of the Insurgent Army, prisoners in Postigo Prison, Manila, Philippine Islands, [original caption], Picture taken by H.C. White Co., 1901

ted the agreement and thus outraged President Roosevelt who — together with the US Navy — then supported the revolt in Panama that led to its independence on November 3rd 1903. Only fifteen days later did John Hay sign a treaty that granted the United States perpetually\* a strip of land in return for \$10 million and an annual payment. Eight years after construction began, the first ship passed through the canal in 1914.

## **Towards a New Role**

5 The USA's foreign policy did not change after the building of the Panama Canal. President Roosevelt strongly believed that the USA had to play a more aggressive role in the world, protect its interests in Latin America, and keep the balance of power in Asia. He also favoured the idea of the USA as an international policeman.

One case of protecting US interests took place in 1904 when US President Theodore Roosevelt sought to prevent European intervention largely to protect the routes to the future Panama Canal. In his annual message to  
10 Congress, he proclaimed his famous Roosevelt Corollary\* to the Monroe Doctrine\*. The USA then obtained Dominican agreement to administer Dominican customs, the chief source of income at that time, and to manage Dominican foreign debt. To keep the balance of power in Asia, the USA sent battleships on a “training operation” to Japan in 1908, thus highlighting the growing importance of the US Navy and the will to use force if deemed necessary.

15 These examples illustrate Theodore Roosevelt's\* “Big Stick” policy. The term originated from the African proverb, “Speak softly and carry a big stick; you will go far.” It combines the idea of negotiating peacefully, while simultaneously threatening with military force. Roosevelt had used the phrase for the first time in public while he was still Vice-President shortly before the assassination of President McKinley. Although Roosevelt's policy was highly effective, it troubled the relations between the USA and Latin American countries for decades  
20 to come.

After Roosevelt's presidency, the foreign policy of his successor Taft focused more on advancing commercial interests than showing off military force. Therefore, this policy has been called “dollar diplomacy” by critics. “Dollar diplomacy” became evident in US interventions in Cuba and Central America, especially in measures undertaken by the US government to safeguard American financial interests in the region. In Nicaragua, a  
25 revolution was supported by American bankers after being encouraged by the State Department. In exchange for money, US control of the Nicaraguan national bank, the customs service, and the national railroad was secured. In China, this policy was less successful. When attempts to finance a railroad in Manchuria failed, the promotion of business interests in China was put on ice.

Not all Americans liked the new role of the United States. Among its opponents and members of the American Anti-Imperialist League were writers such as Ambrose Bierce and Mark Twain, as well as politicians like  
30 former US President Grover Cleveland and industrialist Andrew Carnegie. They all opposed the recent trends of subjugating\* other peoples as it violated the principles of human equality and self-government – the very principles the USA was founded upon. Their success was limited to almost preventing the peace treaty with Spain, and the League disbanded in 1921.

## ***Russian Imperialism***

### **To the South**

35 The Ottoman Empire\* had controlled the Balkans for a long time, but in the 19th century, it was viewed as the “sick Man of Europe.” At that time, a number of states tried to free themselves from Ottoman rule, and neighbouring Russia sought to dominate the Balkans and gain access to the Black Sea and the Mediterranean. European powers such as Austria, France, and Britain, feared Russian ambitions. But the first conflict between Russia and the Ottoman Empire was sparked by a Greek revolt against their Turkish masters. Eventually the re-

volt was supported by a British and a French fleet, and in 1828, Russia declared war on the Ottoman Empire and invaded two of its European provinces – Moldavia\* and Walachia.\* When the war ended in 1829, Russia was given a protectorate over these provinces and control over most of the eastern shore of the Black Sea and the mouth of the Danube.\*

5 The next war between Russians and Ottomans shows that the European powers' fear of Russian expansionist ambitions had grown. The Crimean War (October 1853 – February 1856) was fought between the Russian Empire and an alliance of the French Empire, the British Empire, and the Ottoman Empire. The war was part of a long-running contest between the major European powers for influence over territories of the declining Ottoman Empire and resulted in Russia's defeat. It is sometimes considered to be one of the first "modern" wars since  
10 railways and the telegraph played a role for the first time. The Crimean War had also shown that the Russian army was no match for the armies of the European powers: Russian artillery and Russian muskets were outdated, the Russian navy was antiquated compared to the French and the British navy, and it also became clear that the Russian military system which was based on the conscription\* of serfs\* was no match for free troops from Britain and France. Consequently, serfdom was abolished by the new tsar Alexander II in 1861, giving peasants the  
15 right to own property, marry as they chose, and go to court. In 1856, he reluctantly signed a peace treaty which denied Russia access to the Danube River delta and the right to keep naval forces on the Black Sea, thus weakening Russia.

The main focus of Russian foreign policy was the Balkan peninsula where rebellions by Orthodox Christians against Turkish rule had broken out. After Serbia\* had been defeated Russia joined the conflict. The Russo-  
20 Turkish War of 1877-1878 was fought in the Balkans and in the Caucasus and ended with a Russian victory. The peace treaty returned southern Bessarabia\* to Russia, thus strengthening its influence in the Balkans. This worried the European powers. As a means to reduce Russian influence, the Congress of Berlin was convened. It revised the arrangements of the treaty and dealt Russia a diplomatic defeat by giving it only a small piece of territory; Romania achieved full independence, turning over part of Bessarabia to Russia; Serbia and Montenegro finally gained complete independence, but with smaller territories; Austria-Hungary took over Bosnia and  
25 Herzegovina, whereas Britain took over Cyprus. The results of the Congress were first seen by some contemporaries as an achievement in stabilizing the Balkans, but tensions between Russia and Austria-Hungary intensified, as did the question of nationality in the Balkans.

## To the East

Russia was the only imperialist power whose Asian conquests were overland because of its geographic position.  
30 The Russian march across Asia led to the incorporation of alien cultures and societies as virtual colonies of the Russian Empire, while providing room for Russian settlers.

In the 19th century, Central Asia saw the strategic conflict between the British and the Russian Empire: Britain and Russia tried to fill the power vacuums that had been left by the declining Ottoman, Persian, and Qing Chinese empires. As far as Britain was concerned, the defeats inflicted by Russia on Persia and the Ottoman Empire in the Russo-Persian War (1826–1828) and Russo-Turkish War (1828–1829) demonstrated its ambitions and capabilities and awoke fears in Britain of an overland invasion of India. In 1839, Britain tried to prevent this by  
35 invading Afghanistan, but the First Anglo-Afghan War was a disaster for Britain. The situation remained unresolved in Central Asia for two more decades, with Britain annexing Baluchistan in 1876 and Russia Kirghizia, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan. For a while it appeared that another war would be inevitable, but, with the signing of the Anglo-Russian Entente, the two countries reached an agreement on their respective spheres of influence in the region in 1878 and on all outstanding matters in 1907. They also did this to make an effective stand against the German advance into the region. The destruction of the Russian Navy at the Battle of Port Arthur during the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–05 limited its threat to the British as well.  
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Russia also gained territory in the Far East at the expense of the Qing Chinese Empire. It acquired land from the western reaches of the Amur District\* to the Pacific coast. Russia's main port on the Pacific, Vladivostok, was founded on territory that had belonged to China, and Manchuria\* was occupied until 1905 after which Russia preserved a sphere of influence in the north under a 1907 agreement with Japan. The island of Sakhalin had  
5 been acquired and Russian control was acknowledged by Japan in return for Japanese control of the Kurile Islands.\* The only contraction of Russian territory during the reign of Alexander II occurred far to the east when Alaska was sold to the United States in 1867.

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