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Alfred W. McCoy's

*In the Shadows of the American Century:
The Rise and Decline of U.S. Global Power*

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If the authors continue to develop and explore the topics contained in this volume, significant historiographical contributions can be expected to follow. This book exemplifies a new way to explore in depth the diverse local histories of the archipelago using the rich archives that exist in the Philippines. After all, addressing “history from below” allows for not only the contextualization of an institution that fights for the dignity of poor Filipinos, but also a deeper historical analysis by those who denounce the continuity of inequalities from the colonial period to the contemporary nation-state.

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ALFRED W. MCCOY

In the Shadows of the American Century: The Rise and Decline of U.S. Global Power

Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2017. 359 pages.

There have been many general works on the study of American decline and the limits faced by America’s empire, topics that actually date back to the 1970s, with the end of the US postwar boom, the onset of the oil crisis in the Middle East, and the reality of US political and military setbacks in Southeast Asia. However, only a few scholars have studied American decline in detail. In his latest book, *In the Shadows of the American Century: The Rise and Decline of U.S. Global Power*, Alfred McCoy—professor of history at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and a prolific scholar of Philippine history, US foreign policy and covert operations, and the politics of opium trafficking—undertakes an in-depth study of America’s supposed impending fall. The book argues that America’s policy-making elites have grown insular and “missed the significance of the rapid global changes in Eurasia” (27). Complacency, according to McCoy, endangers the very instruments the US has employed to maintain global hegemony, including “diplomatic alliances, CIA intervention, military technology, trade, torture, and global surveillance” (14).

The book is divided into eight chapters. The first part, "Understanding the US Empire," covers chapters 1 to 3, where McCoy studies the development of America's empire. He first talks about how US global reach grew from the turn of the nineteenth century, as exemplified by its military bases in the Pacific and Caribbean, to the era of mobile bases, drone warfare, and militarized space in the twenty-first century (34–38, 45–56). McCoy discusses the evolving schools of thought (such as the American exceptionalist school, the revisionist Wisconsin school, the imperium, the hegemonic, and the pragmatic conservative schools) on empire and the US, concluding that "there is still surprisingly little serious study of history's most powerful empire" (44) and the geopolitics involved in maintaining superpower dominance.

To sustain its dominance, the US supported and gave massive amounts of aid to subordinate elite leaders such as Ngo Dinh Diem in South Vietnam and Hamid Karzai in Afghanistan and military regimes in countries such as Egypt, Iraq, Pakistan, Thailand, and the Arab monarchies to further US interests across Asia and Africa. For the US, the unacceptable alternatives were insubordinate elites and communist leaders (61–65). However, according to McCoy, the US's reliance on unpopular, ineffectual clients actually weakened US influence (65–79).

It also did not help US influence when the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and criminal syndicates engaged in the profitable worldwide drug trade based in Central America and Afghanistan. During the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, the CIA ended up looking the other way as the illegal drug sale was used to fund the CIA-supported mujahideen groups then fighting the Soviets in Afghanistan. After the Soviet withdrawal in 1992, the Taliban ultimately ended up winning the civil war, sustained by opium revenues that also became a source of livelihood for many Afghans (81–96). After the US involvement in Afghanistan post-9/11, ineffectual US efforts to suppress the Taliban insurgency, including its sources of income such as opium, brought about an endless cycle of American troop surges, as the US sought to shore up a weak and corrupt government largely based in Kabul and the major cities. This situation has made it difficult for the US to leave Afghanistan (96–106).

McCoy looks at instruments of US power in the second part, "US Strategies for Survival," which covers chapters 4 to 6. According to McCoy, the intelligence network regime in the Philippines provided the beginnings

of a worldwide information surveillance apparatus (109–15). In its former colony and its own territory, the US applied a computerized information-gathering system for counterinsurgency during the Vietnam War. The survey of the US surveillance regime in chapter 4 concludes with a discussion of the robotic information regime during the War on Terror, which involved “electronic surveillance, biometric identification, and unmanned aerial vehicles” (119–34).

The CIA employed many torture techniques to obtain information from suspected terrorists and enemy agents—from the use of behavioral research in the 1950s to methods of psychological torture and interrogation from the 1960s to the 1990s—leading to debates over the legality of such methods and the CIA’s impunity during the War on Terror (135–52). Chapter 5 argues that American “sovereign prerogative to torture at will in defiance of international law” undermines its claim to “moral leadership of the international community” (156–57).

Another instrument of US hegemony is military technology, which has advanced dramatically. The Vietnam War became a US training ground for the development of later “firsts” in military technologies, especially through its massive air operations. These developments began from an earlier time, but accelerated during the War on Terror with new war-related innovations such as Predator drones and geosynchronous satellites (159–78). These technological advances in military defense are designed to culminate by 2030 in a Triple Canopy defense system (182), which will integrate cutting edge “aerospace weaponry into a robotic command structure” to coordinate operations across outer “space, cyberspace, sky, sea and earth” (188).

In the last part, “Dynamics of US Decline,” which covers chapters 7 and 8, the book examines the danger of US decline. China, said to pose a formidable challenge to US control over the Eurasian heartland, has been using its cash reserves to build a massive tricontinental infrastructure system to “mobilize military forces to surgically slice through Washington’s encircling containment” (193–94). To counter China’s moves, Barack Obama, a “grand chessmaster” of geopolitics, withdrew US forces from the Middle East, sought to draw “China’s Eurasian partners back into Washington’s orbit,” and aggressively courted African nations (207, 209). McCoy argues that short-term thinking, illustrated by Obama’s moves, led to “unanticipated, even dismal outcomes over the longer term” (218). For instance, Obama failed to anticipate the worldwide nativist and populist reactions to US-led

trade partnerships; the slow US military pivot to Asia due to long-standing commitments in the Middle East; the election of China-friendly Rodrigo Duterte as Philippine president; and frictions with other allies such as South Korea, Japan, and Australia in the Asia-Pacific littoral (218–26).

These scenarios informed McCoy's forecasts of American decline. According to McCoy, the best-case scenario for the US, given its decline, is an evolving world order in which America would be one of many hegemonies. The other scenarios are dire—an economic bankruptcy, with a resultant rapid geopolitical decline for America across the world, and thus ending the American century; disastrous “micro-militarism” in the Middle East, involving a failed US military intervention and irreparably damaging America's prestige; and, worst of all, a third world war between the US and China, in which the latter's stealth, asymmetrical cyberwarfare, space warfare, and rogue supercomputing would prevail over America's defense network and military capabilities. Even climate change would force the US to retreat from the world, as America could not commit to quelling resource-based wars, economic damage, and social upheavals wrought by destructive natural disasters all over the world, including within the US. The resulting vacuum would leave China in control of Eurasia and the world. Citing the weakening of America's moral authority worldwide, McCoy concludes that Washington's inability to keep its grip on its instruments of hegemony and its complacency and short-term thinking are harbingers of the end of the American century, which he predicts would happen by 2030 (227–56).

This work contributes to contemporary political, diplomatic, and military histories oriented toward geopolitical and security forecasting. McCoy rightfully asserts that reliance on technology risks endangering US global power. The book warns of a sudden, catastrophic decline should American reliance on its instruments of power be used against it, ultimately causing its defeat through a hypothetical 2030 war against China, in which Chinese “superior cyber-capability” (249), as McCoy puts it, will overwhelm American communication satellites and render America unable to respond militarily (246–49).

The US risks losing the hearts and minds of the world's peoples due to its focus on sustaining empire through its chosen instruments. Torture, for instance, tarnishes the image and appeal of America before the Americans themselves and before global public opinion. The same is true of intrusive electronic surveillance of people's lives in the name of security. American

investments in military technology give the impression that research and development are used simply to maintain empire through fighting wars and not by cultivating the productivity of the younger generations. Covert action and American reliance on weak and corrupt leaders worldwide promote the image, especially in societies that Americans hope to win over, that Americans are insensitive and enablers of unpopular governments. All these public perceptions cast doubt on America's reputation as a unique power that believes in rights, the rule of law, democracy, self-determination, and a dynamic economy that fosters innovations, which originally made America appealing to the peoples of other nations (255–56).

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EVA MARIA MEHL

Forced Migration in the Spanish Pacific World: From Mexico to the Philippines, 1765–1811

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016. 310 pages.

The Spanish Jesuit Vicente Alemany, a keen observer of the *república* of Manila in his 1760s sequel to Francisco de Quevedo's picaresque novel *El Buscón*, portrayed all Europeans in Manila in a sarcastic but faithful way as “deserters, cabin boys, spanked [convicts], *marcados*, barbers, minions of the law, and more of this kind,” while the *americanos* were all “vulgar people from the flea market [thieves] and from prison,” the worst of whom were selected to serve in the militia and the marina (*Andanzas del Buscón don Pablos por México y Filipinas*, ed. Celsa Carmen García Valdés [Eunsa, 1998], 92–93). *Forced Migration in the Spanish Pacific World* sheds light on the lives of these people who had to cross the Pacific Ocean, mostly against their will. It follows their trajectories from rural villages in New Spain to the remotest presidios of Mindanao.

The author, Eva Maria Mehl, is associate professor at the University of North Carolina Wilmington and has specialized on colonial Mexico and the Spanish Philippines. Under her maiden name, St. Clair Segurado, she