Decolonization and the Asia-Pacific

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I

The most profound change in world politics in the fifty years since the end of the Second World War has been the dissolution of the systems of colonial rule and informal domination through which the colonial powers and their associates exerted their influence over much of Africa, Asia, Oceania and even, in certain respects, South America. For most of the world's population this great transformation has been more immediate, more lasting and more fundamental in its effects than the events that dominate the Western view of post-war international politics, above all the Cold War. Indeed, from a 'Southern' perspective, the Cold War might well be seen as merely a phase in the internal conflicts of the North: of great importance in the development of North-South relations, but essentially an episode in a larger, longer story. From the standpoint of the mid-1990s and the Cold War aftermath, this view appears more and more persuasive.

Yet historians and other writers on international relations have been curiously reluctant to recognise decolonization as a major organizing theme for the understanding of post-1945 world politics. Typically, decolonization is treated merely as a background to East-West conflict, a tedious and predictable prologue to the real business of international relations—rather as if the states that emerged from the old empires had sprung fully—formed into the

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international arena after some inexplicable delay. There are several reasons for this tendency in the literature. The first is that usually decolonization is defined very legalistically as the formal transfer of sovereignty, a definition which mistakes the symbol of change for its substance. Secondly, much of the literature on post-war world politics has been highly Amerocentric in its interests and outlook, preoccupied with Superpower rivalry and intra-West relations. It has been easy to regard most of the world as a series of regional sideshows to the great drama of East-West conflict. Thirdly, insofar as more theoretical approaches might have redirected scholarly attention, the poverty, or triviality, of international relations theory has militated against an escape from the obsessions and introspection of the main-stream literature.

This reluctance to see the real significance of decolonization is particularly marked in the case of the Pacific. It is not difficult to see why. Legalistically defined, decolonization might be regarded as largely confined to one region—Southeast Asia—while its significance in Oceania was reduced by its uncontentiousness and the small scale of the territorial units involved. Secondly, to a greater extent than in other ex-colonial regions, the international history of the post-war Pacific has been overshadowed by wars whose importance was global rather than merely regional. Thirdly, there has been a notable reluctance to see the Pacific as a coherent region with strong reciprocal influences at work. Instead it has been more usual to divide it into four separate zones: South East Asia, the ex-colonial region *par excellence*; the East Asian quadrilateral of China, Japan, Korea and Russia; Australasia; and the 'Island Pacific'—even while recognising that between the first two and the last two there were close inter-regional links.

The purpose of this paper is threefold. First, it argues that decolonization in the Pacific (embracing East Asia, Southeast Asia, Australasia and Oceania) must be treated as seriously as in Tropical Africa or South Asia. This means rejecting any prior assumption that Africa or South

Asia as colonial regions in the formal sense represent examples of 'classical decolonization' compared with which Pacific versions were less significant or fully developed. Secondly, it argues that we need to approach the Pacific as a single region if we are to grasp the extent to which political change in any of its sub-regions reacted upon the others. More to the point, by artificially dividing the Pacific some of the most important dynamic factors in the onset of decolonization are veiled or disguised. Thirdly, it argues that in tracing the complex breakup of the international colonial order, decolonization in the Pacific was not only evident at an early stage (arguably before the Second World War) but also placed a causative role in relation to the general stability of the colonial system elsewhere in the world.

II

To proceed further some definitions are required. In a recent study[1] the Pacific is defined to include North and South America as well as East Asia, Southeast Asia, Australasia and the Island Pacific. Such a geographical scope is not useful for our purposes, since the United States (and Canada) were associates of the Colonial Powers and South America was a separate semi-colonial region chiefly oriented towards the United States or the Atlantic. The Pacific is best thought of as four great inter-connecting sub-regions whose inter-action in modern times (especially since 1890) has been particularly intense. As we have suggested already, the four sub-regions are: Southeast Asia from Burma to the Philippines; Australia and New Zealand (Australasia); the vast realm of the Island Pacific; and the East Asian Quadrilateral of China, Japan, Korea and the Russian Far East — a flimsier and more vulnerable 'Australia' perched on the North Asian mainland. What linked these four zones together was in the first instance their maritime communications which made each open to the influence of the others. Since 1800 the sea routes of the Greater Pacific had been the principal medium through which extra-regional influences (from Europe and North America) had been exerted. European and American attempts to dominate the East Asian Quadrilateral (EAQ), and especially the commercial eldorado of

China, were closely connected with their activities in the Island Pacific and in Southeast Asia—seen persistently as a launching pad for the penetration and exploitation of China[2]. Colonialism in the Pacific has been predominantly maritime in character and Pacific societies have as a result been forced to a greater or lesser extent to look outward to the ocean and its seas. Finally, since c.1890, reciprocal influences between the sub-regions have been especially evident in the conflicts which have spilled out from the EAQ to embrace Southeast Asia, the Island Pacific and to threaten Australasia. The pattern of migration from China also reinforced older civilisational links that pulled Southeast Asia towards the cultural realm of East Asia. Moreover, after 1919 it was apparent that the strategic dominance of East Asia could only be achieved by control of Southeast Asia and East Asia's outer defences in the Island Pacific. As the events of 1941-45 were to prove, the Pacific of the four zones was a strategic, political and economic unit.

It is also necessary to clarify the meaning of decolonization. Conventionally, it is defined as a bilateral process in which a metropole transferred sovereignty to a colony: thus in its larger sense decolonization becomes the sum of a hundred or more such transfers. But this is very unsatisfactory. It favours the *form* of a colonial relationship over its substance, when form may disguise the reality of continued subordination. It finds no place for the technically sovereign 'semi-colonies' (of which the greatest was China) whose liberation from unequal treaties was the informal counterpart to 'independence' elsewhere. Thirdly, so restricted and legalistic a definition offers no means of relating political change to the wider regional and international conditions which exerted a powerful influence on the viability and value of colonial rule.

What is required is a definition which overcomes these drawbacks. The proposition here is that decolonization is best understood as the progressive breakdown of an international colonial 'order' which had been globalized and consolidated between c. 1880 and 1914. This colonial order was the 'envelope' within which colonial rule and informal empire was able to

function. It was characterised by a series of interlocking features. Firstly by an interdependent and mutually supportive system of territorial domination exterted through formal colonial rule and the instruments of informal control —capitulations, treaty ports, foreign advisers, consuls, cruisers and garrisons[3]. At the height of this system in c. 1914, scarcely any state in Asia between Turkey and Japan enjoyed more than nominal sovereignty. Secondly, this system rested upon the general acceptance by the world's most powerful states of the norms and conventions which sanctioned great power intervention in pursuit of national interests and which treated territorial empire as an essential attribute of great power status. Thirdly, the colonial order was characterised by the enforcement of 'open economies'[4] upon colonial and semi-colonial territories where it was not accepted voluntarily. Fourthly, it embodied an immensely powerful set of cultural assumptions in which extra-European cultures were treated as at best picturesque survivals, incapable of generating the social evolution necessary for 'moral and material progress'[5]. Finally, in many parts of the world, it was expressed as a demographic regime which favoured the permanent settlement of Europeans in positions of social mastery while also encouraging Afro-Asian migrations to supply a subordinate or semi-servile labour force without permanency or civil rights.

This international colonial order formed a *system* of domination (although a system heavily dependent upon the collaboration of the dominated). It could easily survive the constitutional 'liberation' of individual colonies; while merely conferring a bogus sovereignty—as in the case of Egypt in 1922—was often merely a technical adjustment designed to streamline imperial influence[6]. To have real meaning, and to allow us to grasp the enormity of the changes in the relations between North and South since 1945, decolonization must be defined as the breakup of the global colonial system and its replacement by a post-colonial order.

III

The globalization of the colonial order between 1880 and 1914 was only

possible because certain international prerequisites were met. Crucial was the agreement of the world's most powerful states that formalized colonial domination was legitimate and desirable. The consequence of this was that no anti-colonial ideology enjoyed great power sponsorship and no rebellion against colonial rule won the international support that was essential to success (even in Cuba and the Philippines American intervention led to the imposition of colonial or quasi-colonial overlordship). The second was the general recognition that European expansion in the 'Outer World' should be conducted according to principles of equitable compensation and through general diplomatic regulation of colonial claims whenever possible. The unauthorised activities of explorers, missionaries, businessmen and hyper-active soldiers had to be controlled to prevent the spiralling of competition in the periphery. Thirdly, all the *European* powers recognised that the delicacy of the power balance on their continent should not be lightly jeopardised by the unrestrained pursiut of marginal gains in the colonial periphery. After all, the colonial game was rarely worth the European candle.

The influence of these factors can be seen most clearly in the partition of Africa which was achieved without inter-European conflict—just. As a result, the partition was astonishingly complete: even Ethiopia was subject to a *de facto* informal division of spheres along Iranian lines. Just as important, because the colonial borders were the result of agreement and diplomatic recognition, they required minimal defence and the burden of tropical African empire in military and administrative terms was extremely light—a fact which no doubt contributed to its acceptability at home. But there are many grounds for thinking, despite the claims of Africanist historians, that Africa was not typical of the colonial order as a whole but an egregious exception.

This becomes clear if we examine the colonial order established in the Pacific in the same period. On the face of it, colonial domination was very complete, if less uniform than in colonial Africa. Australia and New Zealand were 'white men's countries'. The Island Pacific was partitioned completely. In South East Asia, the processes of colonial incorporation and 'pacification'

were largely completed by 1914 with the subjugation of Indo-China and the establishment of Dutch administrative control in the 'Outer Islands'. Thailand lingered in semi-sovereignty as an informal fiefdom of the British. But further north in the EAQ the colonial order was much flimsier. Despite unequal treaties going back to 1842, China had proved highly resistant to external discipline and its vast hinterland was largely beyond effective foreign influence[7]. Even the Russians had found their Asiatic 'Australia' a weak launching pad for domination and the Chinese had played successfully on great power divisions. But above all, the colonial powers had failed to subjugate Japan or incorporate it into their system. Already, by 1900, having quickly shaken off its own unequal treaties, Japan had shown clear expansionist tendencies and an increasing ambivalence over whether it wished to be an Asian member of the Colonial Club or wanted to drive the West out of East Asia.

Thus lack of resources and perhaps lack of will had meant that the Western drive to incorporate East Asia into the colonial world had fallen critically short of its target. In addition, two of the most powerful states active in East Asia by 1914, Japan and the United States, were not constrained by the dsiciplines of the European power balance. Russia, too, had been historically more resistant to diplomatic restraints on its imperial expansion than other European states. As a result, before 1914, at the same time as it was being consolidated elsewhere, the colonial order in the EAQ was notably fragile and uneasily dependent upon a fluid and unstable regional power balance that had already undergone a notable *bouleversement* in 1905.

The course and outcome of the First World War graphically exposed the consequences of this. Elsewhere in the colonial world the effects of the war on the stability of the colonial system were comparatively limited. In Africa, Germany's territories were repartitioned without the political order in the continent being seriously disturbed. In the Middle East, the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire were shared between the victorious colonial powers: the colonial system had absorbed a new frontier. In South Asia, post-war

turbulence had not yet shaken overall British control. But in the Pacific an already flimsy international colonial order was seriously disrupted.

Indeed, it seemed at first that the pre-war system had broken down almost completely. It had been based upon a weak but formally unified China; a Japan restrained by alliance with Britain and constrained by the presence of the other Far eastern powers: Russia, Germany, France and the United States; the general recognition of all the Powers, Japan and the united states included, that their interests — commercial, diplomatic or missionary — required the protection of the 'unequal treaties'; and mutual acknowledgement that cooperation between the Powers through the 'Diplomatic Body' in Peking (a committee of ambassadors) was the best means to counter the supposedly endemic tendency of the Chinese to play off the barbarians against each other. By 1918-19 much of this familiar landscape had been swept away. The aftermath of the revolution of 1911 and the failure of Yuan Shih-Kai to reunify China in 1916, inaugurated the warlord era and entrenched the political division between north and south China which lasted (in various forms) until 1949. At the same time, the nationalist outlook associated with Sun Yat-sen spread rapidly among students and the more westernised Chinese of the port cities and also found expression at a more popular level in labour unrest and xenophobia: a political phenomenon whose emergence was signalled in the May Fourth movement in 1919. Japan, meanwhile, had expoited the wartime opportunity to extend her influence in North China, claiming in the Twenty-One demands of 1915 what amounted to predominant influence over the Chinese government. The startling expansion of Japan's wartime economy added weight to her claims[8].

This transformation of the regional scene was aggravated by the larger shifts in world politics. At the end of the war both Russia and Germany ceased to be imperial powers, one in ideological name, the other in territorial reality. Both renounced their claims to treaty privileges in China. In the early 1920s Soviet Russia declared solidarity with the nationalist government in Canton[9]. There would be no restoration of the old Diplomatic Body, nor of

the old diplomacy which had regulated the ambitions of the six powers in pre-war East Asia. At the very least this suggested that the system of 'spheres' — the outward form of the colonial order — would have to be abandoned or drastically simplified[10]. But the most striking change of all was the growth of American influence in the region, but also globally.

Although the US was a 'treaty power' in China, its longstanding policy was the enforcement of the 'Open Door', the corollary of which was to liquidate all spheres of influence and special rights[11]. In practical terms, that meant developing the Chinese economy by international consortia — like the Financial Consortium set up in 1918 — where American economic strength would be properly reflected. It also meant the vigorous revival of the Chinese state whose commercial and political rights would have to be progressively restored as part of its internal reform. Thus both the 'old colonialism' of the British and the 'new imperialism' of the Japanese would have to be reversed in a new era of East Asian cooperation under American aegis.

Between 1919 and 1922 the US was strong enough to build the foundations of this ambitious programme. In Tokyo, where the defeat of Germany had been something of a shock, confrontation with Britain and America, both aggrieved for different reasons, appeared futile. 'The world is now controlled by two powers, Britain and the United States', noted Prime Minister Hara ruefully in May 1919[12]. This realistic mood dictated withdrawal from Siberia and the occupied ex-German sphere of Shantung; aceptance of naval limitation; and the renunciation of interventionism in China. Under the influence of foreign minister Shidehara, Japanese policy carefully avoided overt political interference in China, expressed sympathy with the recovery of her tariff and judicial autonomy and relied instead upon the diplomacy of commercial influence[13]. The British, too, found it expedient to renounce the old order whose decadence Japan had exploited so ruthlessly. Britain was prepared to 'abandon the "special interests" involved in the old spheres of influence policy', remarked a Foreign Office memorandum in August 1920[14]. It was essential to cooperate diplomatically and navally with

the US against the militarist tendency in Japan. Fear of unrestrained American competition in naval armaments, a major factor in Japanese thinking, was felt even more strongly in London: global strategy and regional weakness coincided to dictate a formal retreat from pre-war claims, rights and privileges. At the Washington Conference in 1922 the British, as principal beneficiaries of China's pre-war semi-colonial subordination, signed up to a new treaty system, guaranteeing Chinese sovereignty and expressed their sympathy for the gradual abolition of extra-territoriality.

After 1922, the British pinned their hopes on a staged transformation of the old order, designed to purchase Chinese cooperation by the progressive rectification of the unequal treaties and the surrender of territorial privileges in the treaty ports. Characteristically, they favoured not a strong centralised Chinese regime but a 'loose federation'[15] with provincial governments that would be less susceptible to immoderate nationalism and more amenable (in central and southern China) to their influence—an approach curiously similar to their reform programmme in India. By the end of 1926, however, the credibility of this policy had been exploded. Centred in Canton and super-charged by communism, Chinese nationalism in its elite and populist forms made British business interests, treaty ports, and even the colony of Hong Kong[16], its prime target.The British faced a spiral of violent local confrontation and deepening diplomatic isolation: their Washington 'partners' showed little sympathy for their plight. The result was a pragmatic volte-face. In December 1926, London decided on treaty negotiation with the Kuomintang government in Canton rather than wait indefinitely for the reunification of China, and promptly surrendered its concessions at Hankow and Kiukang. This policy of appeasement was greeted with horror and incredulity by the Old China Hands and the 'Shanghailanders'[17]. But it proved to be the false dawn of East Asia's decolonization.

In fact, the spectacular decline of the old order in China had been brought about by a radical but transient realignment in regional politics. At its heart lay a rapprochement between the US and Japan based ultimately on

financial rather than diplomatic cooperation. In the boom times of the 1920s, Japan's pursuit of economic opportunity in China was easily reconciled with the Open Door and the formal restoration of Chinese sovereignty, while the flow of American investment and the influence of the zaibatsu helped sustain liberal governments in Tokyo[18]. A broad 'anti-colonial' coalition existed between Japan, the US and the Chinese nationalists, abruptly reversing the pre-war regional balance. But between 1927 and 1932 this anti-colonial alliance fell to pieces. Chiang Kai-shek's Northern Expedition tested Japan's cooperative policy to destruction while its violent side-effects alienated American sympathies[19]. At the moment of maximum strain, the world economic depression and the savage contraction of American capitalism destroyed the domestic and financial base of Shidehara diplomacy and drove Japan towards the policy which ended in the creation of Manchukuo in 1932. Then, too, the Manchurian crisis revealed the full effects of the East Asian strategic revolution, long cloaked by the now-defunct Washington 'system'. For the *quid pro quo* of naval limitation in 1922 had been concessions to Japanese security. By acquiring the German pacific territories north of the Equator, the Japanese gained a great strategic salient in the Western Pacific and completed the three thousand mile ring of island dependencies which, except in the vicinity of Hong Kong, barred easy foreign access to the Chinese coast[20]. Since Hong Kong could not be fortified under the Washington agreements, the naval approaches to East Asia, once the high road of European influence, had become almost impregnable. After 1932 this strategic fact was the key to the steady enhancement of Japanese power.

In the 1930s, the assault on the colonial order in East Asia sharply changed its character. Now the threat to Western enclaves and privileges sprang from the revolt of Japan against Western predominance, European and American alike. The programme of treaty revision lapsed. In 1933 Japan left the League of Nations. The vestiges of the colonial order—the treaty ports, the tariff system, the international settlement in Shanghai, Hong Kong—coexisted uneasily with the growth of Japanese power in North China. They

were defended, irresolutely, by the largest Old Colonial Power now in steep strategic decline. For British cooperation with the US was blocked by mutual distrust and by America's intense diplomatic and strategic isolationism[21]. After 1932, Washington seemed resigned to Japan's East Asian predominance and curiously indifferent to the fate of its own Southeast Asian empire in the Philippines[22]. Japan's civilian politicians would have liked to send the Army back to its barracks and secure their objectives by political means in China and by diplomacy in London and Washington[23]. But the volatile military situation in China placed the Army beyond their control. With the outbreak of Sino-Japanese war in 1937, the scope of Japanese ambitions in China widened and the nature of her revolt against the West became more explicit. At the end of 1938 Tokyo proclaimed a New Order to end the 'imperialist ambitions' of the (Western) powers and replace China's 'colonial status' with the neighbourly cooperation of the East Asian states. In reality this meant that Japan would secede from the international system taking with her as much of Asia as she could carry. The demolition of the Eurocentric colonial system was to be accomplished not by diplomacy or mass nationalism but by a new partition of the world.

But demolition had to wait. The Japanese were too cautious to demolish the Old Order in East Asia until Britain, its principal guardian, had suffered the crushing strategic setbacks which followed the fall of France in 1940: the opening of vast new fronts in the Atlantic, Mediterranean and Middle East. Even then, as the Japanese government told Hitler, they preferred to wait until Britain's outright defeat[24]. At the same time, however, it became clear that imposing the New Order against Chinese resistance and American disapproval was hardly practicable without Japanese control over the resources and strongpoints of a far wider Pacific zone. Nervous of Russian military power on the Eurasian mainland (especially after the batle of Nomonhan), the Japanese made a neutrality pact with Stalin in April 1940: there would be no attack on Russia's well guarded Pacific empire. But Colonial Southeast Asia, the Island Pacific and even the White Man's countries of

Australia and new Zealand were a different story. Now the weaknesses and divisions of the Old Colonial Powers extracted their full price. Unable to contain Japanese expansion or secure American partnership in a modified system of influence, they watched impotently as Sino-Japanese war on the periphery of their interests brought revolution to the heart of the colonial world. Japan's military occupation of French Indochina in July 1941 was the starting signal for a war which brought down the colonial house of cards all across the Asia-Pacific.

IV

The amazing success of Japanese blitzkrieg in 1941-2 revealed with brutal clarity that far beyond the EAQ the globalization of colonialism after 1880 had been accomplished at the cost of ruling through brittle, flimsy and shallow-rooted colonial regimes. In South East Asia, colonial governments in Indochina, the Dutch East Indies, Malaya, Borneo and Burma collapsed or collaborated. In East Asia the old map of treaty ports, concessions, consuls and gunboats was rolled up. Amid the wreckage of their eastern empires, the prestige of the Old Colonial Powers sank to its nadir. Their warrant to rule, founded on the supposed loyalty of their colonial subjects, had been exposed as a sham. With America's entry into the war, and the war's transformation into a democratic crusade, this embarrassing blot prompted the Old Colonialists into declarations of intent, promising closer partnership with the ruled once 'liberated' from Japanese oppression. In 1943, the unequal treaties with China, now worthless, were grandly abrogated. As the dominant Allied power in the Pacific, the US brusquely warned its European associates that no return to the ancien regime would be tolerated. Roosevelt reserved particular hostility for French colonialism[25] and insisted that France's claim to sovereignty in Indochina had been extinguished by failure 'to improve the lot of the people'[26] —a criterion which would have nullified his own jurisdiction in large parts of the American South.

Indeed, the end of the Pacific War in August 1945 promised a golden scenario for the rapid and comprehensive decolonization of the Pacific region.

Vigorous independence movements, sponsored or tolerated by wartime Japanese rule, had sprung up in Burma and the Dutch East Indies. In Indochina the Japanese military coup of March 1945 had liquidated the Vichyite colonial regime, creating, unintentionally, the political space for Ho's Viet Minh nationalists. In the hiatus between Japanese surrender and Allied occupation independence governments were set up in Indonesia and Indochina. In Burma, the 'National Army' created in the occupation period, made the revival of British rule a hopeless task[27]. The US meanwhile was already committed under the Tydings-McDuffie act of 1934 to give the Philippines independence by 1946, and was equally determined to restore Thailand (where it had given up its territorial rights in 1920) to effective sovereignty[28]. Now the Wilsonian programme, aborted by depression and imperialist obstruction, could be revived under far more favourable circumstances. Japan, stripped of its overseas possessions, had been eliminated from the regional balance. The Old Colonial powers were debtors or dependents. China, a hapless victim in 1920, was a victor power, prospectively one of the 'Four Policemen' who would supervise the world's affairs alongside America, Britain and Russia. It was easy to imagine the Asia-Pacific as a great community of nation-states with a benign Sino-American condominium to uphold democracy and the Open Door.

But the difficulties mounted up even more quickly than in the inter-war years. The Old Colonial powers showed a surprisingly fierce determination to reclaim their imperial rights. They were aided by the strategic 'accident' that reconquest of Colonial Southeast Asia was pivoted on India and under Mountbatten's command. British and Indian troops, not American, occupied Indonesia and Indochina and paved the way for a colonial restoration. With the rapid growth of Soviet power and communist influence in Europe, the dangers of humiliating non-communist governments in Paris and The Hague (let alone London) by confiscating their colonies became increasingly obvious in Washington; while the value of their eastern possessions at a time of extreme economic hardship sharpened the colonial appetite

of the Europeans. This was bad enough. Worse still was the collapse of the Sino-American entente which was to have underwritten the new post-colonial order. For the nationalists of the KMT, like the European imperialists in Southeast Asia, had been a victim of Japanese military power. Their political structures had proved far more vulnerable to disruption than those of their communist rivals[29]. Within three years of VJ day, Washington faced the prospect that the new order in the Asia-Pacific would mean peasant revolution and the command economy not liberal democracy and the Open Door.

As a result, the progress of decolonization in the post-war Asia-Pacific was delayed, contested and partial. The British recovered their colonies in Malaya, Borneo and even Hong Kong. At the end of September 1945, French authority was restored in Saigon. By December 1946, after a year of shadow-boxing, there was open war between them and the Viet Minh. In Indonesia, eighteen months of abortive negotiation ended with the Dutch invasion of Sukarno's republic to impose the projected union of a federal Indies with the Dutch 'motherland'. Washington struggled to maintain some elements of its anti-colonial programme. The Philippines became independent. But only in Indonesia did American policy makers dare to enforce (by threat of economic sanctions) a colonial retreat, for only there was it likely that a nationalist successor regime would be both anti-communist and sympathetic to the Open Door which Indonesia's wealth in rubber, oil and tin made so desirable[30]. Elsewhere, the US was drawn willy nilly into propping up the colonial regimes as the best breakwaters against communism. By 1952 it was bogged down in Korea, committed to France in Indochina[31], allied to the 'White Man's' countries in Australasia and more than ever determined to keep its colonial trust territories in the Island Pacific. Washington had become the guarantor of what remained of the Colonial Order.

But it couldn't last. By the mid-1950s it was clear that the European' bid to preserve the main elements of their old colonial system in Southeast Asia had failed. The consolidation of Russian and Communist Chinese influence, and the resilience of local communist movements in Korea and

Vietnam, showed that containing communism in the Asia-Pacific would be an arduous task of indefinite duration. Faced with such a struggle, the Old Colonial Powers had to find new resources, new allies, or both. Considerations of this sort pushed the British into a bargain with non-communist politicians in Malaya which promised independence by 1957. In the French case, military defeat at Dien Bien Phu in 1954 forced a more traumatic decision to withdraw, relinquishing power to a nationalist regime in the south which had American backing. In Washington's view, new strategies of containment or accommodation were required which left no room for the tattered remnants of the Colonial Order[32]. Security pacts with South Korea, Taiwan and Japan, now under reliably conservative rule, guaranteed these successor states of Imperial Japan against external attack. The South East Asia Treaty Organisation (1954) was to be the new vehicle for cooperation between the Western Powers and the non-communist states of Southeast Asia. Ironic confirmation that European colonialism had all but abandoned its claims in the Asia-Pacific can be found in, of all places, Hong Kong. In 1953, the Foreign Office acknowledged privately that there could be no question of the colony's attaining self-government, let alone membership of the Commmonwealth. Nor indeed could there be any significant constitutional change of which Peking did not approve[33].

Decolonization in the Pacific—the demolition of the colonial order—was not an event, let alone a legal transaction. It was not a matter of treaties and tea parties. Even in East Asia, where the colonial regime had been weakest, the post-colonial future was slow to arrive. Russia's Pacific colony survived; colonial Korea was partitioned; China retreated into autarky. In common with the Middle East, the breakdown of the pre-war colonial order led to wars of colonial succession, great power intervention and partitions. In South East Asia, the old imperial orientation of Malaya, Singapore and the British Borneo territories lasted through the 1960s. In the Island Pacific, which remained securely within the Western sphere of influence there was neither pressure nor incentive to accelerate the political development of the

dependencies, most of which had made little progress towards sovereignty (let alone a real independence) before the 19704s[34]. It was only perhaps in the 1980s that the partial opening of China and the phenomenal growth of Japanese economic power (extending Japanese influence into the other sub-regions) began to herald the distinct formation of a fully post-colonial Pacific order[35].

V

Paradoxically, although after its early start the progress of decolonization in the Pacific was slow, it was nevertheless to exert a powerful, arguably decisive, destabilizing influence upon the remainder of the international colonial order. When the Sino-Japanese war of 1937-45 exploded into a Pacific war in 1941, the enormous military and economic strain already imposed on the greatest Old Colonial Power, Britain, by its campaigns in North West Europe, the Atlantic and the Mediterranean-Middle East was further hugely increased. Indian and Australian resources, which in the First World War had been available for the European and Middle Eastern theatres, had to be diverted to the Pacific. Valuable colonial territories like Malaya and Burma (a vital foodbasket) were lost for the duration. Imperial power suffered a vital assault upon one of its psychological bastions: the prestige of military superiority over non-European foes. The course of the Pacific war also greatly enhanced American influence in world politics. Though American policy in the region was not unambivalent, its refusal to endorse the general restoration of the old colonial order there was a clear signal that if the Old Colonial Powers (Britain, France, Belgium and Portugal) came under pressure elsewhere in the world, they would find it difficult to resist American pressure for drastic reform or even withdrawal.

Much more immediate, however, was the blow struck by Japan's forcible decolonization of the Pacific at the viability of the imperial systems operated by the three wealthiest colonial powers. In the late 1930s, the British had been engaged in the cautious political reconstruction of their Indian empire to turn it into a federal dominion in which India's strategic and economic contribution to their wider empire would be carefully

safeguarded[36]. There were clear signs that in this effort, the British had successfully contained the attempt of the Indian National Congress to disrupt their overall control in South Asia. The outbreak of war in 1939 was a major blow to political cooperation between British and Indians: 'Hitler has overset our Indian politics', complained the Viceroy[37]. But the British refused any major constitutional concession to inveigle the Congress into wartime political alliance—until the aftermath of Singapore and the loss of Burma plunged their Eastern Empire into crisis. The abortive Cripps Mission of 1942, while failing to secure agreement on Congress participation in government, made the crucial promise that London would allow, at the end of the war, unconditional political negotiations for independence[38]. At a stroke, British discretion over the timing of constitutional change was abandoned and the elaborate safeguards laid down in 1935 jettisoned. Worse still, the aftermath of Cripps' failure, the Quit India rebellion of August 1942, deeply embittered relations between the British and Congress, intensified communal antagonisms and exhausted a overstretched British administration. Within a few months of peace, the British admitted to themselves that they could no longer control the sub-continent[39]. All prospect of using a united India in a reinvigorated post-war imperial system vanished like smoke in 1947. Without India, the British imperial system, hitherto a powerful twin-engined craft, was condemned to limp along on a single engine badly in need of repair.

Similar arguments could be advanced for The Netherlands and France. Both were able to re-establish their rule in the aftermath of Japanese defeat. But the interval during which their rule had lapsed was critical in deepening colonial resistance to returning imperialists. In the Dutch case, American hostility to their revival of colonial rule was the final blow. With elimination (almost) of their colonial possessions by 1950, the Dutch left the Colonial Club. The French case was more complex. Here, eventually, American aid was forthcoming once nationalist opposition was redefined as communism in Washington. But military defeat in 1954 and French withdrawal from South East Asia was a disastrous setback to the Fourth Republic's strategy of

recovering great power status through a modified form of world empire, and undermined the political viability in the metropole of maintaining colonial rule elsewhere.

The great challenge which had faced the Old Colonial Powers after 1945 was how to revive and modernize their colonial systems and the larger international colonial order in which they had to function. For this herculean task, they needed the maximum international stability and in particular the backing of the United States. But the 'premature' decolonization in the Pacific engineered by the Japanese ensured that they would have neither. The collapse of empires under Japan's onslaught opened up instead a vast new arena where by the later 1940s an intense competition for influence, heavily ideological in character, had begun. The Old Colonial Powers had neither the resources nor the right ideological equipment to confront this challenge. As a result, much the richest colonial region slipped from their grasp: the destruction of colonialism elsewhere was only a matter of time. Not for the last time, where the Pacific led, the rest of the world was forced to follow.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

* This is a revised and expanded version of a paper first presented in Montreal in August 1995. I have been greatly helped by the comments and advice of participants at the Global History seminar at Osaka in September 1997.

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8. See N.Golovin, *The Problem of the Pacific in the twentieth century* (London, 1922), ch. 2, for a contemporary assessment. I am most grateful to Prof T.Matsuda for discussing this and related points with me.
9. See *Cambridge History of China*, Vol. XII, Part 1, ed. J.K.Fairbank (Cambridge, 1978), p.537.
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(付記)

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