

In 1899, McKinley disingenuously told Methodist church leaders how he had appealed for divine guidance about the future of the Philippines:

I walked the floor of the White House night after night until midnight; and I am not ashamed to tell you, gentlemen, that I went down on my knees and prayed to Almighty God for light and guidance. And one night it came to me in this way . . . that we could not give the islands back to Spain—that would be cowardly and dishonourable. That we could not turn them over to France or Germany, our commercial rivals in the Orient—that would be bad business and discreditable. . . . That there was nothing left to do but take them all, and educate the Filipinos, and uplift and civilize them, and by God's grace do the very best by them as our fellow-men for whom Christ also died. And then I went to bed, and went to sleep and slept soundly.²⁰

American missionaries were soon to be disconcerted by the discovery that the Filipinos were Christians already, having been forcibly converted to Catholicism by Spain. Worse still there remained in the south of the Philippines a sizable Moslem population whose determination to resist conversion was by no means weakened by the ousting of the Spaniards. Even in post-colonial times, a powerful separatist movement among the Moros on the southern island of Mindanao continues to trouble the Filipino democracy.

When McKinley took the presidential oath in early 1897, a revolution was in progress on the island of Cuba, barely a hundred kilometres from the US coast. Popular support for the rebel cause among Americans, who saw Spain as a weak colonial power from which they had already taken vast territories on the mainland, failed to persuade the new president to officially recognise the rebels. He preferred to hold Madrid fully responsible for protecting US lives and property, while behind the scenes pushing for enough Cuban autonomy to stop the rebels fighting. Spain refused point blank. It saw no reason to liquidate what little was left of a once-mighty empire that had spread right round the globe.

The Spanish choice of Valeriano Weyler y Nicolau, a tough professional soldier, as the commander-in-chief was a mistake, however.



A British attack on Borneo pirates, a policy endorsed by the Americans

rice sold worldwide in 1914, mainland Southeast Asia supplied 90 per cent, of which 60 per cent came from Burma.

The American Colony of the Philippines

Perhaps the oddest Western colonial venture in Asia was the American occupation of the Philippines. Just as Britain had not acquired an empire there by accident, but through intense competition with France, so the United States could not reasonably claim that its annexation of the Philippines occurred in a fit of absentmindedness. Although it suited President William McKinley to portray the event as an unforeseen result of American intervention in the Spanish Caribbean, the truth is that he had already decided to advance his country's position in the Pacific by means of the acquisition of key islands.

He tried to break the back of the revolution by rounding up thousands of Cubans and placing them in barbed-wire concentration camps. Implementing the policy effectively was beyond the means of the Spanish military, and inadequate housing, food and sanitation carried off some 100,000 internees. Nicknamed "the Butcher" in American papers, Weyler ignored the bad publicity and pressed on with a brutal campaign. Reinforcements from Spain seemed to give him the upper hand over the rebels, who were compelled to operate in small guerrilla bands, but as the Liberal Party leader, Práxedo Mateo Sagasta, observed in Madrid: "After having sent 200,000 men and having spilt so much blood, we are masters in the island only of the land upon which our soldiers stand."²¹ Such trenchant criticism ought to have brought about a change in policy: instead the Spanish government hoped for a military solution to the Cuban conflict until it was too late to influence events. An eventual offer of home rule was seen by the rebels as a means of undermining their will to fight, while loyalists regarded the concession as proof of Spain's inability to win the war.

With Weyler relieved of his command and efforts being made to treat with the rebels, loyalists were joined by soldiers in riots at Havana in early 1898. There was even talk in Spain of Weyler staging a military coup against the new Liberal government of Sagasta, the advocate of Cuban autonomy. McKinley did nothing except move a warship, the *Maine*, into Havana harbour to protect US interests. When on 15 February an explosion sank the *Maine* and killed more than 200 sailors, the United States concluded that a bomb had been placed on board by saboteurs. More likely it was an explosion in the engine room, but the sinking of the warship through an unfortunate accident was not something an agitated American public then chose to consider possible. Because he remained convinced that the United States was unready for war, McKinley was content to wait two months before its declaration. Another reason for the delay was worry about the foreign entanglements that might follow after defeating Spain.

One casualty might well be the traditional US open-door policy towards a tottering Chinese empire, because Japan's easy victory over China in Korea during 1894-95 had unleashed fresh demands for territorial concessions. Though Japan was stopped from occupying the strategically important Liaodong peninsula, Russia took its place and constructed naval facilities at Port Arthur, while in 1897 Germany

seized Qingdao in nearby Shandong province. At pains to reassure the Germans that a new British base at Weihaiwei, on Shandong's northern coastline, was intended to counter Russia rather than Germany, the lease gained in 1898 greatly strengthened Britain's position in north China. The Royal Navy used the unfortified port until the British government gave up the lease in 1930. Thwarted on the mainland, the Japanese added to their empire Taiwan and the islands of the Pescadores, which lie between Taiwan and the Chinese coast.

Aware of the threat to stability posed by Japanese aggression, McKinley thought he had found a solution to American weakness in Asia with the acquisition of the Philippines. There Spain was facing a parallel uprising to that in Cuba. Commodore George Dewey was ordered by Washington to prepare his squadron, anchored off Hong Kong, for an attack on Manila. Once hostilities between the United States and Spain commenced in Cuba, Dewey steamed south and, passing Subic Bay en route for Manila, commented on its suitability as a future US naval base. Had the Spaniards bothered to prepare its natural defences against assault, the Americans would have not won so easily. As it was, the Spanish admiral responsible for Manila's defence could not make use of Subic Bay: no heavy guns had been mounted and only five mines were positioned to protect the harbour. He was obliged to keep his ships close to Manila, where they were placed in a defensive position ready for the American attack.

Dewey's fixed intention was to do battle with the Spanish fleet on arrival, despite the dangers from guns and mines at the entrance to Manila Bay. At night, five American cruisers and a gunboat successfully entered the bay in single file and at dawn opened fire on the Spanish fleet, which surrendered just after noon. On hearing the news of the great victory, McKinley promoted Dewey to admiral, while Congress presented him with a jewelled sword designed by Tiffany's.

Less concerned about the loss of Cuba than the Philippines, Spain despatched in mid-June a squadron consisting of two battleships, two cruisers, three destroyers and two troopships carrying 4,000 soldiers, along with four colliers. No ships or reinforcements were sent to the Caribbean. To avoid early contact with US warships, the Spanish squadron headed for Manila via the Suez Canal. Dewey was therefore faced with a repeat of his own attack unless he moved his ships elsewhere. In the event he did not need to redeploy

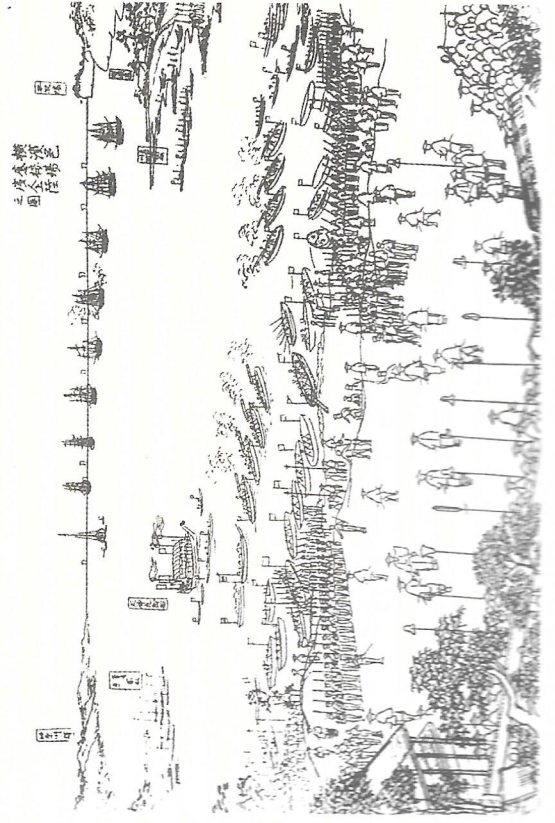
because utter defeat in Cuba persuaded Spain to negotiate an end to the war. An American expeditionary force under the command of Wesley Merritt, a Civil War veteran like McKinley, had already landed to join forces with Dewey and capture Manila. The president instructed Merritt to establish in place of Spanish colonial rule an American military government, since McKinley realised that he would have to control all the Philippines if Manila was to become a permanent American base.

Adroit handling of the Senate and Congress allowed McKinley to consolidate American influence in the Asian Pacific. He annexed Guam, the chief island of the Spanish Ladrões, the present-day Marianas. Guam was in fact the first American conquest of the Spanish-American War. Its governor had mistaken three shots fired by an American warship as a naval salute, apologising for not returning the courtesy because he lacked any cannon. No news of hostilities had reached the island's tiny Spanish garrison. Another McKinley acquisition in 1898 was Hawaii, whose mid-Pacific location provided a vital base for American warships heading towards the Philippines. He was spurred into action by Japanese interest, whose imperial government envisaged some kind of union between Hawaii and Japan. The idea anticipates the aim of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere 60 years later, when its imperialist propaganda called for Hawaii's reunion with Asia.

Notwithstanding the development of naval facilities at Pearl Harbor, the greatest asset to the United States, as Dewey foresaw, was Subic Bay, still a key naval base today. It gave McKinley a lodgement in Asia from which he could conveniently use force to maintain the cherished open-door policy. He must have been gratified to read in the *Presbyterian Banner* how the United States had been "morally compelled to become an Asiatic power. . . America and Great Britain will see to it that China is not Russianized".²² After the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–05 though, it was much less certain that Washington could keep Japanese encroachment on the Chinese mainland in check. As the radical critic of Tokyo's drive for empire Kotoku Shusui realised, American intervention would only serve to strengthen Japanese determination to guard their own interests. For Japan looked upon the American colony of the Philippines with a mixture of fascination and frustration. How could the first people to escape from the

clutches of European colonialism presume to restrain other imperial powers while becoming imperialists themselves?

In 1901, Kotoku Shusui wrote *Imperialism, the Monster of the Twentieth Century* to highlight the evil of colonial expansion. His standards were part Confucian, as he quoted the Chinese philosopher as saying the people should be made comfortable before teaching them. The imperial government, he insisted, was using imagined foreign glory to distract the Japanese people from their domestic ills. And he was deeply depressed by the fashion of imperialism spreading to the United States. Frightened by the first large-scale strike in Japan, a decade later the imperial government hanged Kotoku Shusui and eleven others for conspiring to assassinate the emperor. The trumped-up charge was intended as a warning to social reformers, whose writings were thereafter subject to official scrutiny before publication: intellectual freedom was an early casualty of Japan's drive for an overseas empire. Although Kotoku Shusui was right in anticipating that a conflict between the United States and Japan would have to precede the emergence of his own country as a major economic power, he failed to envisage how this industrial



A Japanese view of the Perry's arrival at Yokohama in 1853. US interests in the Pacific made the Philippines an inevitable colonial acquisition

transformation might occur in post-colonial Asia. In 1901 he had pointedly asked the question: "If the United States truly fought for freedom and independence in Cuba, why does it try to deny the freedom and independence of the Philippines?"

It was something the Filipino rebels pondered as soon as American intentions became clear. The rebel leader Emilio Aguinaldo had originally welcomed the US force that defeated Spain, but McKinley paid little attention to Aguinaldo until he declared a Philippine republic in January 1899. The fighting that began the next month continued for three years because, realising that conventional tactics would fail against the United States, Aguinaldo ordered his army to dissolve into guerrilla bands and to take to the countryside. At first, Washington believed its forces could subdue the rebels without difficulty. As in a number of wars fought in Asia during the twentieth century, and most notably in Vietnam, this assumption proved to be completely wrong. Thousands of US soldiers struggled to contain Aguinaldo's guerrillas and, in despair, a policy of concentration was adopted along the lines of "the Butcher" Weyler. The use of concentration camps inflamed anti-imperialist opinion in the United States, where a Baltimore journal could not decide whether it was more ironic or tragic that "we have actually come to do the thing we went to war to banish".²³

Not even the Gatling gun, whose hand-cranked multibarrel had just dealt such destruction to equally barefoot opponents during the American Indian campaigns, could overcome the hit-and-run tactics of the Filipino insurgents. The final advance in gun manufacture in the colonial era, the machine gun allowed an infantryman to fire from a concealed position, in any weather, 15 rounds of ammunition in as many seconds at targets a kilometre away. The Maxim gun, which superseded the Gatling, was light enough to be carried by hand: its lethal discharge was to change warfare forever after 1914, when Western nations chose to turn the weapon against each other.

That American military technology was totally inadequate for the task of conquering the Philippines finally dawned on Washington. Treating the Filipinos like "Red Indians" was bound to increase the savagery of the conflict, a racial dimension not lost on Arthur MacArthur, the father of the Second World War general

Douglas MacArthur. Appointed military commander in 1900, the older MacArthur rapidly came to the view that only devolution of power to a civil government would quell the insurrection. Cultivating wealthy landowners, who stood to gain from cooperation with the Americans, he managed to isolate the rebels from mainstream Filipino politics. The capture of Aguinaldo by means of a ruse was an absolute godsend. At Manila in 1901, the rebel leader swore an oath accepting the authority of the United States over the Philippines and pledging his allegiance to the American government. Even though his call for an end to hostilities was not heeded by all his followers, the rebellion was beaten and the Philippines became the US equivalent of Hong Kong.

An aggrieved Aguinaldo had to await the coming of the Japanese for his revenge, yet independence within the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere was not the exciting prospect of freedom for which Filipinos had fought Spain as well as the United States. An American campaign to end the embarrassment of colonial rule had already succeeded in getting Congress to pass the Philippines Independence Act, which prescribed a preparatory period during which the colony was to be a semi-autonomous commonwealth under a government of Filipinos. The date for independence was actually scheduled for 4 July 1946. The contrast between the resistance shown to the Japanese in the Philippines and the Dutch East Indies was noted by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, who at once began to consider new political arrangements for a post-war settlement. With the active support of a Labour government in Britain, they were to bring down the final curtain on Western colonial power in Asia.

The Russo-Japanese War

The first serious challenge to Western supremacy in Asia came with the Japanese defeat of Russia in 1905. Relations between the Russians and the Japanese had deteriorated badly after the Boxer crisis of 1900, since Tsar Nicholas II had been encouraged by his advisers to use the anti-Christian movement in China to occupy the whole of Manchuria. By 1902, there were more than 100,000 troops to protect an influx of Russian colonists. The following year,