

TERRA NULLIUS:

FRONTIERS AND THE RISE OF GREAT POWERS  
WITHIN INTERNATIONAL SYSTEMS

BY

JARED D. PASLAY

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## APPROVAL

The undersigned certify that this thesis meets master's-level standards of research, argumentation, and expression.

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SHAWN T. COCHRAN, PhD., Lt Col, USAF (Date)

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JIM TUCCI, PhD. (Date)



## DISCLAIMER

The conclusions and opinions expressed in this document are those of the author. They do not reflect the official position of the US Government, Department of Defense, the United States Air Force, or Air University.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Major Jared Paslay is a 2002 graduate of the USAF Academy. He has executed a variety of AF roles as a C-130 pilot, East Asia Regional Affairs Specialist, and exchange officer with the Japan Air Self Defense Forces. Major Paslay also had the pleasure of serving one year as a Mansfield Fellow, exchanging experiences with individuals in the National Diet, Ministry of Defense, and several prominent Japanese Non-Governmental Organizations. He has a Master's Degree in International Relations (American Military University) and an Associate's Degree in Japanese (Defense Language Institute). Major Paslay thanks the Air Force for investing in his development.



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## ABSTRACT

This is a thesis about the connection between frontier strategy and international systems of order. It demonstrates how frontier exploitation fueled the rise of prominent state actors. This case demonstrates the relevant role of frontier strategy in the rise of hegemons, highlights the characteristics of three major system environments, and argues that the present system has eliminated the frontier variable from hegemonic competition for the first time in recorded history. The thesis arranges historic cases in interstate competition within three general periods named the pre-nation-state, nation-state, and American eras. The eras correspond to three distinct worlds: Suzerain system (nonexistent international system), developing international states system (partial international system), and mature international states system (complete international system). The thesis categorizes the types of frontier exploitation benefits into three major subsets of *ideological*, *military power*, and *latent power* advantages. The thesis asserts that the complete international states system of the modern American era inhibits traditional frontier exploitation options for aspiring future hegemons, rendering the vast majority of these development strategies obsolete. Future hegemonic rise will likely look different from the frontier-based patterns demonstrated since the beginning of recorded history.

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## CHAPTER 1:

### Terra Nullius:

#### No Man's Land and the Rise of Great Powers

*Anyone who owned but did not exploit land forfeited his claim to it. So, with clear conscience, Cook declared Australia "terra nullius" (land of no one) and annexed it.*

Lawrence James,  
*The Rise and Fall of the British Empire*

This thesis examines the connections between *terra nullius*, international systems, and the rise of prominent state actors. It identifies the significant contribution of fringe societies and frontier territories with the past rise of great powers, highlights the characteristics of three major international system types, and argues that the current system eliminates the frontier variable for the first time in recorded history. This change potentially alters the historic pattern of international power shifts in a fundamental way.

From "no man's land" to the spirit of the cultural unknown to the latest scientific progress, the term "frontier" has been applied in a myriad of ways. For the purpose of this study, *frontier* consists of *physical territory outside the formal, recognized bounds of one's own state or a peer state and also perceived to be devoid and incapable of effective self-governance*. In the words of Kenneth Waltz, a frontier territory is outside the system of "like units" comprising whatever international order exists at a given point in history.

Since the beginning of documented civilization, societies have exploited frontiers to gain relative advantages that helped separate leading groups from the supporter, bystander, and antagonist roles within a system of order. To put it bluntly, frontier opportunities helped catalyze the rapid rise of regional and global hegemony. This is because frontiers, if available and exploited effectively, offer the rising state unique opportunities to gain ideological, military, and latent power advantages vis-a-vis peer states. The nature and

availability of frontiers have evolved with evolutions in the international order. Accordingly, while the rise and fall of great powers may alter the landscape of the international system, changes in the international system also affect the rise and fall of great powers.

### **Ideological, Military, and Latent Power Advantage**

Ideological power or influence consists primarily of the cognitive and cultural norms delineating the domestic identity within a society apart from those outside the society. Ideology is often manifest in notions of cultural superiority, entitlement, and religious purpose that both dehumanized fringe societies and provided justification for the exploitation of outsiders. Ideology serves to mask immoral actions behind the guise of righteous vengeance, humanitarianism, and other rationale galvanizing the support and participation of domestic populations. Ideology thus motivates and facilitates the exploitation of frontier areas. But, in turn, this exploitation also serves to enhance images of cultural superiority, galvanize the population, and fuel the drive to pursue and achieve Great Power status. Ideology provides motivation and justification for the pursuit of power but also serves as a basis of state power in its own right.

In a more traditional sense, frontier exploitation can also yield significant gains in resources and material power, bolstering a state's military capability, wealth, and population. Ultimately, military power distinguishes Great Powers from pretenders, but economic and population resources underpin military power and thus are best thought of as "latent" power.<sup>1</sup>

Military power is a key factor in a modern international order characterized by anarchy, as lethal force remains the ultimate authority to resolve domestic security issues vis-a-vis other nation-states.<sup>2</sup> National

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<sup>1</sup> John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2014), 55.

<sup>2</sup> Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 246-247.

interests drive the establishment of military organizations, endowing states with a powerful tool to engage other nations in an extension of “policy by other means.”<sup>3</sup> This military power manifests in a variety of state-controlled organizations that specialize in the use of violent force, ranging from traditional armies and Special Forces Units to missile defense systems and next-generation air and sea craft. A nation’s latent power fuels and allows the development of the military machine. Latent power, or socio-economic capacity, includes the domestic economy and population resources of a nation. This socio-economic arm promotes military power in many different ways, whether it is establishing technological innovation environments or increasing military budget capacity as an overall result of a healthy economy. Mearsheimer simplifies this multifaceted concept, listing population and wealth as “the two most important components for generating military might.”<sup>4</sup> To summarize, military power is the key ability of a nation to wage war and latent power is the ability to sustain war as a nation converts civilian capacity to extend military capability. Military and latent power combine to form a state’s general measure of power within the competition of the international system.

History is rife with examples of hegemons (or aspiring hegemons) exploiting frontier space for a variety of military power gains. The case of the British Empire shows that conquering frontier territory offered the promise of additional resources and national income at reduced cost and risk compared to a traditional invasion of a sovereign country.<sup>5</sup> The case of the Han Dynasty demonstrates how new lands contributed to enhanced military strength and prestige through the capture and conscription of new military members and extension of national borders.<sup>6</sup> Rome models how borderlands and colonies abroad served as a buffer zone, shielding city centers from future outside

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<sup>3</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1976), 87.

<sup>4</sup> John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2014), 60-61.

<sup>5</sup> John Darwin, *The Empire Project*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 37.

<sup>6</sup> Chun-shu Chang, *The Rise of the Chinese Empire*, (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2010), 248.

aggression while providing advanced bases for future operations.<sup>7</sup> These borderlands also provided an essential cultural identity boost, delineating local peoples from “outsiders,” and generating the levels of nationalism required to fuel hegemonic aspirations.

Frontiers are also rich opportunities for economic advancement. Frontiers territories can provide captive markets for mercantilist-styled trade expansion, as was the case with the British Empire.<sup>8</sup> These territories allow the export of domestic social and economic hindrances, lessening strains on domestic resources, a technique also mastered by the British.<sup>9</sup> As the Spanish Empire demonstrates, frontiers provided a critical boost to domestic economies through the acquisition of new resources.<sup>10</sup> Finally, frontiers as buffer zones can insulate domestic economies from outside competition, just as they provide security from physical invasion.

### **Mapping No Man’s Land**

Frontier exploitation is both a catalyst and byproduct of major shifts in the systems governing state interaction. As the international system has changed, the strategies and opportunities for exploiting frontiers have also changed. This thesis identifies three distinctive international environments associated with the pre-nation-state era, the nation-state era, and the American era. The pre-nation-state era encompasses the rise of imperial powers prior to the emergence of the nation-state and is characterized by a suzerain-state system of order. Martin Wight describes a suzerain-state system as an order where a single state both asserts and ensures an enduring supremacy over other units.<sup>11</sup> This thesis characterizes the suzerain-state

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<sup>7</sup> Harold Mattingly, *Roman Imperial Civilization*, (London, UK: Edward Arnold Publishers, Ltd., 1959), 106.

<sup>8</sup> Lawrence James, *The Rise and Fall of the British Empire*, (New York, NY: St. Martin’s Press, 1995), 204.

<sup>9</sup> James, *The Rise and Fall of the British Empire*, 307.

<sup>10</sup> William S. Maltby, *The Rise and Fall of the Spanish Empire*, (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 1.

<sup>11</sup> Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, (New York: The Columbia University Press, 2002), 10.

period as a world where an international states system is non-existent.<sup>12</sup> A hegemon normally dominates neighboring states and resembles the historic dominance of ancient empires such as the Romans, Macedonians, Persians, and Assyrians. The nation-state era spans the successful rise of frontier powers within the confines of the international system that originated around the time of the Peace of Westphalia and takes the form of an incomplete (partial) international states system. The international states system contrasts the suzerain-state concept in that the independent, sovereign nature of peer actors continually contest and compete for dominance.<sup>13</sup> The characteristic of multiple, sovereign actors is indicative of the nation-state social construct that originated in Europe and dominates the modern international order. The American Era is characterized by the rise of the United States to global prominence within a complete international states system. Due to this “completeness”, the United States is likely to be the final hegemon to be able to exploit the advantages of traditional frontier development; future aspiring hegemons will be inhibited by the increased expansion costs imposed by the mature international system.

The following conclusions summarize the analysis of the three Eras:

1. The general pursuit of wealth and power changes little with time. However, significant shifts in systems governing interaction, such as the rise of the nation-state or maturation of an international states system alter the cost-benefit analysis for a unit’s expansion strategy.
2. Systemic order changes shaped the definition and attractiveness of frontier exploitation strategies. Norms originating with the nation-state identity incentivized frontier exploitation over traditional state-to-state competition.

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<sup>12</sup> This thesis considers the international states system to be non-existent during the pre-nation-state era. The statement derives from arguments presented by Hedley Bull in his work, *The Anarchical Society*. However, this argument does not deny the existence of interstate interactions within a suzerain-states system. Despite the existence of a mature international system of order, some characteristics of the modern international states system also existed in ancient times to varying degree, to include diplomatic exchanges, trade agreements, and tribute relationships.

<sup>13</sup> Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, 10.

3. Frontier exploitation carried ideological advantage and contributed significant military and latent power gains to aspiring hegemons.
4. The United States used traditional frontier exploitation methods to fuel its hegemonic rise within the maturing international system.
5. The United States currently presides over an international order characterized by historic levels of standardized national boundaries and strict international norms governing their administration.

Traditional frontier exploitation opportunities are almost extinct. The complete international states system recognizes nearly all states and territories of the world as peer societies within the voluntary jurisdiction of the United Nations.

The following table and subsequent chapters chronicle the evolution of hegemonic rise over the span of the three Frontier Development Eras. Some ideas change little over time, like the benefit of leveraging capable military forces in pursuit of resources. Other concepts, like the perception and legal definition of frontier territory, change dramatically with the introduction of new systemic norms. The most compelling theme of the Three Eras, however, is the story of how frontiers contributed to the great power shifts and rise of hegemons throughout history.

### **Overview: The Lay of the No Man's Land**

The remainder of the thesis proceeds as follows. Chapter 2 examines the advantages of frontier exploitation within the framework of the ancient suzerain-state order, a world as it existed without an international system of order. It looks primarily at ancient empires of the Romans, Imperial Chinese, Mongols, and Macedonians that support the argument that frontier exploitation benefitted aspiring hegemons through ideological, military, and latent power gains. Ideological gains include benefits in the form of the moral high ground and the unifying motivation of domestic societies in response to frontier-based, existential threats. Military gains included increases in relative advantage in physical numbers, organizational and disciplinary superiority

over frontier forces, remote military basing options, and technological innovation. Latent strength gains included additional resources, increases to the labor pool, unique trade opportunities, and the capability to export the economic strain of domestic undesirables abroad.

**Table 1: Examples of Frontier Exploitation in Hegemonic Competition**

		<b>Empire</b>	<b>Ideological</b>	<b>Military Power</b>	<b>Latent Power</b>		
<b>Frontier Development Era</b>	Pre-nation-state	Roman	Roman Civility vs. Barbarian Fringe Societies	Walls of Hadrian, Antonius Pius; absorbed frontier fighters into military forces	Tribute and war spoils; population absorption	Non-existent	<b>International System Maturity</b>
		Chinese	Great Wall signifies struggle against the uncivilized barbarian	Great Wall & Iron; absorbed frontier fighters into military forces	Tribute; Wu-ti 1.5 million mi <sup>2</sup> territorial expansion; population absorption		
		Mongol	Proactive expansion against surrounding steppe aggressors	Imported siege/trebuchet technology; absorbed smaller steppe tribes	Tribute; land resources; acquisition of established cities		
		Macedonian	Greek cultural superiority	Absorbed conquered peoples into military ranks	Tribute; population absorption; trade immigration		
	Nation-state	British	Terra Nullius entitlement; exported British culture	Firepower, maritime, organizational advantage; conscripted military forces	Leveraged trade advantage; tribute; population absorption	Incomplete	
		Spanish	Dehumanized native population; proselytizing humanitarian justification	Firepower, maritime, organizational advantage	New World Gold; slave and indentured labor; natural resources		
		French	European cultural superiority; proselytizing humanitarian justification	Firepower, organizational advantage; conscripted military forces	Natural resources; leveraged trade		
	American	Settler vs. uncivilized, uncultured native tribes	Firepower, organizational advantage; geopolitical leverage vs. European interests	Regional slave labor; land; resources; leveraged trade	Complete		

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Source: Author's Original Work

Chapter 3 looks at the evolution of frontier exploitation within the nation-state international order that characterized the world from around the Peace of Westphalia up to the rise of the United States to its status as a hegemon. It describes the world order as a partial international states system. Like Chapter 2, Chapter 3 defines frontier advantage as a function of ideological, military, and latent power gains. Ideological gains in this era evolved with the creation of the nation state as the fundamental unit of international relations and the establishment of an anarchic system of



sovereign peer actors. Frontier strategies within this world serve as an alternate expansion strategy that mitigates the threat of peer balancing by rival actors. Military advantages included numerical and organizational superiority as well as remote basing opportunities. Latent gains were predominantly in the form of additional resources, human capital increases, leveraged trading opportunities, and the export of domestic economic burden.

Chapter 4 focuses on the United States' rise and current hegemony within a mature international states system. For the US, ideology evolved in response to the developing norms shared by peer actors in the maturing international states system and provided the domestic moral momentum to grow into the far reaches of the American frontier. Military power advantages included frontier opportunities for the US to leverage numerical, organizational, and technological superiority as well as local geopolitical advantages over distant European colonial powers. Latent gains came in the form of vast resource pools, human capital, advantaged trading opportunities, and improved social mobility opportunities for adventurous American Citizens. The chapter concludes that the United States is a paragon model for the frontier-fueled possibilities of competitive territorial expansion. However, it also suggests that the maturation of the international states system will make future hegemonic rise difficult under the traditional methods of interstate competition and frontier exploitation strategy.

The final chapter summarizes the argument and evidence of the earlier sections, asserts that future hegemonic rise will differ from the traditional ways demonstrated over the three eras, and provides scenarios that explore the future possibilities of hegemonic competition within the limitations of a frontierless world. It suggests the world of international relations is entering an uncharted territory where the frontier variable is absent from hegemonic competition. Future possible scenarios include reactions stemming from a globalized, destabilizing event, a reversion to traditional frontier space through technological innovation or climate change, or adaptation of the traditional

definition of frontier in consideration of an evolving global economic and political environment.



## CHAPTER 2:

### The Pre-Nation-State Era

*The strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must.*  
Thucydides, *The Melian Dialogue*

Ancient hegemons rose through the tumultuous ranks of regional competition to dominate the farthest reaches of their known lands. These storied civilizations include the Romans, Greeks, and the ancient Chinese dynasties that shaped the Old World and wrought large-scale impacts to culture, landscape, and society that remain in the present day. Pre-nation-state empires defined their identity through their frontiers, capitalizing on the outer limits of their boundaries to expand in power, prestige, and renown. This chapter examines historical examples of the types of frontier development advantages within the framework of the ancient suzerain-state order, or the world as it existed without an international system. It demonstrates the enduring advantages of frontier exploitation enjoyed by influential regional authorities and empires, advantages established ages before the full emergence of the nation-state institution.

#### **Ideological Advantage**

Though ancient empires exploited frontiers for domestic gain similar to their future nation-state counterparts, older perceptions of frontier differ from definitions derived from international states system norms. Prior to the nation-state, the international order did not define frontier within the framework of national boundaries. Additionally, ancient societies often did not recognize the cultural, social, and political equality of many tribal peoples on their periphery. In accordance with the definition of a suzerain-state system, a singular, dominant actor normally monopolized the right of sovereignty in ancient

times.<sup>1</sup> For these reasons, frontier development in this earlier time reinforced notions of cultural superiority, a notion that later justified the European colonization movements typical of the nation-state era. In the absence of peer-to-peer sovereignty, frontiers provided domestic populations moral justification for conquering and expanding over fringe societies.

Frontier took on a unique connotation within an empire, as the conquest of uncivilized hordes lent moral advantage to the conquering power. Prestige brought visions of superior culture, like the Assyrians who brought surrounding lands under the “blessing” of a rule proclaimed to be the divine heir of over 2,000 years of Babylonian and Sumerian innovation.<sup>2</sup> The Romans fought physically on the battlefield and politically at home for generations over the proper integration of the “barbarians” in Gaul, Britannia, and other peoples at the fringe of their grasp.<sup>3</sup> The Great Wall of China, initiated by the first emperor of the Qin Dynasty, is both a political testament to the importance of frontier security and a physical reminder of the ancient social delineation between “civilized” and “barbarian.”<sup>4</sup>

Cultural superiority justified the subjugation of neighboring societies in the eyes of the domestic populace, giving central authorities and military forces the benefit of a perceived moral high ground. Military frontier campaigns provided the invaluable opportunity to reinforce domestic identities through the delineation of civilizational and cultural boundaries.<sup>5</sup> Cultural and empiric identity, along with the intimate association of frontier as a relation to enforceable sovereignty, created a unique environment for frontier exploitation in the pre-nation-state era.<sup>6</sup>

Existential threats from frontier boundaries also catalyzed rapid mobilization and advancement in ancient societies. Assaults from both the

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<sup>1</sup> Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, (New York: The Columbia University Press, 2002), 10.

<sup>2</sup> Lindsay Allen, *The Persian Empire*, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 17.

<sup>3</sup> Harold Mattingly, *Roman Imperial Civilization*, (London, UK: Edward Arnold Publishers, Ltd., 1959), 106.

<sup>4</sup> Amy Chua, *Day of Empire*, (New York, NY: Doubleday, 2007), 63.

<sup>5</sup> Mario Apostolov, *The Christian-Muslim Frontier*, (New York, NY: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004), 9.

<sup>6</sup> Apostolov, *The Christian-Muslim Frontier*, 7.

Mongols and Tartar raiders from the 1200's through the late 16<sup>th</sup> century bonded the Russian people into a cohesive cultural, military, and organizational identity that eventually became the Russian Empire.<sup>7</sup> The Mongols themselves began their conquests with Chinggis Khan's proactive effort to eliminate the immediate threats of the Jin Empire, Hoyoyn Irgen, and other surrounding steppe peoples.<sup>8</sup> Both Rome and its primary Etruscan rival, Veii, were initially frontier settlements erected at the physical center of major cultural and ethnic divides.<sup>9</sup> Threats from the physical and social fringes galvanized internal cohesion and ignited a greater sense of purpose in these young empires.

Ascending to greatness in the pre-nation-state era was not just a factor of theoretical or moral high ground. Military and economic numbers mattered. Like modern times, Great Powers became elite through increases in military and latent power relative to their rivals. From a military standpoint, frontiers offered the opportunity to increase relative advantage in physical numbers, bestowed organizational and disciplinary advantage on the battlefield, opened possibilities for remote military basing options, and catalyzed technological innovation. Latent strength enhancements included additional economic resources, increases to the labor pool, unique trade opportunities, and human export capabilities that reduced interior resource and social strains.

### **Military Power Advantage**

War on the frontier provided a dual advantage for victorious empires, as the numbers of the vanquished and conscription of former foes accelerated shifts in relative force strengths. The Roman Empire is a notable example of a power that conquered fringe societies then integrated former enemy ranks into their own. The Romans readily added barbarian talent to bolster the ranks in frontier provinces, and one gifted leader of mixed barbarian ancestry, Emperor

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<sup>7</sup> Peter Turchin, *War & Peace & War*, (New York, NY: Pi Press, 2006), 41.

<sup>8</sup> Timothy May, *The Mongol Conquests in World History*, (London, UK: Reaktion Books Ltd., 2012), 37.

<sup>9</sup> Peter Turchin, *War & Peace & War*, (New York, NY: Pi Press, 2006), 142-144.

Maximin, even rose from the ranks of the culturally marginalized to the Empire's highest seat.<sup>10</sup>

This style of military frontier exploitation was also popular outside the European continent. The Achaemenids enforced their ranks with Greek mercenaries.<sup>11</sup> In the years that followed, Alexander the Great returned the favor by borrowing Achaemenid military prowess and 30,000 Persians, in addition to Phoenicians, Egyptians, and other former competition to create one of the largest empires in history.<sup>12</sup> The Han Dynasty in China used frontier settlements as stair-steps to reintegrate former nomadic enemies, maximizing the advantage of blended cultures at a safe distance from their city centers.<sup>13</sup> The Mongols famously grew in prestige, numbers, and infamy with each passing victory.

Ancient Empires also exercised a distinct numerical and organizational advantage over those they conquered on the frontier as they extended their boundaries outward from their core. The Han mastered this technique by using a system of frontier settlements to normalize recently integrated peoples, concentrate military organization, then springboard into further frontier military conquest.<sup>14</sup> Han organizational superiority also enabled both improved weaponry through advanced iron-casting methods and the development of a professional cavalry.<sup>15</sup> This advantage allowed Han strategists to estimate combat parity calculations at one friendly soldier per 3-5 native opponents.<sup>16</sup> In the case of the Mongols, Temujin and Ong Khan absorbed the Tartar confederacy, the Tayichiuds, and other smaller tribes,

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<sup>10</sup> Harold Mattingly, *Roman Imperial Civilization*, (London, UK: Edward Arnold Publishers, Ltd., 1959), 113.

<sup>11</sup> Amy Chua, *Day of Empire*, (New York, NY: Doubleday, 2007), 322.

<sup>12</sup> Chua, *Day of Empire*, 26.

<sup>13</sup> Chun-shu Chang, *The Rise of the Chinese Empire*, vol. 2, *Frontier, Immigration, & Empire in Han China, 130 B.C. – A.D. 157*, (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2010), 22.

<sup>14</sup> Chang, *The Rise of the Chinese Empire*, vol. 2, 22.

<sup>15</sup> Chun-shu Chang, *The Rise of the Chinese Empire*, vol. 1, *Nation, State, & Imperialism in Early China, ca. 1600 B.C. – A.D. 8*, (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2010), 261-262.

<sup>16</sup> Chang, *The Rise of the Chinese Empire*, vol. 1, 261-262.

gaining momentum on the way to becoming the force that eventually threatened all of Eurasian civilization.<sup>17</sup>

Frontier-based threats to central empires like the Romans existed, but frontier resistors faced significant challenges when competing against a Great Power. Brief moments of empiric dread, like the Hun invasion or persistent annoyance from northern Welsh tribes, lent excitement to an otherwise enduring trend of Roman frontier dominance.<sup>18</sup> The majority of populations buried behind physical and social barriers (the Russian Slavs, for example) never posed an existential threat to the Roman Empire.<sup>19</sup>

To be fair, frontier militaries were often quite formidable, though they seldom proved a match for the forces mobilized under a consolidated empire. In the case of Rome, the Empire faced its final defeats at the hands of the barbarian hordes (Alaric the Visigoth sacked the capitol and the Germans deposed the last emperor in 410 and 476, respectively).<sup>20</sup> However, administrative overextension and domestic instability eroded Roman authority long before these dramatic defeats.<sup>21</sup>

Organizational and budget superiority also enabled the creation of physical and cultural barriers that discouraged remote incursions and insulated an Empire's core from exterior threats. The walls of Hadrian and Antoninus Pius, like the Great Wall in China, were intimidating roadblocks to even the most determined outside aggressor.<sup>22</sup> The Ch'in and Han Dynasties expanded north and west through patterns of border defense and settlement; improving domestic security through the establishment of remote military posts.<sup>23</sup> In an attempt to create a cultural barrier to Muslim incursion, the

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<sup>17</sup> Amy Chua, *Day of Empire*, (New York, NY: Doubleday, 2007), 92.

<sup>18</sup> Harold Mattingly, *Roman Imperial Civilization*, (London, UK: Edward Arnold Publishers, Ltd., 1959), 106-110.

<sup>19</sup> Mattingly, *Roman Imperial Civilization*, 106-110.

<sup>20</sup> Anthony Pagden, *Peoples and Empires* (New York: Random House, Inc., 2001), 35-37.

<sup>21</sup> Pagden, *Peoples and Empires*, 35-37.

<sup>22</sup> Harold Mattingly, *Roman Imperial Civilization*, (London, UK: Edward Arnold Publishers, Ltd., 1959), 111.

<sup>23</sup> Chun-shu Chang, *The Rise of the Chinese Empire*, vol. 2, *Frontier, Immigration, & Empire in Han China, 130 B.C. – A.D. 157*, (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2010), 22.

Austria-Hungarian Empire settled Christian Turks in the forward military frontier zones of Krajina, Vojvodina, Banat, and Transylvania.<sup>24</sup>

The practice of importing wartime innovations from foreign cultures finalizes the list of major military advantages to frontier development. Of the ancient societies, the Mongols set the standard for incorporating foreign innovation. Imported Muslim and Chinese engineers quickly turned glaring weaknesses in siege warfare technology into a trademark strength of the Khans.<sup>25</sup> Mongol engineers transferred advancements in European and Middle Eastern trebuchet design to Chinese fronts with lethal results.<sup>26</sup> This ingenious strategy pitted the best Western technology against stubborn Eastern defenses and vice versa, allowing a centralized Mongolian Empire to dominate both fronts.

Fruitful campaigns fueled by technological innovation highlight the importance of military victory to hegemonic rise in the pre-nation-state era. To this end, frontiers played a valuable role in both revitalizing technological thought within military organizations and in promoting victory within the realm of violent competition.

### **Latent Power Advantage**

Though combat prowess played a central role in the successful rise of ancient hegemonies, military strength alone was not enough to dominate a system of order. In this regard, the latent power of economic advantage was the other essential pillar enabling an ancient hegemon. Though deep coffers were often a prerequisite for military dominance, a capable military force enhanced by frontier strategies also contributed positive economic gains. Other direct economic benefits from frontier development included the addition of outside resources, larger labor pools, unique trade opportunities, and a low-risk outlet for both undesirables and social experiments.

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<sup>24</sup> Mario Apostolov, *The Christian-Muslim Frontier*, (New York, NY: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004), 33.

<sup>25</sup> Timothy May, *The Mongol Conquests in World History*, (London, UK: Reaktion Books Ltd., 2012), 132.

<sup>26</sup> May, *The Mongol Conquests*, 136.



Ancient civilizations thrived in an era of symbiotic military and economic strength, and success in both depended on acquiring territory. Promising empires conquered, then absorbed new lands, human capital, and resources, converting external strength into domestic gains. For this reason, military benefits from frontier opportunities also translated into economic advantages. Tribute, taxes, and loot from conquered lands came in the form of both human and economic capital, and were the ideal methods for advancing one's society.<sup>27</sup>

Frontier areas offered developmental opportunities in the pre-nation-state era in the form of valuable and unique resources abroad. The Romans filled their treasury with precious metals from conquered lands: Dacia alone added millions of pounds of silver and gold to the Empire.<sup>28</sup> Cossack forces led by Ermak defeated the Tartars in the late 1500's and gained the gold, silver, precious stones, and organic resources of Siberia in the process.<sup>29</sup> Emperor Wu-ti used extensive land acquisitions to transition former nomadic societies into agrarian assets, developing a 1.5 million square mile expansion of ancient China.<sup>30</sup>

Human capital was also a prime economic commodity gained from frontier expansion, as new populations translated into a stronger economic base, greater taxation effects, and an enlarged workforce. Emperor Wu-ti's social elevation of the farmer and oppression of merchant classes ensured an abundance of converted workers to cultivate agrarian advantage in former nomadic lands.<sup>31</sup> Marcus Aurelius created barbarian settlements within Roman boundaries and Diocletian bestowed *limigantes* and *laeti* titles to reflect the special status of these transitioning additions to the Roman Empire.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Amy Chua, *Day of Empire*, (New York, NY: Doubleday, 2007), 322.

<sup>28</sup> Chua, *Day of Empire*, 322.

<sup>29</sup> Peter Turchin, *War & Peace & War*, (New York, NY: Pi Press, 2006), 21.

<sup>30</sup> Chun-shu Chang, *The Rise of the Chinese Empire*, vol. 1, *Nation, State, & Imperialism in Early China, ca. 1600 B.C. – A.D. 8*, (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2010), 253.

<sup>31</sup> Chang, *The Rise of the Chinese Empire*, vol. 1, 252.

<sup>32</sup> Harold Mattingly, *Roman Imperial Civilization*, (London, UK: Edward Arnold Publishers, Ltd., 1959), 114.

Prudent empires recognized, cultivated, and exploited the potential of diverse talent pools fostered by frontier societies. For example, the early Ottomans granted *timar* military estates to Christians, talented *ghazi* fighters, and other worthy subjects, highlighting a multifaceted cultural incorporation into the empiric fold on a grand, layered scale.<sup>33</sup> Great powers recognized the dual economic and military benefits of population absorption as larger numbers of able-bodied subjects became available for the labor force and, if needed, military conscription.

Frontiers provided ancient civilizations unique trade opportunities that enhanced a relative economic advantage over surrounding competition. Greek citizens left their homelands and domestic land shortages to create colonies and trade posts as far away as Spain, Italy, and Syria, lands brimming with trading markets in valuable metals and other resources.<sup>34</sup> Carthage seeded trading colonies throughout the surrounding Mediterranean.<sup>35</sup> The Silk Road and its legendary value in materiel, cultural, and intellectual exchanges was the pride of Ho-hsi, the Chinese Gateway to the West and a quintessential frontier territory.<sup>36</sup> Frontiers had both export and import value, projecting influence with the export of local goods and mitigating critical domestic shortfalls through the exploitation of external trade relationships.

Frontiers were an ideal environment for social experimentation as well as a safety valve to export undesirables and population excess away from a civilization's center. The opportunistic Han offloaded a significant portion of the economically troubled and other undesirable residents from the old eastern civilization onto the western colonies, reducing the economic burden and political instability of the eastern section of the Chinese Empire.<sup>37</sup> The Spartans used a band of illegitimate sons incompatible with local society to

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<sup>33</sup> Mario Apostolov, *The Christian-Muslim Frontier*, (New York, NY: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004), 30.

<sup>34</sup> Thomas R. Martin, *Ancient Greece*, (London, England: Yale Nota Bene, 2000), 56.

<sup>35</sup> Susan W. Bauer, *The History of the Ancient World*, (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2007), 471.

<sup>36</sup> Chun-shu Chang, *The Rise of the Chinese Empire*, vol. 2, *Frontier, Immigration, & Empire in Han China, 130 B.C. – A.D. 157*, (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2010), 174.

<sup>37</sup> Chang, *The Rise of the Chinese Empire*, vol. 2, 175.

colonize Taras in southern Italy.<sup>38</sup> These types of innovative social export strategies gave established powers a quick and effective method to address interior resource shortages, socio-political instability, and other local issues by simply transitioning the human problem away from city centers and out to frontier lands.

The pre-nation-state era demonstrates a variety of ideological, military, and latent power advantages for frontier development and exploitation within the nonexistent international order of a suzerain-state system. Frontiers provided the ideological impetus justifying the conquering of and expansion into fringe societies. The lack of a peer-based, sovereign state system helped justify the exploitation of frontier lands and peoples to the domestic population.

From a military power perspective, frontier campaigns offered numerical and organizational advantages, strategic basing options, and technological innovation opportunities. Latent power benefits came in the form of resource and human capital gains, beneficial trading possibilities, and unique options to address domestic social and economic issues.

Ancient societies often viewed frontiers as foreign, barbaric, and often chaotic, a perception that encouraged notions of domestic cultural superiority and justified a moral obligation to conquer fringe societies. This sense of entitlement continued well into the nation-state era, motivating frontier colonization efforts while fueling fervent nationalism. Transitions within the international relations system codified the moral high ground of frontier development, as the sovereign nation-state norm shifted the perception of civility further away from frontier societies.

The pre-nation-state era informed future competitors on the military and economic benefits of frontier exploitation. Chapter Three continues the narrative of frontier development strategy into more recent histories within the nation-state era of a developing (partial) international states system. Systemic

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<sup>38</sup> Thomas R. Martin, *Ancient Greece*, (London, England: Yale Nota Bene, 2000), 58.

change and emerging international norms started to inhibit the direct territorial annexation of peer-to-peer lands, altering frontier strategies in a new age of state competition.



## CHAPTER 3:

### The Nation-State Era

*C is for Colonies. Rightly we boast, that of all the great nations Great Britain has the most.*

Excerpt from the Children's Book  
*ABC for Baby Patriots* (c.1899)

The Peace of Westphalia inaugurated the modern world system, defining the nation-state as the basic unit of international relations. The new order enfranchised national identities, demarcated cultures, and was a progressive step in the standardization of national boundaries. The fledgling international states system motivated societies to new levels of competition, blurred secular and religious political influence, and catalyzed further development of local vernacular languages.<sup>1</sup>

The nation-state system redefined the concept of territorial frontier with the establishment of formal state boundaries and the recognition of these states as sovereign and equal national actors. However, the social, cultural, and political equality of individual states excluded frontier societies. Standardized national boundaries and state equivalency created a new level of differentiation between established nation-states and the informal status of outside frontiers. Over time, the territorial expansion of unit actors reduced the remaining space available for continued territorial extension, raising expansion costs as states increasingly came into conflict with one another.<sup>2</sup>

These normative shifts within the new system of order altered risk-reward calculations for national expansion. The threats of evolving cost and regional balancing associated with traditional interstate conflict impelled expansion strategies to favor frontier exploitation. The case for frontier development became more compelling as national pursuits of wealth and power

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1989), 70.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Gilpin, *War & Change in World Politics*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 147.

adapted to take advantage of the new rules of the international order. Traditional notions of moral and cultural superiority also rose to new levels of prominence within a new age dominated by the nation-state institution.

### **Roots of a New International Order**

The shrinking global stage of the nation-state era promoted frontiers as an irresistible opportunity for national powers in search of significant military and latent power gains. Territorial acquisition evolved, flourishing under the guiding norms of the emerging nation-state system of order. The costs of annexing a peer's sovereign territory ballooned with the increasing scale of military campaigns that characterized European interstate competition. In some cases, improved naval technologies enabled a shift in expansion aims away from the conquering of neighboring competitors and towards distant and less controversial advancement opportunities overseas.

Nation-states created the Westphalia settlement and affected systemic change to ensure the prosperity and continued survival of the nation-state as the primary unit of international interaction. Treaties empowered territorial rulers to minimize the threat of future Europe-wide imperial orders.<sup>3</sup> Mutual agreement bestowed legal status equivalent to the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire on individual heads of state, creating an anarchical environment of coequal state units that underpins modern international relations theory.<sup>4</sup> The wary eyes of neighboring states now proactively checked traditional empire-building strategies through monitoring, coalitions, and other temporary power aggregations.

Incentives for frontier expansion abounded during the nation-state era. Powerful states proactively minimized the capabilities of aspiring peers and formed alliances to counterbalance neighboring nations perceived as a threat to international system stability.<sup>5</sup> In addition to counterbalancing considerations,

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<sup>3</sup> G. John Ikenberry, *After Victory*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 38-39.

<sup>4</sup> Ikenberry, *After Victory*, 38-39.

<sup>5</sup> Ikenberry, *After Victory*, 38-39.

the promise of imperial conquest tempted national leaders with an attractive alternative to the costs of traditional expansion via continental war. Frontier exploitation was an effective way to expand without being so threatening as to invite balancing attempts from coalitions of rival states.

The consequences of both interstate and frontier-based conflict during the formative years of the nation-state era were of particular importance to national survival. Military costs and expansion campaigns dominated the budgets of sovereigns like Philip II and Elizabeth I, where up to 75% of national expenditure was dedicated to war or previous war debt.<sup>6</sup> The success or failure of a state military affected national wellbeing for generations and underscored the weight of campaign decisions. Likewise, monarchs often believed the quickest fix for the fiscal challenges of failed campaigns was through the proactive prosecution of a successful territorial conquest. For this reason, frontier options were a constant consideration to a sovereign executing the risk-benefit calculus of a national strategy.

The economic principle of substitution explains the attractiveness of a frontier campaign option in a world characterized by monarchs scrambling to address the reality of increasing war costs. Summarized, the principle of substitution states that if two options offer comparable benefit, an actor will tend to make a decision in favor of the one that costs less.<sup>7</sup> In the case of both pre-nation-state and nation-state eras, territorial acquisition usually yielded the gains in military and latent power that translated into national prestige.

However, the international states system that originated during the nation-state era enforced new global norms and consequences that differentiated between the state and frontier annexation option. Nations now faced the prospect of coalition balancing in the case of invading a sovereign neighbor and often the perceived economic benefit from such an option paled

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<sup>6</sup> Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1989), 71.

<sup>7</sup> Jurgen Brauer and Hubert V. Tuyl, *Castles, Battles & Bombs*, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 21.

in comparison to the resources required to execute the plan. In contrast, the frontier exploitation of distant land promised both positive economic gain favorable to most state options and mitigation of the threat of regional balancing. The Spanish campaigns in America and the Netherlands demonstrate both ends of the spectrum: Military action in the Americas enriched Spain continuously for centuries, but the costs of European conquest bankrupted Philip II and led to defeat in the Netherlands at the hands of the Dutch and well-financed French forces.<sup>8</sup>

Frontiers provided ideological advantages and the military and latent means necessary to attain advantage within the international states system. The ideological advantages of frontier exploitation softened the international perception of a nation's expansion strategies, sidestepped the risk of being checked by the system via peer balancing, and provided moral justification to the domestic populations supporting the campaigns. Subjective cost-benefit calculus aside, the tangible advantages of frontier conquests resembled the legendary exploits of ancient civilizations. Like the days of old, numerical advantages, organizational superiority, and remote basing capabilities contributed to the national military gains of the sponsoring state. In similar fashion, frontiers in the nation-state era offered opportunistic authorities latent power gains in raw resources, human capital, advantaged trading opportunities, and the ability to offload burdensome social undesirables overseas to frontier colonies. Frontier expansion benefits evolved across the spectrum of ideological, military, and latent power advantage in a new era dominated by the nation-state institution.

### **Ideological Advantage**

Entitlement and notions of cultural superiority found new life in the colonial age of European interstate competition and Western expansion. Spaniards invoked this inherent right to exploit and convert the indigenous

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<sup>8</sup> William H. McNeill, *The Pursuit of Power*, (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 109-110.



peoples of America, ensnaring thousands of natives to toil for the benefit of a small cadre of oppressive, foreign elite.<sup>9</sup> Captain James Cook and other British explorers bore a mandate to declare distant territories British holdings wherever they judged native inhabitants as lacking in the proactive development of their lands.<sup>10</sup> Portuguese Melaka, Spanish Manila, and Dutch Batavia were all vibrant native settlements in Southeast Asia prior to their guided transition to “enlightened” European control.<sup>11</sup>

Most colonial frontiers did not generate enough of an existential threat to unify national identities within established nation-states. However, cultural divides between conquerors and the conquered continued to provide moral momentum to those undertaking the “benevolent” subjugation of non-state civilizations. Social perceptions regarding the state-sponsored conquest of lesser peoples added a humanitarian element to the traditional power and wealth-based motivations of frontier development. Spanish apologists and other European colonization proponents demoted native peoples to subhuman, “homunculi” status, justifying lopsided wars and enslavement based on perceptions of their social practices being inferior, immoral, and savage.<sup>12</sup> Motivations stemming from humanitarian and cultural superiority justified the moral, economic, and military risks required to tame the wild spirits of frontier territories and its peoples. Frontiers offered substantial benefits to those willing to push the limitations of the domestic and international status quo.

Frontiers fueled relative gains that enabled national aspirations for regional and global greatness. Numerical advantages, organizational superiority, and remote basing capabilities contributed to the national military gains of the sponsoring state. In similar fashion, frontiers in the nation-state era offered opportunistic authorities latent power gains in raw resources,

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<sup>9</sup> Niall Ferguson, *Civilization*, (New York, NY: Penguin Press, 2011), 113.

<sup>10</sup> Lawrence James, *The Rise and Fall of the British Empire*, (New York, NY: St. Martin’s Press, 1994), 142-143.

<sup>11</sup> Nicholas Tarling, ed., *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia*, vol. 2, *From c. 1500 to c. 1800*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 18.

<sup>12</sup> Anthony Pagden, *Peoples and Empires*, (New York: Modern Library, 2001), 68.

human capital, advantaged trading opportunities, and offloading social undesirables to frontier colonies.

### **Military Power Advantage**

Great Powers understood the numerical and organizational advantages of leveraging formal state militaries against unorganized, outnumbered, and undisciplined frontier civilizations. The Portuguese settlement in Melaka, the Spaniards in Manila, the Dutch in Batavia were all Southeast Asian examples of the European advantages in firepower, naval technology, and military organization over more primitive native forces.<sup>13</sup> Cortez subdued the Aztecs, the great 1.5 million-member American empire, with a mere 600 men, 16 horses, 14 artillery pieces, and a cunning eye for opportunistic, unconventional strategy.<sup>14</sup> Australia was an even easier conquest; James Cook simply ignored the existence of native aborigines, declared the land *terra nullus* (no man's land), and claimed it outright on behalf of Britain.<sup>15</sup>

Frontiers also granted the state personnel gains through the integration of natives into national military service. Japan took Formosa (Taiwan) from China after the first Sino-Japanese War and subsequently received 80,000 Formosan volunteers for Imperial Army service during World War II.<sup>16</sup> Britain in World War I had a military 8.5 million strong that included 1.4 million Indians, 630,000 Canadians, 420,000 Australians, 136,000 South Africans, and 129,000 New Zealanders.<sup>17</sup> Where race relations inhibited front-line integration, the British Empire used 1 million blacks and other minorities in logistical support roles to liberate more white subjects for combat action.<sup>18</sup> After World War II, the French augmented 30-50 percent of their forward-

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<sup>13</sup> Nicholas Tarling, ed., *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia*, vol. 2, *From c. 1500 to c. 1800*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 19-21.

<sup>14</sup> William S. Maltby, *The Rise and Fall of the Spanish Empire*, (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 53.

<sup>15</sup> Lawrence James, *The Rise and Fall of the British Empire*, (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 143.

<sup>16</sup> Amy Chua, *Day of Empire*, (New York, NY: Doubleday, 2007), 284.

<sup>17</sup> Lawrence James, *The Rise and Fall of the British Empire*, (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 353.

<sup>18</sup> James, *The Rise and Fall of the British Empire*, 353.

deployed battalions in Indochina with native paratroopers.<sup>19</sup> Examples like these demonstrate the significant military contribution and sacrifice of frontier natives to their administrative states.

Frontier territories offered prime locations for forward bases and power projection as naval advancements and military innovation shrunk the world. The British considered Australia, India, and New South Wales as strategic candidates for bases to launch seaborne invasions of Spanish America, Mexico, and Chile.<sup>20</sup> The Portuguese and Spanish waged a strategic chess match trading merchant and military presence on the African Coast and Americas for centuries.<sup>21</sup> French intrusions into Vietnam and its neighbors yielded the Cochinchina colony, Cambodian protectorate, and a prestigious counter to British, Chinese, and other state influences in the South Pacific.<sup>22</sup> Imperial Japan overran Southeast Asia in a strategy to convert isolated, disconcerted island chains into a fortified logistical web for long-range naval operations.<sup>23</sup> Frontiers offered states a unique chance to gain relative power via methods perceived as less threatening by bordering states.

The nation-state era continued the trend of wealth and power, prerequisites for hegemonic rise, but the rising costs of conflict highlighted the important relationship of latent power to prestige and authority within the international states system. Growing scales of war demanded stronger, more complex, and more resilient economies (in Europe, the annual war cost increased by a factor of ten every hundred years between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries).<sup>24</sup> Formal conflicts expanded in scope, from the Napoleonic to the World Wars, to decimate entire generations of domestic labor pools. Military innovation evolved from attrition to maneuver warfare, only to devolve again into unlimited campaigns of economic and operational exhaustion. Prudent

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<sup>19</sup> Martin Windrow, *The Last Valley*, (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2004), 196-197.

<sup>20</sup> Lawrence James, *The Rise and Fall of the British Empire*, (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 146.

<sup>21</sup> William S. Maltby, *The Rise and Fall of the Spanish Empire*, (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 19.

<sup>22</sup> Martin Windrow, *The Last Valley*, (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2004), 70.

<sup>23</sup> John Toland, *The Rising Sun*, (New York, NY: Modern Library, 2003), 302.

<sup>24</sup> Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1989), 77.

nations often sought frontier development to survive and thrive by minimizing military cost and maximizing economic gains.

### **Latent Power Advantage**

Economic growth in the nation-state era offered unparalleled advantages in a national quest for prestige and influence in the international community. Additionally, trends towards attrition-style military campaigns, such as the World Wars and the seven major Anglo-French wars from the 17<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, favored the strongest economy.<sup>25</sup> Economic dominance was the indirect key to military victory and international influence in the system of order. To this end, frontiers promised gains in resources, human capital, trading opportunities, and social experimentation. Colonialism remained, but systemic changes in international norms imparted added costs to annexation methods based on force, particularly in the case of sovereign territory. Maritime technology and international trade opened market opportunities abroad while shifting traditional hegemonic strategies away from conquest into new arenas of commerce-based domination.<sup>26</sup> Technological and market innovations created new means and improved on traditional methods to exploit frontiers for economic gain.

Resources fuel national aspirations, and frontiers offered land, precious metals, and other growth capacities that often dwarfed domestic holdings at reduced “cost.” France owned 9.3% (90% in resource-rich Africa) of the entire world in 1935.<sup>27</sup> Not to be outdone, Britain controlled 23.9% of the planet that year, with the United Kingdom domestic landmass comprising a mere 0.2% of the total area.<sup>28</sup> Frontier land gave European Powers the capacity to expand past the constricting borders of their neighbors and feed growing domestic needs. The land was varied, vast, and home to unimaginable riches.

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<sup>25</sup> Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1989), 76.

<sup>26</sup> Amy Chua, *Day of Empire*, (New York, NY: Doubleday, 2007), 323.

<sup>27</sup> Grover Clark, *A Place in the Sun*, (New York, NY: The MacMillan Company, 1936), 46-47.

<sup>28</sup> Clark, *A Place in the Sun*, 37.

Resources fueled national aspirations, and gold, in particular, fueled war and global prestige early in the nation-state era. Hapsburg European victories and setbacks coincided with substantial increases and decreases in bullion shipments from the New World, respectively.<sup>29</sup> The conquistadors laid the golden foundation for this Spanish imperialism, exporting over 101 metric tons of gold over a 50-year period (surpassing the world's entire holdings at the time) to the treasury of a single monarch.<sup>30</sup> Gold, silver, and other rare treasures abounded in the Spanish Americas.

Frontiers provided hegemony the required human capital to out-perform rivals in economic and military competition. The British Empire in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century comprised 425 million subjects, of which 85% were non-Caucasian and 75% resided in India.<sup>31</sup> By 1670, the Dutch had translated aggressive immigration campaigns into a labor base that owned over 75% of the world's 20,000-ship trade fleet.<sup>32</sup> North American land and slave labor was the great experiment that enabled both the European Miracle and the Industrial Revolution.<sup>33</sup>

Frontiers boosted domestic economies through a variety of methods. State-sponsored European traders dominated Asian competitors in the lucrative markets of Southeast Asia, bringing unique goods to the European continent and boosting patron economies through shipping revenue.<sup>34</sup> Britain leveraged competitive advantages in commodities production to crush developing markets, including their own colonial holdings, with products a hundredfold cheaper than local wares.<sup>35</sup> Britain, Spain and other European powers forced varying degrees of paternal economic dependence on their

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<sup>29</sup> Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1989), 48.

<sup>30</sup> Jean Descola, trans. Malcolm Barnes, *The Conquistadors*, (New York, NY: The Viking Press, 1957), 9, 380.

<sup>31</sup> Lawrence James, *The Rise and Fall of the British Empire*, (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 353.

<sup>32</sup> Amy Chua, *Day of Empire*, (New York, NY: Doubleday, 2007), 164.

<sup>33</sup> Niall Ferguson, *Civilization*, (New York, NY: Penguin Press, 2011), 97.

<sup>34</sup> Nicholas Tarling, ed., *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia*, vol. 2, *From c. 1500 to c. 1800*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 9.

<sup>35</sup> John Darwin, *The Empire Project*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 37.

respective frontier settlements through aggressive mercantilist policy.<sup>36</sup> Frontier imports improved domestic livelihood as well, with natural bounties in spices, furs, tobacco, sugar, and other goods enriching local markets. Stronger domestic and foreign trade economies translated into increased authority within the international system of order.

Improved economic markets provided the boost needed for a state actor to distance itself from the rest of the competition. British strategists and rivals alike admitted that resource gains from colonial expansion was key to Britain's global aspirations.<sup>37</sup> The Dutch built an empire almost exclusively through trade outposts abroad and brilliant international lending practices within Europe.<sup>38</sup> Trading opportunities catalyzed significant strategic gains.

In addition to consumer trade goods, nation-states often exported their domestic social burdens to frontier territories. The British Empire benefitted in multiple ways from the exportation of social burdens abroad. New Zealand, South Africa, and Canada served as a humanitarian outlet for Great Britain, a safety valve that alleviated some of the social and economic consequences caused by rapid domestic population growth.<sup>39</sup> Governments subsidized emigration for lower economic classes, as was the case when Kent paid £14.10 each to 27 citizens for passage to New York.<sup>40</sup> Britain exported its criminal population to Australia (unwilling participants in this colonization experiment outnumbered free settlers and officials alike), harnessing the disenfranchised masses to build an agrarian, paternalistic society.<sup>41</sup> British ingenuity shows how frontiers were premier opportunities for social progress at home and abroad during the nation-state era.

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<sup>36</sup> William S. Maltby, *The Rise and Fall of the Spanish Empire*, (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 161.

<sup>37</sup> Brendan Simms, *Three Victories and a Defeat*, (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2007), 368-369.

<sup>38</sup> Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1989), 78.

<sup>39</sup> Lawrence James, *The Rise and Fall of the British Empire*, (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 307.

<sup>40</sup> James, *The Rise and Fall of the British Empire*, 307.

<sup>41</sup> James, *The Rise and Fall of the British Empires*, 147.

The nation-state era is a strong case for the power of frontier opportunity. New system norms shaped international competition, favoring wealth and power gains via frontier development over the military and economic cost of annexing another European state's sovereign territory. Frontiers presented states an ideal opportunity for domestic gain, as moral, economic, and military reasoning compelled nation-states to seek power through expansion abroad. The world shifted in line with Gilpin's balance-of-power philosophy, as shrinking regional opportunities heralded increased conflict and encroachment between neighboring states.<sup>42</sup> As a result, Britain and other European nations channeled competitive aspirations into imperial expansion overseas.

The new order highlighted by the Peace of Westphalia and the ensuing centuries of state-centric struggle that followed established the ground rules and the playing field for the United States' rise to global dominance. The world's likely last frontier power, US authorities seized frontier opportunities to fuel hegemonic rise within the global system of order. The next section focuses on the American Era of Frontier Development, a paragon of successful and pragmatic frontier exploitation.

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<sup>42</sup>Robert Gilpin, *War & Change in World Politics*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 147.

## CHAPTER 4:

### The American Era

*For some people the term “frontier” may bring to mind only the way west. That is acceptable as long as one remembers that everything from where the Atlantic Ocean breaks upon the shore was west at one time.*

Louis L’Amour, *Frontier*

The United States is the leader of the modern international order. A dominant frontier power, US authority stabilizes a shrinking global society characterized by economic and cultural globalization, unprecedented technological interconnectivity, and established norms governing the interaction of nearly 200 nation-states. US influence spans the globe in a variety of powerful media, ranging from intimidating (forward-deployed military forces) to irresistible (McDonald’s franchise).

The United States began as a humble assortment of overseas colonial holdings. In a span of two centuries, the 13 Colonies conquered the heart of the North American continent and the oceans beyond on a path to hegemony. What began as a European frontier venture became the most powerful military, political, economic, and cultural force in modern history.

Aiding the American cause was the decline of the British Empire, the destabilization of two World Wars, and the rise of international organizations that further delineated the status of frontier territories from established nation-states. British decline left a power vacuum in a world dominated by a competitive European colonial presence in Africa, Asia, and the Americas and complicated by Japanese and Russian aspirations in the Pacific. The US filled this vacuum, aided by the League of Nations and other international organizations aiming to minimize the threat of continuous, unlimited war waged within the European continent and beyond.



The United States did not gain power alone. The international system of nation-states also transitioned over the last 300 years, shifting from a field dominated by monarchic actors towards the varieties of democratic and socialist systems that polarized the world during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. National identities encased by sovereign borders eroded hierarchies based on nobility and enfranchised the masses. In addition, emerging international norms delineated the sovereign status of peer nation-states from the ambiguous administration of frontier societies. The next section describes developments in frontier strategy originating from the contribution of international organizations to the perception and administration of frontier regions. These factors hastened the transition from the fledgling days of the international states system to the mature, complete version of the modern international order.

### **An Aside on the Role of Modern International System Norms**

Regional, international, and global norms reached levels of unprecedented influence during the US-led modern era of international relations. Systemic trends promoting super-national governing organizations and global trends in accepted norms deserve mention in the systemic cost-benefit analysis of US expansion. Globalization of economic markets, innovations in intercontinental and interstate transportation, advancements in cartography, and the birth of modern democratic political institutions all contributed to an environment championing respect of both literal and figurative national boundaries. However, national sovereignty discussions rarely included assets and peoples residing in non-state lands, except in consideration as the property of an established, colonizing state.

Horrific losses from World War I and II also prompted state actors to lend authority to super-national governing entities in the hopes of mitigating future state-on-state conflict. Once again, international system norms effectively disenfranchised the frontier arena through policies striving to demarcate state

authority. A state could expect severe restrictions and threat of coalition retaliation should it choose to violate the sovereign rights of another. In contrast, similar administrative agreements regarding non-state territories and their native residents were often vague, lacking, or absent altogether.

US hegemonic rise is a unique case study because it occurred in a time where unprecedented super-national authorities, such as the League of Nations, UN, and NATO came into being. They are organizations that evidence the rise of the present world order: a complete international states system densely populated by peer actors. Empowered by member states, each agency effectively increases the cost of interstate war through collective security agreements and shared norms condemning large-scale warfare. These international organizations are unique to the American Era and have a continuing impact on international perceptions regarding frontier expansion. For the sake of brevity, the League of Nations and United Nations serve as general characterizations of a larger global movement that redefined the concepts of national sovereignty and frontier.

Rising human, resource, and capital costs from large-scale conventional war catalyzed international cooperation movements and the establishment of formal organizations during the early and mid-1900's. Two US-sponsored entities, the League of Nations and the United Nations, further enfranchised state actors within the norms of major international accords. The birth of the League of Nations in 1919 and founding of the United Nations in 1945 were significant developments in the international administration and interaction with frontier territories.

The horrors from both World War I and II motivated nation-states to seek collective security guarantees through innovative international arrangements. Though the arrangements that became the League of Nations and the United Nations strove to protect the nation-state as the basic unit of international order, their charters diminished the status of non-state territories as they

strengthened state sovereignty rights. The League of Nations was the first of two major international organizations posited by the United States and its allies to stabilize relations within a shaky core of European states.

The League of Nations was an international endeavor that evolved from a segment of Woodrow Wilson's Presidential Senate Address in 1917 and laid the political framework for the 1945 United Nations Charter.<sup>1</sup> Harnessing the momentum of the domestic peace movement, Wilson's "Fourteen Points" cast a strategic vision for a world order stabilized by collective security interests of nation-state actors.<sup>2</sup> The League Covenant focused on preventing interstate conflict through the preservation of territorial and political integrity of its members.<sup>3</sup> Organizational norms enumerated in Article 16 of the Covenant prescribed complete cessation of diplomatic and economic ties with member states violating the prohibition of war.<sup>4</sup> Covenant guidance evidenced a change in international climate that was becoming increasingly hostile toward traditional state vs. state conflict.

This explicit defense of sovereign boundaries, however, only applied to the self-governing lands of the nation-state. Frontier territories fell under jurisdiction of the Mandates Commission, subjugating frontier societies to the scrutiny and administration of Mandatories, advanced nation-state sponsors.<sup>5</sup> The Covenant rated Mandates by potential self-governing capacity, labeling frontier societies as either Category A (nearing statehood), B (in-between), or C (least capable of attaining statehood in the near future).<sup>6</sup> A C verdict from the state-sponsored council legitimized direct administration of the low-scoring C territories by established members of the League.<sup>7</sup> The Mandates

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<sup>1</sup> A. Leroy Bennett and James K. Oliver, *International Organizations: Principles and Issues*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed., (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2002), 28.

<sup>2</sup> Bennett, *International Organizations*, 28.

<sup>3</sup> Bennett, *International Organizations*, 31.

<sup>4</sup> Yale Law School, *The Covenant of the League of Nations*, ([http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/leagcov.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/leagcov.asp)) Accessed 14 April 2015.

<sup>5</sup> A. Leroy Bennett and James K. Oliver, *International Organizations: Principles and Issues*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed., (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2002), 33.

<sup>6</sup> Bennett, *International Organizations*, 32.

<sup>7</sup> Bennett, *International Organizations*, 33.

administration exemplifies how an organization dedicated to the promotion of peace within the covenant of the “sacred trust of civilization” overtly judged and stratified the world’s societies against the measuring stick of statehood. Invariably, frontier lands once again got the short end.

The institution of the League of Nations met an untimely end in the global destruction of World War II. Axis aspirations encouraged the ironic sequel to the “War to End All Wars,” sending the League to its grave with the somber distinction of absolute failure in the pursuit of its peaceful objectives. World War II devastated millions and created generational economic, political, and social effects that shifted the world’s center from its millennia-old seat within the European Continent across the Atlantic for the remainder of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In its place, a power vacuum once again threatened to destabilize rebuilding efforts within war-torn Europe. Fortunately, the thirst for stability and collective security once championed by the League of Nations did not lay dormant long.

The ideals of the League of Nations resurrected from the rubble of World War II with a strong sense of purpose, new members, a more robust enforcement policy, and a new name: The United Nations. Originating in 1945, the UN Charter was an extensive document created with the expressed intent of both learning from past League successes and failures and ushering in a new era of interstate stability.<sup>8</sup> Like the League, the UN concept originated in the United States with the initial Dumbarton Oaks proposals in 1944 and soon gained support within Allied and neutral states.<sup>9</sup> Unlike the League of Nations (and to the relief of the international community), the United States joined the organization as a founding member, where it remains an influential leader to this day.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Bennett, *International Organizations*, 46.

<sup>9</sup> Bennett, *International Organizations*, 46.

<sup>10</sup> Bennett, *International Organizations*, 48.

The similarities between the League of Nations' and United Nations' charters were numerous, beginning with a focus on the protection of state sovereignty. Like the League, the UN drew its security strategy from the idea of collective self-defense, with armed aggression against a member state automatically referred for Security Council consideration.<sup>11</sup> This verbiage served to deter state aggression as well as propagate a system norm adverse to the physical violation of national borders. Additionally, the document codified the sovereign rights of the nation-state by limiting membership to state units, an action that formally established statehood as the near-universally accepted standard for international interaction.<sup>12</sup> Since 1945, the UN proactively advanced a collective security strategy while strengthening and stabilizing the nation-state system of order. Thanks to the near-universal membership of the UN, the state as an institution had never been stronger.

Regrettably, the UN continued the League of Nations trend of marginalizing frontier societies, burying territorial and sovereignty claims deep in the fine print of latter Charter chapters. Contrasting the direct language of Article 2, the Chapter XI Declaration Regarding Non-self-governing Territories makes no mention of collective self-defense, replacing a Security Council ultimatum with a general statement of maintaining "good-neighborliness." The League Mandate concept perseveres in Article 77 as part of the trusteeship system, charging administrative states with the duty of maintaining peace and security within trust territory.<sup>13</sup>

The Charter empowers member territories under the similar principles based on the sovereign equality of its state units in accordance with Article 78.<sup>14</sup> While this notation signifies certain progress in the equal consideration of frontier societies and territory, non-self-governing regions are predominantly outsiders in a system dominated by national self-interest. Charter structure,

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<sup>11</sup> United Nations, *Charter of the United Nations and Statute of the International Court of Justice*, (San Francisco, CA: United Nations, 1945), 10-11.

<sup>12</sup> United Nations, *Charter of the United Nations*, 3.

<sup>13</sup> United Nations, *Charter of the United Nations*, 15-16.

<sup>14</sup> United Nations, *Charter of the United Nations*, 15.

article orders of precedence, and an overt focus on equipping the system to check *interstate* aggression characterizes the UN Charter and a world system that neither views nor administers state and frontier incursions the same way.

### **Ideological Advantage**

The US hegemonic rise is a strong case for the power of ideological advantages of frontier development. Like ancient times, frontier settlements adapted and overcame adversity, unified in an existential struggle and tested by the elements, wilderness, and sporadic conflict with Native American tribes. Frontier romanticism drew interest from New and Old World alike, as countless opportunists spilled out from the constraints of East Coast settlements toward visions of prosperity in the western wilds of the North American Continent.

Early settlers were survivors, and the frontier spirit quickly captivated the urban public with a new and polarizing national motto: expand or die.<sup>15</sup> European cultural, religious, and ethnic superiority themes dominated popular opinion in “Indian-Settler” affairs, punctuating an ironic chapter in a movement dominated by immigrants fleeing Old World limitations in pursuit of liberty and religious freedom. American frontiersmen could do no wrong; in many cases, US military forces came to the defense of adventurous US citizens settling the territorial holdings of other sovereign agencies. The modern states of Tennessee, Kentucky, Texas, Oregon, and California were born from the public consensus of “move first, involve government later,” as European colonial powers and Mexico contended with US military action in defense of citizens homesteading beyond current borders.<sup>16</sup>

European entitlement also enslaved and disenfranchised thousands of frontier inhabitants within their own hereditary lands, while thousands more imported from other frontier continents maximized the resource potential of new territorial acquisitions. Subhuman labels originating with the European

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<sup>15</sup> Robert Morgan, *Lions of the West*, (Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2011), 206.

<sup>16</sup> Morgan, *Lions of the West*, 206.

colonization movement justified domestic policies that tolerated the wholesale purchase and sale of humans as property.<sup>17</sup> Mutual aggression and sensational stories of “Red Man” savagery provided moral impetus for the wholesale butchering of entire villages and legendary massacres like Wounded Knee, Sand Creek, and Camp Grant.<sup>18</sup> Many native and neutral accounts paint a tragic, barbaric, and intolerant picture of American history. Yet frontier messaging provided ample justification for western expansion; motivating generations of new Americans to exploit land and people alike for benefit of country and civility.

The United States also exploited proximity advantages over distant and weakly administered European colonial and Mexican territories. Americans leveraged the geopolitical advantages of domestic borderlands against the long-distance logistical, political, and administrative problems of their adversaries. Value differences between sovereign homeland and distant holdings enabled US negotiators to buy hundreds of thousands of square miles of territory from disinterested foreign hands. Frontier opportunity fueled American expansion for a fraction of the military and economic cost of traditional state competition.

US agents took the initiative *during* national expansion, maximizing a favorable geopolitical environment to exploit the detached foreign competition. American settlers “liberated” Alta California from the bumbling oversight of a distant, uninterested Mexico City; bloodless victories by shrewd but preemptive US forces in the farther reaches of Monterey and San Francisco also gave Mexico pause prior to an official declaration of war.<sup>19</sup> General Andrew Jackson used military force to undermine the Spanish in Florida, attacking forts, replacing Spanish officials with local civilians, and establishing American tax revenue law, effectively ceding the region to American control.<sup>20</sup> Spain retaliated with the 1819 Transcontinental Treaty, trading Spanish Florida and

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<sup>17</sup> Anthony Pagden, *Peoples and Empires*, (New York: Modern Library, 2001), 107.

<sup>18</sup> Larry McMurry, *Oh What a Slaughter*, (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2005), 15.

<sup>19</sup> Robert Morgan, *Lions of the West*, (Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2011), 223; Robert W. Merry, *A Country of Vast Designs*, (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2009), 303.

<sup>20</sup> Samuel J. Watson, *Jackson's Sword*, (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2012), 152-153.

Oregon for Spanish primacy in Texas.<sup>21</sup> Texas left a newly independent Mexico less than 20 years later, eventually joining the US as the 28<sup>th</sup> state in 1845.

The US purchased other territories outright from their disinterested, distant administrators. The Louisiana Purchase happened when British concerns compelled Napoleon Bonaparte to sell French strategic liabilities to eager US buyers for 60 million francs.<sup>22</sup> The Gadsden Purchase added 30,000 square miles from Mexico and southern rail possibilities for \$10 million.<sup>23</sup> Russia received \$7.2 million in exchange for about 570,000 square miles of territory, its coastal islands, the Aleutians, and all the islands in the eastern two-thirds of the Bering Sea.<sup>24</sup> The frontier status of these and other lands enabled a US government purchasing option likely unavailable had the territory been contiguous with a nation's domestic heartland.

Frontiers provided American visionaries with ample ideological advantages to gain the domestic and foreign momentum required to expand from the original 13 colonies to the Pacific seaboard and beyond. The moral benefit to frontier expansion strategies motivated the citizenry to accept the risks required to affect rapid, hegemonic change. Ideological momentum combined with latent and military power gains to propel American society to the top of the international food chain.

Past lessons informed American strategists of the power and latent power possibilities when considering frontier conquest. Violent conflict with Native American forces and European colonialists demonstrate how numerical, organizational, and technological superiority, as well as geopolitical advantage, contributed to victory for US forces. In similar fashion, the American frontier was beneficial for latent power gains in raw resources, human capital,

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<sup>21</sup> Watson, *Jackson's Sword*, 174.

<sup>22</sup> Jon Kukla, *A Wilderness so Immense*, (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003), 256, 354.

<sup>23</sup> Robert W. Merry, *A Country of Vast Designs*, (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2009), 477.

<sup>24</sup> David M. Pletcher, *The Diplomacy of Involvement*, (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2001), 37.



advantaged trading opportunities, and the ability to enhance the social mobility of US citizenry.

### **Military Power Advantage**

The United States military is the most powerful and capable combat organization in history. However, this was not always the case. Prior to usurping the British stake in global supremacy, the leadership of a young America recognized that the shrewd maximization of military advantage was critical to continued development, prosperity, and national survival. To this end, frontier expansion strategy provided ideal military advantages that translated into operational victory in frontier campaigns, economic gains on the domestic home front, and a combined capacity capable of fighting to win in other arenas of international military competition.

Frontier exploitation offered a variety of opportunities for American forces to maximize military power advantages. Numerical, organizational, and technological superiority helped military units unseat local native populations from their ancestral lands, effectively extending the national borders from the eastern Atlantic seaboard to the beaches of the western Pacific. Geographic and geopolitical advantage helped wrest borderlands from long-distant foreign administration. The United States used military advantage over natives to take land and resources by force, gains that would enable the rise of America as both an economic and military superpower. The Plains Indian Wars and other conflicts that occurred in the American wilderness demonstrate the lopsided nature of the military campaigns waged on the American frontier.

The US military boasted significant numerical advantages over the majority of the disjointed Native Americans encountered during the westward expansion movement. Andrew Jackson massed thousands for a formal offensive during the first “Seminole War” in Florida, action that met little armed resistance from Native American, Spanish official, and US defectors alike.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Samuel J. Watson, *Jackson's Sword*, (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2012), 145.

Hardly a battle, the Sand Creek Massacre saw Colonel Chivington send the bulk of a 1,000-strong force against 700 Arapaho and Cheyenne men, women, and children; 163 Cheyenne lost their lives, US losses numbered nine.<sup>26</sup> Historians list the Wounded Knee death tolls for the Sioux and Seventh Cavalry at 146 and 31, respectively.<sup>27</sup>

US forces persecuting both peaceful and violent frontier campaigns were organizationally superior to the majority of their counterparts. Lewis and Clark were Army officers with command experience prior to undertaking President Jefferson's fateful directive to explore, understand, and prepare the American frontier.<sup>28</sup> Senior Field Grade and Flag Officers empowered by extensive combat and executive experience also directed formal military force against isolated tribes with devastating results. Battle-tested legends like General William T. Sherman turned army regulars from the Confederacy to the Plains Indians following the end of the Civil War.<sup>29</sup>

The organizational benefits to waging frontier warfare with federal funds and Army forces also translated into significant technological advantages on the battlefield. American steel and gunpowder helped US soldiers and settlers decimate overmatched bands of capable Native American warriors. The Colt .45 Peacemaker was lethal, portable, and offered six volleys without reloading.<sup>30</sup> Tomahawk, bow, and arrow sufficed for hunting and peer competition, but their capabilities paled when pitted against Springfield rifles. The high firing rate of Winchester repeating rifles confronted military planners and leadership with a new logistical concern of maintaining adequate supplies of ammunition.<sup>31</sup> Perhaps the most dramatic difference in technological

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<sup>26</sup> Sherry Marker, *Plains Indian Wars*, (New York, NY: Facts on File, Inc., 2003), 48-50.

<sup>27</sup> Larry McMurry, *Oh What a Slaughter*, (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2005), 151.

<sup>28</sup> James P. Ronda, *Lewis and Clark among the Indians*, (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), 3.

<sup>29</sup> Sherry Marker, *Plains Indian Wars*, (New York, NY: Facts on File, Inc., 2003), 50.

<sup>30</sup> Sherry Marker, *Plains Indian Wars*, (New York, NY: Facts on File, Inc., 2003), 75.

<sup>31</sup> Marker, *Plains Indian Wars*, 75.

capability, the Seventh Cavalry used a Hotchkiss gun, an early type of machine gun, against the knife-wielding Sioux at Wounded Knee.<sup>32</sup>

In addition to technological, numerical, and organizational momentum, frontiers gave US leadership a geographic and geopolitical advantage in conquering borderlands and extending the expanse of the American nation-state. Napoleon accepted the American advantage in the Louisiana Territory without aggression, eliminating a geopolitical vulnerability while adding \$20 million in preparation for a more pressing British security threat.<sup>33</sup> General Jackson's military forays into the Florida frontier generated limited European military response, concluding with the British and Spanish acceptance of US expansion at the expense of former European territorial holdings.<sup>34</sup> These instances highlight geographic separation and territorial status as major factors influencing the strategic cost-benefit analysis of European leaders.

The American military juggernaut owes its present status to past military successes and territorial expansion, both of which benefitted from frontier development opportunities. The numerical superiority of domestic regular forces often overwhelmed isolated native resistance and detached colonial defenses. Organizational advantage ensured American competency and efficiency in battles fought by professional soldiers under the command of veteran generals. Technological innovations in firepower maximized the impact of both single actors and cohesive units alike in bloody contests over land, resources, and global prestige. Lastly, American geographical advantage in the competition for borderland expansion shifted territorial value away from distant colonial supervision in favor of American stewardship. Frontier-fueled military power gains played a significant role in American hegemonic rise, a trend that continued in the US exploitation of frontier territories for substantial latent power gains.

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<sup>32</sup> Larry McMurtry, *Oh What a Slaughter*, (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2005), 151.

<sup>33</sup> Thomas Fleming, *The Louisiana Purchase*, (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2003), 125.

<sup>34</sup> Samuel J. Watson, *Jackson's Sword*, (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2012), 174-175.

## Latent Power Advantage

The genesis of American hegemony occurred within a fortuitous economic frontier environment blessed by extensive natural resource reserves, human capital possibilities, unique and beneficial trade opportunities, and a high level of social mobility within the citizenry. National expansion provided the developmental potential and economic resources necessary to attain power, prestige, and influence within the international system of nation-states. In this respect, effects from significant economic gains and significant military power advantages catalyzed US hegemonic rise in the domestic frontier and beyond.

Benjamin Franklin summarized the intimate tie between territory and prosperity when he begged British society to secure proper living space for their American colonists.<sup>35</sup> “How careful should she (Britain) be,” he argued, “to secure room enough, since on the room depends so much the increase of her people.”<sup>36</sup> Since the time of the Pilgrims, the United States has expanded its boundaries nearly tenfold, stretching the continental national border between two major oceans and absorbing the natural resource treasures associated with millions of square miles of former frontier.

The resources gained from the annexation of much of the North American frontier enriched and empowered the citizenry beyond the Founders’ wildest dreams. Lumber from Puget Sound, gold from California, and extensive natural gas reserves in the Midwest are just a few of the frontier bounties that made the United States into a world-shaping economic powerhouse.<sup>37</sup> Coal, fish packing, hydroelectric power, and agricultural lands in the Pacific Northwest alone demonstrate a wide array of frontier resources that provided employment opportunities, strengthened domestic and international trade economy, and offered tangible benefit to the national population.<sup>38</sup> These

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<sup>35</sup> Brendan Simms, *Three Victories and a Defeat*, (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2007), 394.

<sup>36</sup> Simms, *Three Victories and a Defeat*, 394.

<sup>37</sup> Joseph Schafer, *A History of the Pacific Northwest*, (New York, NY: The Macmillan Company, 1951), 203-209.

<sup>38</sup> Schafer, *A History of the Pacific Northwest*, 270-280.

expanses gave the United States a distinct economic advantage that translated into valuable prestige within the international system of order.

Human capital, in particular the slave trade, was a sobering yet historic enabler for the development of vast lands in the American south and beyond. African slave labor tilled vast acreage in the southern states, bolstering the economy of a young United States.<sup>39</sup> Native Americans worked alongside Africans in forced servitude in southern states like South Carolina, where Tuscarora and other local tribes comprised one third of the total slave population.<sup>40</sup> Frontiers, both at home and abroad, provided ample supplies of human capital to develop untamed lands, lands that settlers later domesticated for the societal expansion of an American nation stretching westward.

The United States leveraged frontier opportunities to establish beneficial trading relationships, both with native peoples and with other interested nations. The economic potential of an American-Sioux trading allegiance held important domestic value for President Jefferson, both for its positive domestic implications and its exclusivity clauses limiting the ability of European imperial rivals.<sup>41</sup> 100 years later, Pacific frontier holdings in Alaska, Hawaii, Guam, and other island regions accounted for billions of dollars in foreign and inter-territorial trade.<sup>42</sup> In the case of Hawaii, Americans nearly owned the Kingdom outright as early as 1863, controlling nearly all major sugar plantations, half the merchant fleet, and over four-fifths of the region's trade.<sup>43</sup> America pioneered new forms of mercantilism abroad, blending free market advantages with protectionist policies to boost the mutually beneficial vitality of both domestic and frontier economic holdings.

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<sup>39</sup> John Darwin, *The Empire Project*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 96.

<sup>40</sup> Sherry Marker, *Plains Indian Wars*, (New York, NY: Facts on File, Inc., 2003), 24.

<sup>41</sup> James P. Ronda, *Lewis and Clark among the Indians*, (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), 29.

<sup>42</sup> Julius W. Pratt, *America's Colonial Experiment*, (New York, NY: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1950), 243.

<sup>43</sup> David M. Pletcher, *The Diplomacy of Involvement*, (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2001), 47.

Frontiers not only allowed for the physical expansion of national boundaries, but also provided means to attain greater social mobility for the American citizenry. The “Wagons West” motto signified American character and propensity for risk-taking, adventurousness, and the insatiable pursuit of untapped opportunities. Individuals stagnated in the set social strata of urban life could leave a dismal certainty to set out in hopes of striking gold, finding oil, or with simpler aspirations like homesteading and cultivating a liberated plot of frontier. Soldier-settlers also found success in colonization methods resembling the Han of ancient China, as Army officers brought their families with them to domesticate the outer fringes of frontier and civilization alongside adventurous civilian homesteaders.<sup>44</sup>

National boundaries were not strong enough to stop the determined American flood of immigrants; armed farmers often crossed international boundaries without passport or permission, creating a diplomatic nightmare for Spanish, Mexican, and American relations.<sup>45</sup> Regarding annexation debates, Americans often voted with their feet, with government policy merely following and formalizing the free initiatives of thousands trekking west.<sup>46</sup> Regardless of legal sanction, the US citizenry exploited the political no-man’s land of territorial administration, displacing imperial colonial presence and native societies alike in romantic pursuit of the American Dream.

Much of the modern character of the United States and its people reflects the emotional determination and courage of thousands of homesteaders, politicians, soldiers, and integrated societies to harness the power of frontier possibility for their own. In addition, the international system of order evolved alongside the development of the United States, creating norms that fortuitously favored American methods of strategic expansion via frontier exploitation. Traditional principles fused with new advantage, creating a formidable set of ideological, military, and latent power opportunities that

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<sup>44</sup> Sherry Marker, *Plains Indian Wars*, (New York, NY: Facts on File, Inc., 2003), 78.

<sup>45</sup> Samuel J. Watson, *Jackson’s Sword*, (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2012), 39.

<sup>46</sup> Robert Morgan, *Lions of the West*, (Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2011), 206.

pushed a disaggregated group of colonial and Native American holdings into global consideration, eventually rising to the top of the international order.

The United States model is a blueprint for the frontier-fueled possibilities of competitive expansion. Historical analysis supports a compelling argument for frontier relevancy in state competition, evidenced most strongly by the definitive rise of the world's hegemon. The American era is a fitting end to the fascinating trend in frontier development strategies that spanned the course of ancient civilizations to the present day.



## CHAPTER 5:

### Hegemonic Rise in a Frontierless World

*And now, four centuries from the discovery of America, at the end of a hundred years of life under the Constitution, the frontier has gone, and with its going has closed the first period of American history.*

Frederick Jackson Turner  
*The Frontier in American History*

Frontier territory is an endangered species in today's international system. There are currently 193 member states in the United Nations, with nearly every square inch of populated land falling within the formal, recognized boundary of one of these states.<sup>1</sup> Formal nation-states aside, there are also 72 "dependent areas and other entities" participating in the global political system.<sup>2</sup> Considering the current number of established nation-states and the provision in Article 78 of the UN Charter allowing territories to gain membership and informal entrance into the "national sovereignty" club, the number of exploitable territories is at a record low.<sup>3</sup> The era of traditional frontier development and exploitation is at an end.

The preceding chapters chronicled the journey of influential civilizations, making the case that frontier development strategies benefitted aspiring hegemony in the three critical areas of ideological advantage, military, and latent power within the suzerain and international states systems. Pre-nation-state empires exploited frontiers in an environment where the biggest threat was either a distant, rival civilization or internal insurrection. Nation-state powers used frontier strategies to minimize the threat of coalition balancing and avoid correction at the hands of the fledgling international state system of order. The United States mastered the art of frontier exploitation and

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations, "*The United Nations*", (accessed April 18, 2015, <http://www.un.org/en/sections/about-un/overview/index.html>).

<sup>2</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, "*The World Factbook*", (accessed April 18, 2015 <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/xx.html>).

<sup>3</sup> United Nations, *Charter of the United Nations and Statute of the International Court of Justice*, (San Francisco, CA: United Nations, 1945), 15.



effectively rose within an international system destabilized by the chaos of World War II.

Since then, the world order has matured into a complete international states system, a fact substantiated by a United Nations Charter that establishes peer sovereignty within its participating actors, state and non-state alike. The broadened application of sovereignty creates a modern order densely packed with recognized state and territorial societies. Peer status extension to participating territories, coupled with a historic number of formally recognized nation-state units, has shrunk the number of frontier territorial development options. Considering this, the modern order has been relatively stable during major stints as both a bipolar and unipolar system. Unless the trend of the past century reverses or another world war occurs, the frontier variable of hegemonic rise is essentially absent for the first time in the history of humanity, squeezed out by the unprecedented density of the state system.

What is an aspiring hegemon to do? Unbeknownst to most, the world after 1945 has quietly slipped into uncharted territory. Today's international system writ large is devoid of frontier opportunity where aspiring Powers have no option but to risk system balancing for domestic expansion efforts made at the expense of other states. Given the new standard of international system "density", the costs of state expansion are at an all-time high.<sup>4</sup> New hegemon would be hard-pressed to rise in traditional form under such hostile conditions. Something has to give.

Today's environment offers several possible options for an aspiring hegemon. The most difficult and likely impossible course is to refrain from hegemonic competition. Since this will probably not happen, other paths become increasingly probable.

One possibility is a globalized, destabilizing event. This could come in the form of universal environmental catastrophe, a planetary impact scare from

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<sup>4</sup> Robert Gilpin, *War & Change in World Politics*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 147.

an extinction-level asteroid, or even a slow-growing burn in the guise of overpopulation and the associated dash for limited resources. History also chronicles past instances of large-scale destabilization in the wake of world war. Regardless of cause, a global event that upends the international order may catalyze a hegemon's rise without the benefit of frontier options.

Another possibility is that traditional frontiers reappear. This can happen in several ways. The polar ice could melt in the Antarctic Continent, tipping off a strategic race for vast stores of land and resources. Internal and external factors could cause a nation-state to devolve into a frontier-style administration. China, the United Arab Emirates, and other nations currently demonstrate the technological prowess to build new frontiers, creating islands in territorial waters through various innovative techniques. The renewed availability of frontier options would better approximate the traditional competitive environment of past hegemonies.

The most likely course, however, is that the traditional definition of frontier (as it appears in this argument) changes. The uninhabited, resource-rich space environment draws many comparisons from wilderness romantics, generating the informal title as the "Final Frontier." Another form of the frontier exists within the limitless realm of evolving cyberspace. Globalization and interdependent economic markets give states new means to exploit the resources and leverage trade advantage of developing regions without the public scrutiny of forcefully annexing territory. Oceans and airspace are currently hot legal topics in the struggle to wrest exclusive resource rights from the possession of rival states and the international commons. These and many other variations are likely to occur. The very characteristics that make the word frontier impossible to restrict to a singular definition speak to the future possibilities.

Regardless of method, hegemonic rise and fall is likely to continue, in one form or another, as it has since the birth of recorded history. To this point,

this thesis has argued the relevance of frontier development strategies to the success of Great Powers. Historical analysis suggests the status of frontier exploitation as an ever-present consideration and factor in the success and decline of empires, past and present. The relevance of frontiers deserves due consideration as global competition proceeds into a new era that is now missing an environmental variable present since the beginning of humanity. The unknown possibilities are frightening, yet strangely wild, liberated, and beautiful...a fitting conclusion to the case for *terra nullius*.



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