

John G Bell
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Book Response
McCormick – *America's Half Century*. Part 1

The Two Brains

There's a consistent theme of opposition, pairs of values linked together, in this book. In the forward, it is pointed out that US policies “attempt to serve two (sometimes divergent) masters: domestic imperatives and systemic needs.” [McCormick xi] The preface foreshadows a primary focus on an “uneasy tension – the mix of coexistence and competition – between the internationalist imperatives of the economic system and the nationalist predilections of the political system...” [McCormick xvii-xviii]

Specific examples of this dichotomy can be found throughout the book. Introduction to some examples can be found in opposition between “[h]egemony and the balance of power” [McCormick 5], “greater elitism” and “residual pluralism” [McCormick 7], “national security” and “economic internationalism” [McCormick 9], the big picture of the in-and-outers and the narrow expertise of career bureaucrats [McCormick 14], “contrary impulses to isolate ... or integrate ... into the world-system” [McCormick 60].

Each of these echoes a struggle between two modes of thinking, two conflicting drives, discussed in *Why We Love War* by Lawrence LeShan. These two modes of thought are an impulse toward individualism and an impulse toward community which appear “through modern textbooks on psychology, sociology, and anthropology.”

“One central human tension is the problem of how to be both an individual and a part of the larger group. [...] On the one hand is the drive to be more and more unique and individual, to heighten one's experience and being. On the other hand is the drive to be part of something larger, a full-fledged member of the tribe.” [LeShan]

The conflict between these two drives are historically resolved by war and wartime consciousness. The struggles for economic, military and ideological dominance examined in

America's Half-Century are between factions that appear to embody elements of these two fundamental human drives.

Economy, Military and Ideology

There is a consistent framework used in America's Half-Century that looks for economic, militaristic and ideological elements. This trifecta is introduced as a checklist for consolidating hegemonic power.

“Beyond mere economic power, it [a hegemonic hopeful] must process clear military superiority and ideological hegemony as well. By fear or respect, it must be able to exert its political will over the rest of the system and command deference to its principles and policies.”

[McCormick 5]

This framework appears in the three-part solution to a cycle of concentration and dispersion in hegemonic control. Brook Adams addresses problems raised in his 1895 book *The Law of Civilization and Decay* by posing three solutions in his 1900 book *American Economic Supremacy*. [McCormick 17-18] In the second book, Adams describes “a rapid and peaceful transition from British hegemony to American preponderance” [McCormick 18] by noting the development of American economic dominance, a change in dominant ideology, and proposing that America could complete the transition of power by assuming military dominance as a policing power in the world. [McCormick 19] The realization of dominance in these three areas were “necessary preconditions for American hegemony.” [McCormick 22]

Success in these three areas also creates a downside. After WWII, there is a growing sense of importance linked to a “giddiness” over dominance of the world-system. [McCormick 47] This dominance, in turn, becomes a source of arrogance. [McCormick 47-48] Later, it becomes a framework for direct control over the reemergence of states like Germany [McCormick 61], military control through NATO [McCormick 93], and even a framework for addressing reindustrialization and reconstruction. [McCormick 93-95] Further, inability of states like Russia to overcome economic and ideological weaknesses with a strong military created a “modern and

fearsome yet backward and ineffectual” [McCormick 60] society is a key example of the framework's interdependence in seeking hegemonic control.

By extension, the key to addressing the recurring rise of hegemonic power is to dismantle it at each of the three points. The ability of one entity, whether a single state or group of states, to develop hegemonic power could possibly be thwarted by focusing on decentralizing control and development of world economic, military and ideological dominance.

Gateways

“Our military forces will work with our commercial forces to obtain as much of the world trade as we can lay our hands on. We will occupy all the strong strategic-points in the world and try to maintain a force so preponderant that none shall dare attack us. ... Potential power over other nations, however benevolent its purpose, leads inevitably to imperialism” - Taft [McCormick 70]

One of the recurring themes in America's Half-Century is the strategic gateways that exist and need to be controlled to counterbalance some external force: Germany to Russia [McCormick 67 et al.], Japan to China [McCormick 58 et al.], and perhaps even the Canal Zone to Central America [McCormick 20]. These strategic pivot points are between larger entities appear essential for both containment of an opposition force and as an entering wedge to force change within that opposite.

Of course, the one most relevant to current events is the constant struggle in the Middle East. This area is mentioned as a strategic focus for the Axis powers, during WWII. The Persian Gulf was potentially the place where Germany's Eurasian dominance would link with Japan's dominance in Asia. [McCormick 31] Mentioned in passing several times is the place of Israel as a gateway of control over the Middle East itself. This gateway function balances the potential economic domination by the oil producing nations. It's an interesting, if superficial, link that the Middle East was a key location of strategic importance to the Axis powers in WWII and now is the primary battle ground in the “War on Terror” against the “Axis of Evil.” I wonder if the term “Axis of

Evil” isn't intentionally revisiting the historic emphasis on the Middle East in the battle against the Axis powers, a bizarre kind of nostalgic justification.

These gateway points are consistent and recurring external locations of economic, military and ideological conflict and it appears to be an important element in America's Half-Century that there is a link between the conflicts in those regions no matter how separated in time they may occur.

Works Cited

LeShan, Lawrence. Why We Love War. Utne Jan-Feb 2003. pp53-58
McCormick, Thomas J. America's Half-Century.