



In the Shadows of the American Century: The Rise and Decline of US Global Power

Alfred W. McCoy

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This valuable contribution to geopolitical discourse draws important lessons from history.

Alfred W. McCoy is perhaps best known for his valuable books on the CIA's role in the Southeast Asian opium trade and on Cold War-era torture. He effectively leverages his expertise in those areas to craft *In the Shadows of the American Century*. In this cogent analysis, McCoy describes how a century of foreign-policy decisions paved the way for the decline of the United States as an empire, and outlines several possible outcomes for the coming decades.

Starting with the Spanish-American War, this historical analysis examines the methods that the United States used to expand its global role, particularly after World War II. McCoy explains how decisions like drone policies in the Middle East, the torture of innocents during the invasion of Iraq, allowing the drug trade to fund warlords, and the support of unpopular dictators have irrevocably weakened the "soft power" advantage that the United States once enjoyed around the world.

He clearly notes the ways in which the rise and fall of American imperial power mirror those of earlier empires, while explaining how decades of covert action by the United States government make its experience unique.

McCoy keeps the book from becoming too academic by including personal stories. As a student at Yale, he wrote a book about covert CIA action in Laos during the Vietnam War; here, he details how the agency interfered in his academic life, got him audited by the IRS, tapped his phone, and tried to prevent the book from seeing the light of day. Beyond its excellent analysis, this and other anecdotes make the book engaging.

McCoy predicts a future in which China substantially expands its global reach, and he lays out policy options for the United States that could (at best) see the country retaining spheres of continuing influence, or (at worst) fully cede geopolitical leadership to a rising China.

In the Shadows of the American Century is a valuable contribution to geopolitical discourse that draws important lessons from history.

JEFF FLEISCHER (September/October 2017)

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