

Easternization - Asia's Rise and America's Decline - From Obama to Trump and Beyond

A Book Review

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Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [History](#)

The premise of Easternization concerning Asia's rise is a topic of prime importance for those following global foreign affairs. Gideon Rachman's overall and very direct theme is that of the rise of Asia as the world rebalances from colonialism.

Rachman's second premise, a "prejudice" he acknowledges, "is largely a positive view of the role of American power in the world." So my mind right away reads a contradiction in ideas, as rebalancing from colonialism is for the contemporary world a rebalancing from the neocolonialism perpetrated and perpetuated by the U.S. Reading Easternization then becomes an exercise in examining Rachman's discourse in light of his obvious view of U.S. imperial exceptionalism.

Immediately - the very next sentence - is the usual 'we are doing good, but made some mistakes' that tends to serve for apologists of U.S. global behaviours, as "there is no denying that, over the decades, the United States has committed terrible wrongs in the exercise of its power," yet "U.S. power has seemed to me to represent a better foundation for a just world," using the Soviet Union (now dead and gone) and China as the "obvious" bad alternatives. Rachman indicates "without dominant powers and guided solely by the rule of law," the "multipolar world is already emerging and proving to be unstable and dangerous."

My oh my, I love these imperial apologetics. U.S. good. Rest of the world (except for sycophantic governments elsewhere) bad.

Asia out of context

There are two main areas - other than the fallacy of needing a global hegemon for a just world - where the arguments fall apart. The main one is the lack of context, mainly because if context had been included, the arguments for being a force for good fall apart completely. Certainly much of what he says is true, but only in the limited context in which it is presented.

When discussing southeast Asia he argues about Indonesia having "enjoyed years of rapid economic growth," that "wars of decolonization gave way to bloody struggles of the Cold War," and neighbouring Cambodia was "destabilized," and the "bloodletting" of Suharto's Indonesian coup and the invasion of East Timor by Indonesia. Great, nice summary but...

...but what about the U.S. role in all this? The "terrible wrongs" in this region are primarily the fault of the U.S., not for freedom and democracy but for global control of resources,

economies, and sycophantic governments. The U.S. took over France's colonial war for Vietnam, recognizing its natural resources and strategic positioning vis a vis China. Cambodia was "destabilized" by a massive and continuous bombing campaign during the Vietnam war. The Indonesian coup was instigated by the CIA, with the "suspected communists" mainly being anyone who was against the government - teachers, lawyers, union organizers - or who worked the land - the peasants and indigenous people working the land for a subsistence living. Sure Indonesia's economy has seen "rapid growth" - that is what happens when a neoliberal austerity regime takes over and allows large transnational corporations to rape the land, pollute everything, and pay a pittance for wages to those kicked off their homelands.

Africa out of context

The lack of context is global, as need be to protect the U.S.' global spread. Rachman is formerly a writer for the Economist, and refers to it concerning Africa: "After the Ethiopian famine, the Rwandan genocide, the civil wars in Somalia and Congo, and Zimbabwe's descent into despotism, it was hard to find much optimism about Africa...." Later he argues about Africom, its "establishment had a lot to do with the emergence of terrorists threat in Africa." Again, great, nice summary in a teaspoon, but what about the whole pot?

The U.S. has had a hand in all these areas of conflict. It started in 1961 with the CIA instigated assassination of Patrice Lumumba (and later that of Dag Hammarskjöld) in the Congo in order to protect western interests in the region, being again mostly natural resources and cheap labour. It continues on through to today (in the 2016 terms of the publication of this book) with Ethiopia intermingled with the wars in Sudan, Somalia, Eritrea and other areas of U.S. interference. The terrorist threat is a largely U.S. instigated due to its destruction of various governments, in particular Libya, and for its own hidden support for the terrorist groups it covertly sponsors in the region. For democracy? Not a whit - for control of African resources and strategic positioning for transportation and Eurasian containment.

Latin America out of context

Surely Latin America is an area where outright colonialism, let alone "terrible wrongs" and neocolonialism, should easily be recognized. After the U.S.' own revolution for independence, South America shook off the Spanish yoke of Spanish control and largely consolidated its independence - fractured as it was - by 1830. It was in 1823 the U.S. applied the Monroe Doctrine against outside powers - other than themselves - interfering in South America. Any interference was to be considered an act of aggression against the U.S. How convenient - colonialism of the second order, also to be noted that Bolivar was against slavery while the U.S. was still very much accepting of slavery. Rachman's history is very abbreviated, "Throughout the Cold War the United States had fought to combat Russian power in Latin America. - acting often ruthlessly, from Nicaragua to Cuba to Chile."

Ruthlessly indeed. In Guatemala in 1953 the CIA instigated the overthrow of the democratically elected Arbenz government, setting off decades of covert and overt operations against the people of Guatemala in favour of - at the time - United Fruit (Chiquita). Since then all Latin American countries have had some form of covert or overt attack by the U.S. CIA and black operatives to overthrow governments for the people to install governments for the corporations and the U.S. Really, this is a much "better

foundation” than leaving countries to their own devices and emerging democracy.

Yes the U.S. has committed “terrible wrongs” around the world, but not because of good intentions for “rule of law” or democracy or some other platitudinous rhetoric. The other area where Rachman’s arguments fall apart are simply on his main topic. Certainly his thesis is happening, the ‘east is rising’, but it is presented in military type terms, making both China and Russia appear as the main antagonists, with the U.S. being the grand defender of global harmony.

China and Russia

China of course is the main contender within Easternization, but Russia incurs the most of Rachman’s wrath.

The China argument starts with a differentiation between nationalism and democracy in China, which is entirely specious as the U.S. presents itself as the most democratic society in all its exceptionalism while at the same time inculcating a nationalism in all its patriotic children. He indicates that China is “fundamentally unstable” without any real background to that argument other than to say that “some combination of economic problems, political upheaval, and regional tensions may eventually stop the country’s rise – or even cause it to break up,” the latter being the obvious U.S. choice if actions in Yugoslavia and the Middle East are indicators.

Reading between the lines and understanding Rachman’s belief in the U.S. as global hegemon, the breakup and control of China is an obvious goal, not for democracy, but for Asian resources, cheap labour, and to isolate Russia in order to give it the same treatment. While China is viewed as a “threat” it is the latter, the breakup of Russia, which receives the most vitriol from this discourse.

The anger against Russia reflects the century long hatred the U.S. government has created towards anything to do with Russia. Domestically it started with the many attacks against “bolshevik” labour unions, followed by the hope that Germany and Russia would simply exhaust each other in the Second World War, followed immediately by the creation of the Cold War (with plans to make a nuclear attack on Russia preceding their usage on Japan) and the travesty of the McCarthy era, to be followed by the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, the depredations created by the U.S. shock doctrine during the Yeltsin years (his “failed state” argument), and ultimately and finally the collapse of the Soviet Union and the “end of history.”

But then along came the ferocious little fellow named Putin, and the rage against his evil desires continues. It is with his Russian arguments that Rachman loses any credentials left for having a reasoned critical analysis of the global situation. His turn of language and outright lies concerning Russian actions simply reflects his exceptionalist credentials to those of the typical Russia bashing fear mongering mainstream so typical of U.S. media today.

In the introduction Rachman argues “For two decades after the end of the Cold War, the United States and the EU based policy on the hope that Russia would join the community of Western democratic, capitalist nations.” to be fair, he does say later on that “there is some historical and contemporary evidence for the suggestion that Western leaders were so confident of their victory...that they felt little need to accommodate Russian concerns” and

“treated Russia with neglect and disdain.” Yeah, sort of there, but missing the whole Yeltsin shock doctrine debacle perpetrated on the country by western corporate capitalists and politically oriented academics (notably Jeffrey Sachs). Russia would only be welcomed into the “western community” if it became fully subservient to U.S. interests.

Russia is “ruthless” (hey, so was the U.S. in Latin America), “angry”, a “military threat”, and Putin was filled with “rage and humiliation.” He says “Russia’s population of 150 million is falling,” that it has a “moribund economy”, and is a “declining power.” None of which is true.

His history follows the typical U.S. centric view, speaking of the “invasion” of Georgia, the “revolution” in Ukraine and its “violent repressions”, along with the “separatists” shooting down the jetliner, the “annexation” of Crimea, and the “land grab” in eastern Ukraine.

Georgia attacked South Ossetia and its cohort of Russian defenders, resulting in the Russian counterattack, which could have taken all of Georgia had he wished, but didn’t. Ukraine was subject to a CIA/NSA sponsored coup, with the neonazi favorites fomenting the violent repression in the Maidan, while the separatists in eastern Ukraine were simply trying to defend themselves from attacking neonazi militias and Ukrainian army regulars wanting to ethnically cleanse the area of its Russian population. Not a land grab, mostly assistance to an endangered group of people. The cause of the jetliner shoot down, has remained indeterminate as the recorded documents have never been released. Crimea voted to ask for association with Russia, and the Duma accepted the proposal, no annexation necessary. Crimea, since the fall of the Soviet Union, had always wanted to be distanced from Ukrainian power in Kiev.

Same old, same old

What finally happens within Easternization is the realization that Rachman wishes to maintain the status quo of U.S. dominance. He bases his argument on the tried and not true aphorism “the rule of law” used by most western countries wanting to attack another country in some way. But what this rule of law amounts to is the freedom of the military-industrial-corporate-financial complex to operate however, whenever, and wherever in the world, under the protection of the U.S.military.

For it is the U.S., according to Rachman, that needs to have the “global security role”, to have the “role of global policeman,” and as he says himself in support of my contra-indicators, it is “a question of military power and economic muscle come to the fore.” Somehow Rachman sees that as “morally defensible and strategically feasible,” in spite of its horrible moral record left out of his context, and while it might be strategically feasible, it is only thus so while endangering the world to U.S. plans for a first strike nuclear war as conventional war will not do it.

In other words, it is the same old story of the U.S. military supporting U.S. corporate greed throughout the world for the enrichment of the few, while harvesting the labour and the resources of the rest of the world.

Rachman’s Easternization is an interesting read, but only good for tried and true exceptionalists.

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