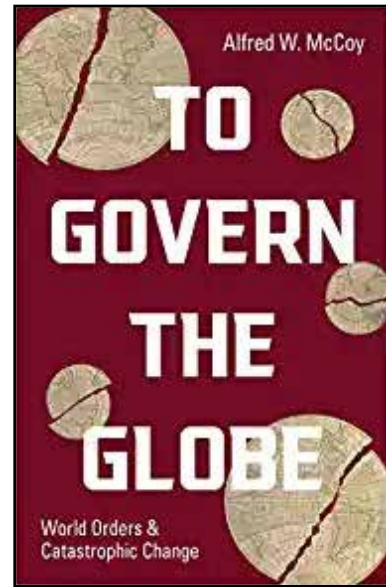


To Govern the Globe, World Orders and Catastrophic Change.
Alfred McCoy. Haymarket Books, Chicago, 2021.

Review By Ed Meek

To better understand what is going on in the world these days, as well as how we got here and where we're going, get a copy of Alfred McCoy's brilliant new book *To Govern the Globe*. McCoy is the author of *Policing America's Empire*. In his new book, he takes on the challenge of covering the last 800 years from the perspective of the rise and fall of empires, and more importantly, of world orders leading up to Pax Americana and the current decline of the United States. He describes convincingly the coming dominance of China and the world-wide problem of climate change that will undermine China's future as we collectively attempt to survive a hostile environment—one that we're beginning to understand the serious nature of as we witness wildfires, flooding, droughts, hurricanes, record heat, shifting seasons and climate refugees.



Reading about the conflicts of the last eight centuries, you might come away with the feeling that those of us residing in Europe and North America have been experiencing a brief utopian interlude and that the norm is a constant state of war and conflict. The invasion of Ukraine by Russia fits right into a history of imperial conquest and is a response to the break-up of the Soviet Union and the wars, proxy wars, and CIA actions conducted by the US in the Middle East and Southeast Asia. This is not to justify the Russian attempt to reclaim Ukraine but McCoy provides us with some perspective on the game of thrones played by powerful countries through history. As Circe said to Ned just before he lost his head, "You win or you die."

According to McCoy, world orders are "deeply rooted, resilient global systems created by a convergence of economic, ideological and geopolitical forces." These may begin with an empire but often live on after it. They tie into our views of human rights and sovereignty. McCoy claims "there have been just three world orders: the Iberian age after 1494, the British imperial era from 1815, and Washington's world system from 1945." He also makes the case that the coming world order will belong to China beginning around 2030.

World orders, explains McCoy, have come into existence because of some combination of terrible events like pandemics or major wars that create a power vacuum combined with new developments in labor, technology and weapons. The Iberian Age was partly engendered by the advent of The Black Death that swept east from Asia causing the demise of 60% of Europe's population. Meanwhile the Portuguese and the Spanish had built small, swift ships capable of sailing long distances. The Portuguese

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sailed south establishing ports in Africa and around the horn to the Indian ocean and Asia and on to China while the Spanish as well as the Portuguese headed west to America. They were religious zealots acting with the Pope's stamp of approval to enslave all heathens. They bought captives from Africa and shipped them to the Caribbean and North America creating a world order that depended on slavery to engineer economies based on sugar and cotton. The Portuguese and Spanish were brutal in their treatment of Africans, Incas and Aztecs using superior weaponry to enslave Africans and to plunder gold and silver from the Incas and Aztecs.

Eventually they lost control of their empire when the Dutch, harnessing wind for with windmills and building better ships for warfare, defeated the Spanish Armada and established the first international corporation in the Dutch East India Company. They in turn were replaced the British who developed the steam engine and coal mining leading to the Industrial Revolution and defeating Napoleon to end his short-lived empire. This began the second world order and jump-started climate change.

Because of the industrial revolution, the British no longer needed slavery and they took a moral stance outlawing the slave trade in 1804. They began seizing ships and freeing the captives. At the same time, they developed a navy superior to the Spanish and the Dutch and began spreading their empire around the globe. They focused on colonizing countries in Africa, India, North America, Australia, New Zealand with the attitude that colonists were second class citizens subject to rule by the British Empire.

The sun finally set on the British empire during World War II. While the rest of the world suffered 77 million casualties, the United States continued to grow and develop to emerge as the most powerful nation. After the war, the US helped draft "the UN Charter that promised its peoples the freedom to form their own states ... and universal human rights." This was America's finest moment promoting freedom and individual rights around the globe.

At the same time, the US, like all of the preceding empires, engaged in geopolitics to establish global hegemony. Geopolitics, McCoy tells us is "the use of geography (air, land, and sea) to maximize military and economic advantage." The US, following in the footsteps of past empires stationed its navy and its troops strategically around the world, from Europe to the Middle East and Southeast Asia to maintain open markets for the flow of goods.

Whenever threats to the empire appeared to be developing, the US used the CIA to depose objectionable leaders. These interventions did not often work out well. We replaced elected pro-communist Mossadegh in Iran with a pro-western Shah resulting in anti-American sentiment that continues today. McCoy points out that we fomented Muslim unrest in central Russia that resulted in Russia's invasion of Afghanistan leading to the collapse of the Soviet Union. Like the British, French and Portuguese before us, we got involved in faraway wars wasting lives, and treasure in Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan.

Thinking we could free the world with global trade, we opened markets to Russia and China. Rather than proving mutually beneficial, both

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countries, China in particular exploited the weaknesses of capitalism by controlling and taking over markets while using the profits to educate its people and expand its power through the Belt and Road Initiative developing business in Africa and linking Asia to Europe and Russia. McCoy predicts that China will supplant the US by 2030 as the number one economy and power in the world.

Now Putin has disturbed the force by invading Ukraine like an imperialist from the 19th century.

The somewhat surprising result is that the US and NATO have reaffirmed their alliance and NATO has pledged to build up their military. Perhaps the US and Europe have more of a future than McCoy predicts.

If McCoy is right about China, the transition will not be easy since the Chinese have a much different world view than the United States. They prioritize their economy and centralized power, but they do not prize individual freedom or human rights. Nor do they approve of open oceans or free trade. McCoy thinks their hegemony will be short-lived though because of the growing global problem of climate change. 57% of China's energy comes from coal. The connection between coal mining and electricity, begun by the British in the Industrial revolution remains strong in China, India and Australia. Through the twentieth century the US continued the development of industry using coal, oil and gas. Although fossil fuels led to better lives and prosperity for millions of people around the world, they have heated up our atmosphere and our oceans creating climate problems that the prime offenders, China and the US, do not appear to be willing to take on.

McCoy makes dire predictions about how bad it will get by 2050 based on studies by thousands of scientists. The glimmer of hope lies with those willing to make the changes necessary for the survival of humans, animals and vegetation. To Govern the Globe can be read as a clarion call to take action.