

## Rise and Fall of the American Empire: Quigley's *The Evolution of Civilization Applied*.

S. Joseph Kowalski, May 16, 2009

Carroll Quigley in his *The Evolution of Civilizations: An Introduction to Historical Analysis* concludes that all successful civilizations follow a six step process. A civilization needs to be born (the *Mixture* stage). Its youth is called the *Gestation* stage. The most important stage is the *Expansion* stage, similar to the vigorous youth of an individual. The age of *Conflict* stage is equivalent to the human's middle age slowdown. The *Universal Empire* stage signifies that the civilization has entered its sclerotic senior-citizen age. *Universal Empire* stage is followed by *Decay*, the same as a human's old age. Lastly is death, the stage of *Invasion*.<sup>i</sup>

Where is Western civilization in its life cycle? Has it started a fourth cycle of *Expansion-Conflict*? Or, has it entered the *Universal Empire* stage? If so, is the American Empire the *Universal Empire* of Western civilization? What is the status of the American Empire? Is it growing economically? Or, is it decaying? Geopolitically, is it still increasing its political muscle? Or, is it on its downhill slide? Where are we?

This essay will argue that: Western civilization is still mired in the age of *Conflict*; the United States became the *Universal Empire* at the conclusion of World War II; Western civilization was not fortunate to have a fourth period of *Expansion*; and, the United States has a high probability of entering its age of *Decay*.

In 1966, Carroll Quigley postulated two scenarios for the Western civilization: first, Reorganization – A Fourth Expansion starting in 1944; or, second, Continuation of the Process – Universal Empire (the United States), then Decay followed by Invasion (end of the civilization).<sup>ii</sup> My belief is that starting at the end of World War II, the United States became the *Universal Empire* of Western Civilization, and, further that for the United States, the current global credit crisis and the accompanying global economic downturn may be the precursor for Western Civilization's age of *Decay*.

Western civilization, of which the United States is a part, has been following Carroll Quigley's six step civilization process. It's *Mixture* period, 300-750 CE, arose in Western Europe with the mixing of four groups: those from the Classical civilization (the western part of the Roman Empire); Christians and Jews; barbarians (such as, the Germanic tribes); and the Saracens (those from North Africa and the Middle East). When it obtained its "instrument of expansion" it embarked on its prosperous period, the first stage of its three *Expansions*, which lasted from 970 to 1300 CE. Middle age took over and Western Civilization entered the *Age of Conflict* stage. Uniquely, Western Civilization has had three lives. It had two more cycles of *Expansion* and *Conflict*. The second stage of Expansion lasted from 1420- 1650 (the Renaissance period) and its companion *Conflict* stage from 1650-1815. The third stage of *Expansion* began in 1770 and

lasted until 1929. This third vigorous period is called the Industrial Revolution. The third *Conflict* stage began in 1900.<sup>iii</sup> The key to both the rise and fall of a civilization is the “instrument of expansion.” “The civilization rises while this organization [instrument of expansion] is an instrument and declines as this organization [instrument of expansion] becomes an institution.”<sup>iv</sup> The decline in the *rate of expansion usually* “...takes the form of a decreasing rate of investment (rather than of a decrease in either invention or in accumulation of surplus), [and] leads to a crisis. This crisis, which we have called increasing tension of evolution, arises from the clash between the decreasing rate of expansion, on one hand, and the fact that people’s minds and the organization of the society are arranged for expansion, on the other hand.”<sup>v</sup> The *rate of expansion* is paramount in determining whether a civilization is in an ascending or descending mode.

When the civilization’s rate of expansion noticeably declines, it enters the *Age of Conflict*:

“This is probably the most complex, most interesting, and most critical of all the seven stages. It is marked by four chief characteristics: (a) it is a period of declining rate of expansion; (b) it is a period of growing tension of evolution and increasing class conflicts, especially in the core area; (c) it is a period of increasingly frequent and increasingly violent imperialist wars; and (d) it is a period of growing irrationality, pessimism, superstitions, and other-worldliness.”<sup>vi</sup>

The *Age of Conflict* is characterized by imperial wars and irrationality. The masses seek to get ahead by taking wealth from their neighbors, and do this by embarking on imperial wars. They also embark on irrationality to compensate for their growing financial insecurity. The vested interests encourage the masses in their desire for imperial wars and irrationality because both divert the masses away from the vested interests’ un-invested surplus.<sup>vii</sup> Germany of the 1930s and early 1940s provides a vivid example of an imperial war, and its accompanying irrationality: Nazi Germany’s imperial war against France, Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union along with the irrationality of the German’s being the ‘master race’ and the extermination of Jews, Slavs, and gypsies. The Nazi party was financed by the German monopoly capitalists in order for the Nazi’s to wage imperial war, class oppression, particularly, against Communists, and the irrationality introduced by Adolf Hitler.<sup>viii</sup>

The *Age of Conflict* follows the *Age of Expansion*. The *Expansion* stage is critical to the health and longevity of the civilization. If the civilization successfully finds a new *Instrument of Expansion*, it has a new life, and, therefore, reverts to a new *Expansion* stage. Otherwise, the civilization finds itself on the slow path towards *Universal Empire, Decay*, and, possibly, the stage of *Invasion*.

### **The 20<sup>th</sup> Century American Economic Experience.**

The post-World War II investment record does not suggest that the United States invested its surplus into a fourth *Instrument of Expansion*. The record suggests instead that the United States from 1969 began sending its surplus to the four corners of the world.

July 1969, the first year of the Nixon presidency, fateful events occurred which were precursors to the present economic decay of the United States. The Federal Reserve in that month raised interest rates to “fight” inflation. This was the wrong policy move.<sup>ix</sup> “After 1969, the higher inflation - which never remotely approached hyperinflation if we define it as around 50% per month - came not from excessive government spending, large budget deficits or extraordinary printing of fiat money. It came instead from a reduction in production, especially industrial production, while consumer spending stayed high.”<sup>x</sup> “What was called for was not a new currency which would have the confidence of users at home and abroad. Rather what the economy needed was, in some way, stimulation of fixed capital investment, and, by so doing, enhances productivity and increases production.”<sup>xi</sup>

In July of 1971, Mr. Kissinger, as President Nixon’s Chairman of the Security Council, first visited China. Later, in February of 1972, President Nixon solidified the China opening by meeting with Chinese Prime Minister Zhou Enlai. President Nixon also had a private meeting with Chairman Mao Zedong. After President Nixon’s visit, China declared that it would follow a capitalist economic policy.<sup>xii</sup> “From the 1970s to the present, United States policies have been steadily directed to building up, quickly and substantially, the economic strength of China, along with other countries in Asia. All the while, those same policies have drained the real life out of the American economy.”<sup>xiii</sup> The United States surplus was not used to stimulate its own fixed investment. Rather its surplus went to China and other East Asian countries for their fixed investment. United States de-industrialization has continued to the present with the consequence that its manufacturing has been ‘hollowed-out’. China and the other East Asia countries became steadily richer while the United States became steadily poorer which was to ultimately become the largest transfer of wealth in global history. Or, as James Cumes’ title suggests, “America’s Suicidal Statecraft”. Both Carroll Quigley and James Cumes emphasize the importance to a country of continued investment in goods production. “The source of income and wealth and their increase lie in the processes of investment, productivity and production, the one following on from and providing essential nourishment for the other.”<sup>xiv</sup>

The United States failed to develop after 1944 a new *Instrument of Expansion*. Instead, those in the United States who held the *surplus* invested it overseas rather than domestically and the economy since then has been negatively impacted. Carroll Quigley’s postulated fourth expansion did not occur. Arguably, post -1944, the United States followed Quigley’s alternate scenario, *Universal Empire*.

## Universal Empire.

At the conclusion of World War II, the United States occupied or was in control of the western part of Europe, Germany became a protectorate of the United States. Through its control of NATO, the United States has retained control of Europe to this day, and has evolved into Western civilization's *Universal Empire*. Post-World War II, United States security policy included political and economic control of Europe and Japan and a grand strategy of ultimately eliminating the Soviet Union first as a global competitor, and in the long-term, for it to become an American client state. National Security Council 20/4<sup>xv</sup> and later in the 1950s NSC 68<sup>xvi</sup> provided the framework for this grand strategy. "NSC 68 provided an unequivocal answer: the United States should seek victory over the Soviet Union by adopting a grand strategy that "would check *and roll back* the Kremlin's drive for world power. "Simply put, NSC 68 stipulated that the ultimate aim of U.S. grand strategy was, by means short of hot war, to eliminate the Soviet Union as a peer competitor by using preponderant U.S. power to force the retraction of Soviet influence and control from regions beyond the borders of the Soviet Union, and, ultimately, to bring about regime change inside the Soviet Union itself."<sup>xvii</sup> Similarly, global economic hegemony was also a major part of the post-WW II security strategy. The United States has followed a strategy of hegemony beyond the Western Hemisphere. As Zbigniew Brzezinski states, "The collapse of its rival [the 1989 collapse of the USSR] left the United States in a unique position, it became simultaneously the first and the only truly global power."<sup>xviii</sup>

Domestic factors, Open Door and ideological expansion, dictated an extra-regional hegemony by the United States. Mr. Layne in his book *The Peace of Illusions: American Grand Strategy from 1940 to the Present* extensively discusses William Appleman Williams. Mr. Williams was the chief proponent of the Open Door school which attempted to explain U.S. grand global strategy as coming from its Open Door liberal economic policy and a political Open Door for spreading democracy and liberalism abroad.<sup>xix</sup> "As Williams put it, the goal of U. S. grand strategy has been to create an 'Open Door world', an international system, or "world order" made up of states that are open and subscribe to the United States liberal values and institutions and that are open to U.S. economic penetration. An Open Door world rests, therefore, on two pillars; the economic Open Door (maintaining an open international economic system) and the political Open Door (spreading democracy and liberalism abroad."<sup>xx</sup> "... from at least the 1880s U.S. economic expansionism has been based on two linked factors. First, U.S. policymakers have believed that prosperity is the key to domestic political stability and have *perceived* that Americans prosperity depends on access to overseas markets, investment opportunities, and raw materials. Economic expansion thus is the prerequisite for avoiding political and social unrest at home. Second, the Open Door's flip side is apprehension about the consequences of "closure" – fear of what would happen to American core values if the United States were denied economic access to key overseas regions. United States policymakers believe that the country would have to adopt a regimented, state-planned economy, including government-imposed restrictions on imports, exports, and capital flows."<sup>xxi</sup>

The Open Door policy followed since the end of World War II is based on the concept that the United States requires an Open Door to all countries outside of the US in order to insure that its political and economic systems are not weakened. The Open Door concept's basic premise is that the health of the US economy depends on its unfettered access to the markets of all countries: for capital; for exporting markets; and, for resources; etc. Further, foreign countries must adopt a liberal democratic government styled in a manner which the United States would like others to adopt. Without these two requirements fulfilled globally, the United States is fearful that its standard of living will drop and that it would need a state-planned command economy. At the time, the United States officials believed that to have a strong post-war economy, it must have unfettered ability to export capital and goods globally and especially to Europe. The Bretton Woods system was the preferred mechanism to tightly bind Europe economically to the United States and by so doing provide the mechanism for the long-term strengthening of United States exports of goods and capital with the expected result of a continuing strong economy. The Bretton Woods system along with continuing United States domination of post-war Europe began the United States hegemony of Europe.<sup>xxii</sup>

Post World War II found Europe with a power vacuum. The United States had both military superiority and economic dominance and used the Economic Open Door, the Political Open Door, and the United States self-interest in defending its domestic "Core Values" to exert American hegemony over Europe.<sup>xxiii</sup> Post-World War II, the United States became the Western civilization's *Universal Empire* and had latent inspiration of becoming the global hegemon. After the demise of the Soviet Union, the United States global strategy and its accompanying goals underwent a significant escalation. Andrew Bacevich, in *American Empire: The Realities & Consequences of U.S. Diplomacy*, analyses the issues relative to the post World War II period and concludes that the United States prior to 1991 has been an extra-regional hegemon, and later, post the demise of the USSR, the global hegemon.<sup>xxiv</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski, an influential member of the foreign policy elite and author of *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives*, asserts that the United States is an empire and further describes a post-1991 strategy for United States control of the world.<sup>xxv</sup> The demise of the Soviet Union emboldened the United States to continue with its grand strategy of economically and politically controlling both Russia and Eurasia.

### **United States success as the global hegemon.**

In *After the Empire: The Breakdown of the American Order*, Emmanuel Todd sees the United States as a declining power similar to that of the old Soviet Union. He calls the United States "wars" in the Middle East and in Central Asia as "theatrical micromilitarism". He says that "...the size of the opponent chosen by the United States is the true indicator of its current power. Attacking the weak is hardly convincing proof of one's own strength.", and further, "What is certain is that America's menacing unilateral behavior has accelerated the integration of Europe and moved the rapprochement between Europe and Russia irreversibly forward. Their combined

strength – the economic power of Europe and Russia’s strategic nuclear deterrent force – will suffice to contain future American trigger-happy agitation. As for George W. Bush and his neoconservative helpers, they will go down in history as the grave diggers of the American empire.’<sup>xxvi</sup>

After 1945, Germany became an American protectorate and Europe came under the United States indirect political and economic control. Through the Bretton Woods accords, the control of the World Bank and the International Monetary fund, the United States has economically controlled Western Civilization, and by extension, the rest of the world. Europe has become a client state of the United States. American troops have been continuously stationed in Europe, especially in Germany, since 1945. NATO which was formed by the United States to protect Europe has been and still is in the control of the United States. Since the demise of the Soviet Union, the United States controls NATO for its own imperialist goals.

How long can the US remain the Universal Empire? How long can the United States remain the global hegemon? When will the Western Civilization enter the Age of Decay? These questions are unanswerable. Their answers are dependent on the ability of the United States to have both a strong economy and a strong military. At this time, the United States has a strong military, although Mr. Todd considers its army both in the past and in the present as very weak and has accomplished little in its history. Since both Europe and Japan found its productive enterprises weakened because of World War II, the United States economy was able to gather significant strength. By the mid-1960s, Europe and Japan’s industrial production became very strong and both were exporting more to the United States than they were importing. During this Bretton Woods period, a form of a gold standard was in effect. Importers could exchange their US dollars into gold at the rate of \$35 per ounce of gold. By the mid 1970s, the flight of gold from the US in order to pay for its trade imbalance became intolerable, and, consequently, the United States left the Bretton Woods gold standard. This happened because for most of the post-World War II period, the United States economy has been subsidized by credit. What remained of the Bretton Woods agreement was that the United States dollar, without gold backing, remained the global reserve currency. Since the dollar remained the reserve currency, the United States could pay its external bills with credit denominated in United States dollars. The Federal budget and the country’s consumption above what it itself could produce has and is being financed by overseas credit particularly from Japan, China, others in East Asia, and the Mideast oil countries. Only with rose-colored glasses can a conclusion be made that the United States economy is strong in 2009. The ratio of debt to GDP increased at a modest pace until 1982. Starting in 1982, it has been growing exponentially and in 2009 exceeds 330%. In 1969, it amounted to about 150%. Currently, we are still dependent on the rest of the world to lend us the money to continue financing the current account deficit with borrowed funds. Without the borrowed funds, we have a choice of reducing both our Current Account deficit to zero and reducing the United States standard of living or opting for monetizing the new debt with its consequent inflation. The latter is the likely course.

In the fifth century, the balance of power between the Roman Empire and the “barbarians” was altered by the entry of the Huns into the equation. This allowed the “barbarians” to settle in parts of Gaul, Spain, the Balkans, and North Africa. The loss of revenues from North Africa and the additional military cost of protecting the Empire from the “barbarians” were major factors in the decline of the Roman Empire. To maintain an empire, one must have access to enormous amounts of wealth which can be internal wealth or tribute from client states. In the middle of the fifth century, barbarians controlled significant parts of the Roman Empire. The Visigoths were a power in parts of Gaul and Spain. The Burgundians, Alans and Bagadae also controlled areas of Gaul. The Vandals and Alans controlled some of the richest areas of North Africa especially Carthage. In 468, the Roman Empire rolled the dice. With the financial support and the mighty naval fleet of the eastern empire, the Roman Empire embarked on a campaign to regain Carthage and its wealth. Without the wealth of Carthage, the western empire did not have adequate resources to fund its armies, and without its armies, would be unable to restore control over the empire. A huge armada along with a large army set out for North Africa to engage the Vandals in a land war. As the fleet was anchored near its embarkation point, the Vandal navy cornered the Roman fleet and destroyed its fighting ability by setting the Roman fleet on fire. “...the failure of the Byzantine armada doomed one half of the Roman Empire to extinction”<sup>xxvii</sup>

In similar manner, the United States elite concluded that for the economic health of the American Empire, the United States must control the world’s resources: oil, natural gas, and other resources, and with the control would be able to exact tribute from the rest of the world. By so doing, the United States was postulated to have the ability for retention of strong economic health. With the demise of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, the time was ripe for US global control. Zbigniew Brzezinski’s *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives* discusses the need for the US to control Eurasia and how to do it. After 9/11 the United States proceeded with vigorous campaigns to control Eastern Europe, Central Asia, and the Middle East. Iraq, Afghanistan, and control of Georgia and Ukraine were all parts of this plan. Simultaneously, NATO was expanded to include the Eastern European countries such as Poland. The United States planned to install a missile defense system located in Poland and the Czech Republic aimed at Russia which, if successful, would allow the United States to make a successful first-strike nuclear attack and destroy Russia. Mid-year 2009, the status of the United States gamble is unclear. Success looks like a “long-shot” whose odds are unfavorable for the United States. Any serious economic crisis, such as the current one, likely will likely derail this effort before long.

Just as the Roman Empire “rolled the dice”, in its attempt to restore Carthage to the Empire and resolve its financial crisis, and consequently failed, so the United States’ desire to resolve its finances by controlling the world’s resources will likely fail. The Roman Empire went on to extinction and its “ashes” became part of the Western civilization. The American Empire likely will move on to an extended period of decay. If this occurs, the United States will likely be safe

from extinction because of its geographical advantage. It is surrounded by two oceans and weak neighbors on both the north and the south. Europe's fate is likely to be as an ally of Russia.

At present, the United States has no internal wealth to maintain its empire. It maintains both its economy and its military with tribute (credit) from the rest of the world. This hardly seems sustainable. If it is not sustainable, then the United States will not be able to sustain its empire. If and when this happens, the United States will likely fall into the age of *Decay*. The geography of two oceans separating it from Eurasia will likely be sufficient for the United States to indefinitely be a decaying country much as the late stages of the Ottoman Empire. The Roman Empire was not geographically as fortunate. The Classical Empire eventually disappeared and Europe did not have a civilization until about 970 CE when the first expansion of the Western civilization started.

### **Conclusion.**

Carroll Quigley's analysis concludes that civilizations are born, grow to an adult vitality, regress in their middle age, and then as a senior citizen begin their Age of Decay. The Roman Empire clearly showed these stages along with its ultimate demise. Western civilization did not have a rebirth in the years following World War II. Instead, Western civilization transitioned from the age of *Conflict* to the age of *Universal Empire* with the United States assuming the empire role. The United States, the *Universal Empire* of the Western Civilization, is now showing symptoms that, sooner or later, its role as Western Civilization's *Universal Empire* may be coming to an end. Russia and China are now becoming more assertive in their objections to United States policies, especially economic and geopolitical.

"The *Stage of Decay* is a period of acute economic depression, declining standards of living, civil wars between the various vested interests, and growing illiteracy. The society grows weaker and weaker."<sup>xxviii</sup> Do these words characterize our present Credit Crisis? While it is much too early to argue that the United States is in its age of *Decay*, the current credit crisis and the concurrent economic weakness, have the potential to drive the United States into a serious depression.

Does the current US economy display the strength needed to be an empire, especially one which has aspirations to rule the world? Hardly. The United States has been maintaining its economy with overseas borrowed funds, and currently, has begun monetizing its federal debt. As has been widely suggested, "The US economy depends on the kindness of strangers." Its economy and federal budget has been significantly supported by global borrowings which are showing signs of ending. Monetization of the federal debt has started, and some observers suggest that future default of government bonds, through currency revaluation, is likely. The global credit crisis which started mid-year 2007 suggests that Western Civilization's financial problems might be overwhelming, and, consequently, the ability of the United States to project global power might be endangered. The United States may be in the same straits as when the Roman Empire failed



in its mid-fifth century attempt to restore Carthage to the Empire and regain its wealth. In similar manner, we might be observing the fall of the American Empire.

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## Notes.

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<sup>i</sup> Carroll Quigley, *The Evolution of Societies: An Introduction of Historical Analysis* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1979), 146.

<sup>ii</sup> Carroll Quigley *Tragedy and Hope: A History of The World In Our time* (New York: The MacMillan Company, London: Collier-MacMillan, 1966), 11.

<sup>iii</sup> *Ibid*, 358-404.

<sup>iv</sup> Carroll Quigley, *The Evolution of Societies: An Introduction of Historical Analysis* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1979), 132.

<sup>v</sup> *Ibid*, 143-144.

<sup>vi</sup> *Ibid*, 150.

<sup>vii</sup> *Ibid*, 152.

<sup>viii</sup> *Ibid*, 153.

<sup>ix</sup> James Cumes *America's Suicidal Statecraft: The Self-Destruction of a Superpower* (Canberra: Cresscourt Publishing, 2006), xiii.

<sup>x</sup> *Ibid*, 91.

<sup>xi</sup> *Ibid*, 91. James Cumes explains his rationale that the FED's raising interest rates in 1969 was the incorrect policy Chapter 3," Money, Credit and Interest".

<sup>xii</sup> *Ibid*, xv.

<sup>xiii</sup> *Ibid*, xv.

<sup>xiv</sup> *Ibid*, 39.

<sup>xv</sup> Source: "U.S. Objectives with Respect to the USSR to Counter Soviet Threats to U.S. Security", *Foreign Relations of the United States, Vol. 1* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, Department of State, 1948), pp. 663-669

<sup>xvi</sup> NSC 68: United States Objectives and Programs for National Security (April 14, 1950: *A Report to the President Pursuant to the President's Directive of January 31, 1950*. The following report is submitted in response to the President's directive of January 31 which reads: That the President direct the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense to undertake a reexamination of our objectives in peace and war and of the effect of these objectives on our strategic plans, in the light of the probable fission bomb capability and possible thermonuclear bomb capability of the Soviet Union.

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- <sup>xvii</sup> Christopher Layne *The Peace of Illusions: American Grand Strategy from 1940 to the Present* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2006), 63.
- <sup>xviii</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives* (New York: Basic Books), 10.
- <sup>xix</sup> William Appleman Williams *Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (New York: Delta, 1962)
- <sup>xx</sup> Christopher Layne *The Peace of Illusions: American Grand Strategy from 1940 to the Present* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2006), 30.
- <sup>xxi</sup> *Ibid*, 32.
- <sup>xxii</sup> *Ibid*, 42.
- <sup>xxiii</sup> *Ibid*, 30-36.
- <sup>xxiv</sup> Andrew J. Bacevich *American Empire: The Realities and Consequences of U.S. Diplomacy* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press)
- <sup>xxv</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives* (New York: Basic Books)
- <sup>xxvi</sup> Emmanuel Todd *After The Empire: The Breakdown of the American Order* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), Preface.
- <sup>xxvii</sup> Peter Heather *The Fall of the Roman Empire: A New History of Rome and the Barbarians* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 390-407.
- <sup>xxviii</sup> Carroll Quigley *The Evolution of Civilizations: An Introduction to Historical Analysis* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1979), 159.

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