

**UNENTHUSIASTIC IMPERIALISM: WILLIAM MCKINLEY
AND THE ACQUISITION OF THE PHILIPPINES IN THE
SPANISH-AMERICAN WAR OF 1898**

BY DESMOND CURRAN

In 1898 President William McKinley faced a choice that changed American history. Three years earlier, yet another Cuban insurrection for independence had broken out against their imperial ruler, Spain. Frustrated by the failure of the Captain-General of Cuba, Arsenio Martínez Campos, to quell the insurrection, the Spanish government sent General Valeriano Weyler to Cuba as his replacement. To combat the rebels, Weyler implemented a strategy to separate the rebels from their greatest resource: the general population.¹ This plan marked the beginning of the now infamous *reconcentración* policy.²

The conditions in these camps made Weyler's decree more of a death sentence than the separation policy for the Cuban citizens. The Spanish military could barely keep its own troops healthy: soldiers died frequently as they succumbed to diseases such as yellow fever, dengue, and malaria. Lacking the basic support systems available to the Spanish soldiers, the large number of Cubans in these camps could barely survive. The *Reconcentrados*, as they were called, died daily by the hundreds.³ As reports on these conditions reached the United States, widespread public sympathy for the Cuban cause quickly turned into

¹ John Lawrence Tone, *War and Genocide in Cuba, 1895-1898* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 212, 213. The Spanish General Valeriano "The Butcher" Weyler implemented the *reconcentración* policy, designed to separate insurgents from the general population by placing the general population in walled-off camps. The Archivo General Militar de Madrid currently lists a total of 102,469 fatalities, but does not include Havana, where up to 120,000 additional Cubans were reconcentrated.

² Valeriano Weyler y Nicolau, "Bando, Ordeno Y Mando, Habana 16 de febrero de 1896," Archivo General Militar de Madrid, Background code 2.2, boxes 3308-5127, accessed April 27, 2018. "All inhabitants of the fields in the jurisdiction of Sancti-Spíritus, Provinces of Port-au-Prince and Santiago de Cuba, must *reconcentrate* in the places where there is a division, brigade, column or troop of the Army and provide themselves with documentation that guarantees their person, within the passage of eight days from this Bando by the head of the municipality."

³ John Lawrence Tone, *War and Genocide in Cuba, 1895-1898*, 212.

anger and calls for action. Tensions with and distrust of Spain grew to a fever pitch, turning into a rage with the sinking of the *U.S.S. Maine* on February 15, 1898.

The Spanish-American War of 1898 is widely regarded as a turning point in American history, marking a new phase of American Imperialism that looked beyond the West to overseas and beyond. McKinley was a pragmatic politician who had risen in recognition due to his domestic politics and his stance on tariffs. But when he took office in March 1897, he was immediately confronted with a diplomatic emergency caused by the humanitarian crisis in Cuba. Despite his efforts for a peaceful resolution, he could not prevent the outbreak of conflict. On April 21, 1898, the United States declared war on Spain. Only four months later, on August 13, a cease-fire was signed, and with the Treaty of Paris on December 10, the “splendid little war” came to a close. Throughout the war’s short duration, McKinley maintained a focus on one primary objective: extracting Spain from Cuba. His focused approach was successful, but it also led the United States into new territory: the Philippines.

This thesis offers a new perspective on the discussion surrounding President William McKinley’s eventual decision to keep the Philippines as part of a peace treaty with Spain. A sequence of events that began before the United States’ declaration of war and continued through its completion inadvertently placed McKinley in a position where he, despite his reluctance, was obligated to have the United States take the Philippines. As the title of this thesis suggests, McKinley did not appreciate the dawn of overseas American Imperialism, despite presiding over its arrival. His hand was forced by the situation of events created by the efforts of Theodore Roosevelt, George Dewey, and Whitelaw Reid.

My first chapter addresses one economics-based interpretation of McKinley’s decision-making regarding the Philippines. The prominent historian William Appleman William argues in *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* and other works that McKinley’s approach towards the war, and subsequent acquisition of the Philippines, was largely driven by his interests for commercial expansion into foreign markets. I argue that McKinley’s decision on the Philippines prioritized American security and peace first, in order to enable American commercial expansion and prosperity without disruption. The economic potential of the Philippines was always present in McKinley’s thoughts, but each incentive included a strategic risk that

outweighed the commercial benefits. While McKinley left few written records of his thoughts, ample sources exist to help reconstruct the full range of his thinking about the Philippines, including his private conversations, speeches to Congress, political record, and presidential campaign platform.

This thesis also addresses shortcomings of more contemporary works such as David Trask's *The War with Spain in 1898*, often referred to as "the definitive work on the war," as well as Richard Collin's *Theodore Roosevelt: Culture, Diplomacy, and Expansion*.⁴ Chapter two looks at how Trask and Collin both downplay the role and influence that Theodore Roosevelt played in the acquisition of the Philippines. Roosevelt's *Rough Riders: An Autobiography*, along with several personal letters, grant insight into his perspective on naval affairs and how his perspective motivated his actions as Assistant Secretary of the Navy. This chapter pivots away from the economics-based lens of chapter one and focuses more on how the military's strategic preparation for war influenced its outcome. The highly influential work of Alfred Thayer Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 1660-1783*, published in 1890, as well as Ronald Spector's 1977 history of the Naval War College, *Professors of War: The Naval War College and the Development of the Naval Profession*, provide critical insights into the history of the Philippines' inclusion in the strategy for war.

Chapter three presents my interpretation of how McKinley's balancing of American economic and strategic interests was ultimately shifted by the success of Admiral George Dewey at Manila. At the Paris peace negotiations, the diplomatic acuity of the American Peace Commissioner Whitelaw Reid pitted McKinley's disinterest in keeping the Philippines against his objective of ending the war. In this chapter, I continue my argument from chapter one that McKinley's perspective on the Philippines was informed by much more than economic interest. Although McKinley had initially never wanted the Philippines, he ultimately wanted to end the war more than anything else. He was prepared to accept the Philippines as a territorial acquisition—or as it was eventually framed, a purchase—if American assumption of that territory was necessary to secure peace. Documents from *Foreign Relations of the United States*, as well as *Making Peace with Spain*:

⁴ Anne Cipriano Venzon, *America's War With Spain: A Selected Bibliography* (Oxford: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2003), 8.

The Diary of Whitelaw Reid, provides a valuable understanding of the peace negotiations between the Spanish and Americans in Paris. The Philippines had been previously identified in naval preparations for war with Spain as a tactical pressure point to coerce Spain into ending any conflict quickly. But Dewey's initial success in conquering Manila, aided by the groundwork laid by Roosevelt, changed the status of the Philippines. Instead of a pressure point, the Philippines became a *de facto* conquest of the United States, to be used as a bargaining chip with Spain. Whitelaw Reid recognized, and acted upon, this new status, which would ultimately force McKinley to keep the Philippines.

Chapter One: Unenthusiastic Expansion

President William McKinley took office in 1897 tasked with resolving two large, complex problems: the ongoing conflict and humanitarian crisis in Cuba, and the growing fears regarding U.S. economic stability. A year later, the outbreak of the Spanish-American War gave McKinley the opportunity to tackle both. But McKinley may have been more prepared for dealing with the American economy than for a diplomatic stand-off with Spain. Lewis Gould argues that McKinley was a product of his time, claiming that "his political career had focused on internal politics during an era when foreign policy was only a sporadic issue"; further, "McKinley began his presidency without a well-defined record on international questions."⁵ McKinley had gained political recognition from his vociferous support of tariffs and protectionism as a Republican congressman from, and then governor of Ohio. The tariff was the centerpiece policy of his 1896 presidential campaign.⁶ Up until 1897, his twenty-year career had been defined by his domestic policies. Suddenly, he faced an incredibly complex and delicate diplomatic situation, one that had vexed his predecessor Grover Cleveland and frustrated the public.

McKinley hoped to avoid war in Cuba. Fortunately, previous American interest in Cuba meant there were existing policy precedents that offered possible resolutions. The United States had attempted to

⁵ Lewis L. Gould, *The Presidency of William McKinley* (Lawrence, Kansas: The Regents Press of Kansas, 1980), 32.

⁶ Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, ed., *Republican Party Platform of 1896*, The American Presidency Project (University of California, Santa Barbara), accessed October 20, 2018, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/273316>.

purchase Cuba several times in prior decades. President James Polk first offered Spain \$100 million to purchase Cuba in 1848; Franklin Pierce raised the offer to \$130 million in 1854.⁷ In 1897, McKinley discreetly tried to negotiate the purchase of Cuba, citing “the policy of the United States to permit no disturbance of Cuba’s connection with Spain unless in the direction of independence or acquisition by us through purchase.”⁸

When that attempt failed, McKinley had to seek alternative options to restore peace to Cuba. McKinley’s subsequent approach to Cuba reveals a cautious, deliberate nature. McKinley maneuvered carefully between commitments to the Monroe Doctrine made in the Republican Party platform and preexisting U.S. interests in Cuba.⁹ Despite his lack of experience in foreign relations, he found a means to attempt to tactfully address humanitarian concerns by relying on the steadiness of political precedent. And while he was unsuccessful in purchasing Cuba, this commitment to policy, to well-established plans and precedents, rather than leaping into the unknown, guided McKinley throughout the Spanish-American War.

McKinley’s electoral platform also guided him as he struggled with the question of acquiring the Philippines. The Republican Party Platform of 1896 featured a detailed list of policies and plans designed to encourage the expansion of American trade to global markets. These included reciprocal trade agreements, proposals for an international bimetallic standard (while also supporting a domestic gold standard),

⁷ Pérez, *The War of 1898*, 5. Seventy years earlier in 1823, Thomas Jefferson had written to President James Monroe that “[Cuba’s] addition... is exactly what is wanting to round out our power as a nation to the point of its utmost interest.” These sentiments persisted. The 1854 Ostend Manifesto argued that the United States “can never enjoy repose, nor possess reliable security, as long as Cuba is not embraced within its boundaries.” Thomas Jefferson, quoted in Louis A. Pérez Jr., *The War of 1898: The United States & Cuba in History & Historiography* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 5; James Buchanan, J. Y. Mason, Pierre Soulé, October, 1854, *Full Text of the Ostend Manifesto*, ([historyofcuba.com](http://www.historyofcuba.com)), accessed September 28, 2018, <http://www.historyofcuba.com/history/havana/Ostend2.htm>.

⁸ William McKinley, “Message of the President, to the Senate and the House of Representatives, December 6, 1897,” *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1897* (Buffalo: William S. Hein & Co., 2008), XI.

⁹ Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, ed., *Republican Party Platform of 1896*, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/273316>.

expansion of both the navy and the merchant marine, and, most important to McKinley, protectionist tariffs on imported products.¹⁰ Each of these policies worked together to facilitate the expansion of American trade to foreign markets. For instance, the expansion of the U.S. merchant marine would lower the cost of shipping American products abroad, thus increasing their competitiveness in foreign markets. A strengthened navy would then protect these commercial ships and secure their trade routes.¹¹ The tariff would protect the domestic American market from foreign competition.

The general public expected this package of policies in some shape or form. In 1896 the United States was in the midst of recovering from a recession initiated by the Panic of 1893, considered by many as evidence of growing economic instability. American agricultural and manufacturing output had increased to levels that the domestic market could no longer absorb. The resulting surplus led to increased market volatility as prices for domestic products plummeted. As concerns grew around this instability, the solution appeared, to many, to be a new wave of American expansion that looked beyond continental North America.

In 1893 the historian Frederick Jackson Turner presented the first and most significant argument for expansion in his essay “The Significance of the Frontier in American History.” Turner’s “Frontier Thesis” posited that American democracy was dependent on its ability to reach a frontier and that without a frontier, American democracy would falter, and even fail.¹² According to Turner, new frontiers would solve American economic struggles by providing new markets to absorb the production surplus. He was not alone in reaching this conclusion. Another historian, Brooks Adams, reached a similar conclusion in his 1895 book *The Law of Civilization and Decay*.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Edward P. Crapol and Howard Schonberger, “The Shift to Global Expansion, 1865-1900,” in *From Colony to Empire: Essays in the History of American Foreign Relations*, ed. William Appleman Williams (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1972), 140.

¹² Frederick Jackson Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” *Annual Report of the American Historical Association* (Chicago), (December 14, 1893), accessed December 12, 2018, <https://www.historians.org/about-aha-and-membership/aha-history-and-archives/historical-archives/the-significance-of-the-frontier-in-american-history>.

Adams, however, went beyond Turner in arguing that territorial expansion was necessary to secure new markets, and specifically identified the Pacific as the new frontier to pursue this expansion.¹³ While Turner's work was much more widely circulated in the public discourse, Adams shared his work directly with a few select members of the Washington elite, including vocal expansionists Theodore Roosevelt and Senator Henry Cabot Lodge (R-Massachusetts).¹⁴ Both Turner and Adams, in seeking to illustrate a link between the continuance of American prosperity and the economy, contributed to a larger American expansionist mindset. Consequently, McKinley rode into office with a popular mandate in favor of expanding American commercial presence into new frontiers, with some preference for looking towards the Pacific.

The sudden, surprising inclusion of the Philippines in the Spanish-American War brought the question of territorial expansion to the forefront of discussions surrounding American economic prosperity. At the end of the war, instead of facing questions about Cuban independence from Spain, McKinley faced a much larger question regarding the Philippines. McKinley's first response was no. "I didn't want the Philippines," he said, one year later; "when they came to us, as a gift from the gods, I did not know what to do with them."¹⁵ It is clear that McKinley had no interest in the Philippines prior to the Battle of Manila Bay on May 1, 1898. McKinley not only told several confidants throughout the war that he was uninterested but after the battle in Manila, McKinley had to commission a cartographer specifically for the Philippines because he did not know entirely what

¹³ Brooks Adams, *The Law of Civilization and Decay: An Essay on History* (London: S. Sonnenschein & Co., New York: Macmillan & Co., 1896), 29; William Appleman Williams, "The Frontier Thesis and American Foreign Policy," in *A William Appleman Williams Reader*, ed. Henry W. Berger (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1992), 353, 360-361.

¹⁴ Williams, "The Frontier Thesis and American Foreign Policy" in Berger, ed., *A William Appleman Williams Reader*, 93.

¹⁵ James F. Rusling, "Interview with President McKinley," *Christian Advocate* (New York) 78, (22 January 1903): 137-38, quoted in Ephraim K. Smith, "A Question from Which We Could Not Escape: William McKinley and the Decision to Acquire the Philippine Islands," *Diplomatic History* 9, no. 4 (1985), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24911695>, 364.

the Philippine archipelago and its geographic surroundings looked like.¹⁶

McKinley's lack of interest aside, he had several other good reasons to not support acquiring the Philippines. McKinley once told fellow Republican legislator Robert M. La Follette that he hoped "to round out his career by gaining for America a supremacy in the markets of the world... without weakening the protective system."¹⁷ That "protective system" was the Monroe Doctrine, the same doctrine that had guided his earlier message to Congress about the future of Cuba.¹⁸ The Philippines' most appealing quality was its proximity to China, making the islands a "stepping stone" for the United States to enter the Chinese market, one of the new frontiers as identified by Brooks Adams. Its location, however, also presented a potentially disastrous threat to McKinley's hopes.

The acquisition of the Philippines would attract attention from the several competing imperial powers in the South China Sea region (see Figure 1). This prompted the question: would those nations be hostile to a new competitor? During the period between May 1 and the conquest of Manila in August, this fear was almost realized when a force of German ships, larger and more powerful than Commodore George Dewey's Asiatic Squadron, arrived outside of Manila Bay.¹⁹ Prior to the outbreak of war with Spain, Theodore Roosevelt had raved about "our military weakness" relative to other imperial nations.²⁰ American officials feared that any possible military confrontation with a European imperial power (or Japan), would likely humiliate the United States. A United States venture into the South China Sea region could be interpreted by European powers as a renouncement of the

¹⁶ Henry S. Pritchett, "Some Recollections of President McKinley and the Cuban Intervention," *The North American Review* 189, no. 640 (1909), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25106318>, 399.

¹⁷ Gould, *The Presidency of William McKinley*, 33.

¹⁸ William McKinley, "Message of the President, to the Senate and the House of Representatives, December 6, 1897," *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1897*, XI.

¹⁹ Derek B. Granger, "Dewey at Manila Bay: Lessons in Operational Art and Operational Leadership from America's First Fleet Admiral," *Naval War College Review* 64, no. 4 (2011), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26397247>, 135.

²⁰ Theodore Roosevelt, *Rough Riders: An Autobiography*, ed. Louis Auchincloss (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 2004), 461.

“protective system” of the Monroe Doctrine and an invitation back into the Western hemisphere, increasing the risk of confrontation.

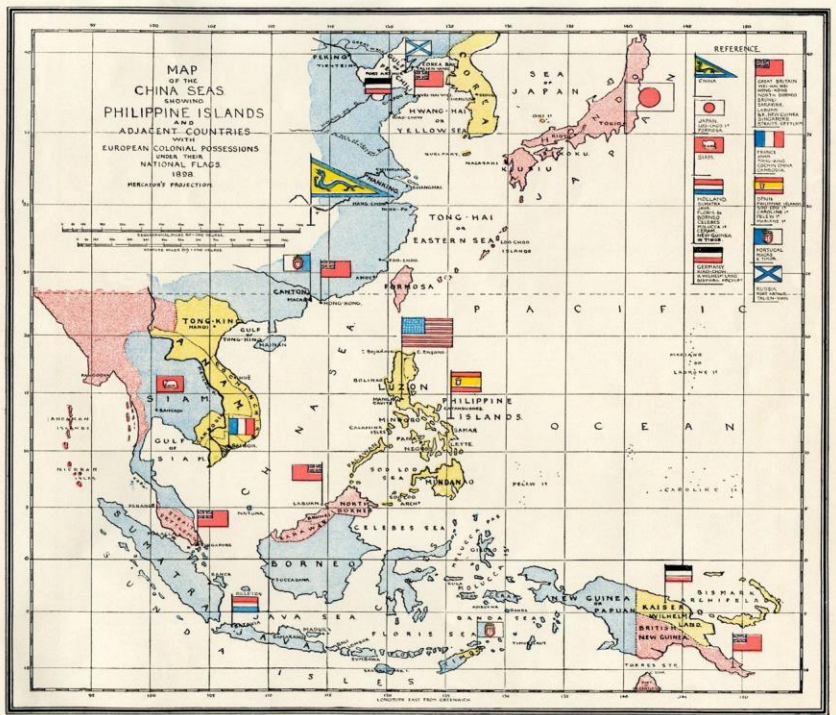


Figure 1. “Map of the China Seas, Philippines, and European colonies in the region, 1898.” Alamy Stock Photo. Printed color lithograph illustration. North Wind Picture Archives. Accessed February 20, 2019.

At the same time, there was a precarious balance of economic interests in Asia. While the United States was negotiating peace with Spain, McKinley and John Hay, then the ambassador to Great Britain, were drafting their proposal for an Open Door Policy with China.²¹ Their proposal was simple: all countries could trade equally and freely

²¹ John Hay was the U.S. Ambassador to Great Britain during the Spanish-American War in 1898. He was later appointed to the position of Secretary of State on September 30, 1898, when the previous Secretary, William R. Day, stepped down to participate in the Peace Commission for the treaty negotiations with Spain. As Secretary, John Hay would announce the Open Door Policy one year later, on September 6, 1899.

within the Chinese market.²² Until that point, each Western imperial power had separately carved out “treaty ports” across China’s coast through treaties with the Chinese government, each with their own set of terms. The United States had no such agreements at that point, so McKinley sought to circumvent the existing system. By proposing that each nation trade on equal footing, the larger powers, such as Great Britain and Germany, would focus more on enforcing a balance of power among each other than reacting to the United States’ entering the region.

If the United States kept the Philippines, however, McKinley’s calls for the Open Door Policy might appear disingenuous, due to the many benefits offered by the archipelago. To address this pitfall, McKinley’s future—public—instructions to the Peace Commission in Paris included the following passage: “[W]e seek no advantages in the Orient which are not common to all. Asking only the open door for ourselves, we are ready to accord the open door to others.”²³ He made this statement with the Open Door Policy in mind, which John Hay would promulgate the following year. McKinley had to ensure that his intentions were made public early on so that if the United States did keep the Philippines, it had previously been on the record addressing any European concerns.

But perhaps the biggest reason for McKinley to so blatantly say “I didn’t want the Philippines” was that he believed that he could achieve his commercial goals without the Philippines. The intrinsic value of the Philippines was the possibility for the islands to serve as a coaling station and naval base, aiding McKinley’s efforts to increase overseas trade. By 1898, however, the United States had already secured territories that provided these same benefits, but without the potential pitfall of arousing European interest. The United States had already annexed Hawaii earlier that year, was in the process of acquiring the Samoas (American Samoa), and was preparing to enter treaty negotiations with Spain with the explicit intention to keep

²² John Hay, “Mr. Hay to Mr. White, Department of State, Washington, September 6, 1899,” *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1899* (Buffalo: William S. Hein & Co., Inc., 2008), 129-130.

²³ William McKinley, “Instructions to the Peace Commissioners, Washington, September 16, 1898,” *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1898* (Buffalo: William S. Hein & Co., Inc., 2008), 907.

Guam.²⁴ The possession of the Philippines was unnecessary. Halfway through the war, on June 3, McKinley, hoping to pressure Spain after Dewey's success at Manila, made an unofficial peace offering to Spain: "the Philippines would remain in Spanish hands except for 'a port and necessary appurtenances, to be selected by the United States.'" ²⁵ His offer also stipulated that Spain would "cede a port in the Ladroneas (Marianas) possessing a harbor and coaling station."²⁶ The offer clarifies McKinley's strategy for expanding American commerce: his objective was small, strategic acquisitions that facilitated American trade. He did not want large territorial acquisitions like the Philippines; they were potentially more trouble than they were worth.

It is clear, then, that economic considerations played a significant role in McKinley's decision regarding the acquisition of the Philippines. However, McKinley's reluctance and prior lack of interest in the Philippines proves noteworthy. His commitment to commercial "supremacy" remained rooted in reality, and much like his initial approach to resolving the conflict in Cuba reflected a cautious approach and desire to avoid instigating any armed conflict. To maintain such a deliberate approach, McKinley had to consider much more than commercial growth.

The Philippines presented an incredible opportunity for the United States to pursue a new frontier. But William Appleman Williams argues that "[m]en like McKinley... their own conception of the world ultimately led them into war in order to solve the problems the way that they considered necessary and best."²⁷ McKinley may have considered the war necessary to resolve the issue in Cuba, but only because his other options had been exhausted. If, as Williams argues, McKinley's true objective for war had been "overseas economic expansion" to defend against economic depression, which

²⁴ Crapol and Schonberger, "The Shift to Global Expansion, 1865-1900," in Williams, ed., *From Colony to Empire, Essays in the History of American Foreign Relations*, 142; William McKinley, "Instructions to the Peace Commissioners, Washington, September 16, 1898," *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1898, 906.

²⁵ William R. Day, "Day to Hay, 3 June 1898," quoted in David Trask, *The War with Spain* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., London: Collier MacMillan Publishers, 1981), 425.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1962), 38, 42.

was threatening “democracy and social peace,” how could McKinley justify the monumental challenges posed by acquiring the Philippines?²⁸

The historian Ephraim K. Smith has described McKinley as an “unenthusiastic expansionist” for this reason.²⁹ McKinley did not want to justify the acquisition. He never wanted to keep the Philippines. The islands were irrelevant to achieving his goals. Unfortunately for him, it was his responsibility to direct the Peace Commission. The eventual decision to keep the Philippines was not influenced by McKinley’s economic interests, it was largely subject to forces beyond McKinley’s control. During the negotiations for the Treaty of Paris, he was forced to contend with the unexpected reality of the American position in the Philippines that had developed from Dewey’s initial attack on Manila on May 1.

Neither Dewey nor McKinley had identified the Philippines as a target prior to the outbreak of war. As I have argued throughout this chapter, McKinley strongly preferred to follow established policy and precedent rather than diverge from the consensus. So, when Theodore Roosevelt, the Assistant Secretary of the Navy, unexpectedly ordered Commander George Dewey and the Asiatic Squadron to prepare to attack the Philippines, McKinley may have been surprised but supported the decision. Why? Despite the sudden timing, Roosevelt was only implementing a plan that had been previously approved by the Navy Department. In 1896, Lieutenant William Wirt Kimball presented a contingency plan for war with Spain to the Naval War College. His plan sought to pressure Spain by attacking its colonial possessions around the world, including the Philippines. It was Roosevelt, however, who started a process in which the Philippines went from being a strategic target to an acquired asset for the United States.

Chapter Two: “You May Attack When Ready, Dewey”: Theodore Roosevelt’s Preparation for War

Secret and confidential. Order the squadron, except *Monocacy* to Hongkong. In the event of a declaration of war with Spain, your duty will be to see that

²⁸ Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*, 42.

²⁹ Smith, “A Question from Which We Could Not Escape,” 374.

the Spanish squadron does not leave the Asiatic coast, and then offensive operations in the Philippine islands. Keep *Olympia* until further orders.

— Theodore Roosevelt to George Dewey, February 25, 1898

On February 25, 1898, Assistant Secretary of the Navy Theodore Roosevelt assumed the role of acting secretary since the current Secretary of the Navy, John D. Long, had taken leave for a sick day. Roosevelt wasted little time and quickly issued the notorious order from above to then-Commodore George Dewey of the Asiatic Squadron.³⁰ Returning the next day, Long was shocked, and condemned Roosevelt's actions in his diary: "[Roosevelt] has gone at things like a bull in a china shop."³¹ The historians David Trask and Richard Collin have interpreted Roosevelt's order differently, however, arguing that his actions on February 25 were unremarkable and only part of a pre-existing plan.

However, Trask and Collin's interpretation overlooks the personal context behind the timing of Roosevelt's order. They do not question why Roosevelt issued the order when he did; they only examine the two questions of "why Roosevelt issued the order" and "why the Philippines." One possible answer to both is that Roosevelt was an ardent expansionist. In a letter to Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan one year earlier in 1897, Roosevelt stated, "If I had my way we would annex those islands [Hawaii] tomorrow."³² It is reasonable to assume

³⁰ Theodore Roosevelt to Commodore George Dewey, February 25, 1898, in Brad Berner, ed. *The Spanish-American War: A Documentary History with Commentaries* (Madison, Teaneck: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2014), 50.

³¹ Margaret Long, ed., "26 February 1898," *The Journal of John D. Long* (Rindge, N.H., 1956), 169-170, quoted in Trask, *The War with Spain in 1898*, 80.

³² Theodore Roosevelt to Captain Alfred T. Mahan, May 3, 1897, *Theodore Roosevelt Papers: Series 2: Letterpress Copybooks, -1916; Vol. 1, Apr. 9-July 12, 1897*. Manuscript/Mixed Material, accessed January 2, 2019, <https://www.loc.gov/item/mss382990319/>; Wynell Schamel and Charles E. Schamel, "The 1897 Petition Against the Annexation of Hawaii," *Social Education* 63, 7 (November/December 1999): 404, <https://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/hawaii-petition>. In 1893, the Hawaiian Monarch Queen Liliuokalani was overthrown in a coup sponsored by American businessmen, who then formed a provisional government. That government was then recognized by the U.S. minister to Hawaii, John Stevens,

that Roosevelt may have had similar sentiments or interests regarding the Philippines. Yet this fails to answer a third question: why Roosevelt would choose to act in that particular moment when the order itself was not an issue.

What is perhaps overlooked is that when Roosevelt issued the order, he was much more concerned with the general preparedness of the U.S. military than with any expansionist desires in the Pacific. As such, his order to Dewey was more specifically rooted in his unease over the Navy's poor preparation. The timing of his order, only ten days after the sinking of the *U.S.S Maine*, was made in anticipation of war with Spain. Roosevelt's order was an attempt to compensate for the Navy's weakness and unpreparedness by issuing the order before war broke out, at least giving Dewey and the Asiatic Squadron additional time to prepare. As such, Secretary Long's condemnation of Roosevelt was largely justified; Roosevelt's order could be interpreted by the Spanish as bellicose, which would, in turn, subvert any diplomatic efforts. Roosevelt, however, was convinced that war was inevitable and that Dewey, the Asiatic Squadron, and the U.S. Navy at large needed as much help as he could give them.

Theodore Roosevelt's appointment as Assistant Secretary of the Navy in 1897 was sensible. Despite having never served in the armed services, his material knowledge made him an excellent choice. While a student at Harvard the young Roosevelt began writing his first book, *The History of the Naval War of 1812*.³³ The book was published in 1882 and was well received by naval historians and academics. More importantly, in the process of writing the book, Roosevelt gained a considerable amount of expertise regarding naval tactics and composition. With this expertise, Roosevelt examined the U.S. Navy in the 1880s and concluded that it "had reached its nadir" and was "utterly incompetent to fight Spain or any other power that had a Navy at all."³⁴

who also declared that Hawaii was a U.S. protectorate. President Benjamin Harrison then signed a treaty of annexation with that government, but before it could be ratified in the Senate, he was replaced by a new president, Grover Cleveland, who rescinded the treaty. Four years later, Hawaii still remained a protectorate of the United States, and annexing Hawaii was one of the Republican Party's top priorities as William McKinley took office in March of 1897.

³³ Theodore Roosevelt, *Rough Riders: An Autobiography*, ed. Louis Auchincloss (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 2004), 460.

³⁴ Roosevelt, *Rough Riders*, Auchincloss, ed., 460.

Roosevelt's largest concern was the questionable composition of the Navy, which he characterized as "our military weakness" relative to other imperial nations.³⁵ By 1890, and even by 1898, the U.S. Navy was still catching up to other global powers, including Spain. In the two decades after the Civil War (1869-1889), the U.S. Navy had drawn down its numerical size from a total of almost 150 to around 60 active ships (see Figure 2). Starting in 1885, however, widespread alarm grew about the state of the Navy, and a general consensus emerged in favor of reversing this trend. Several "Navy Acts" were passed by Congress between 1885 and 1890 to appropriate the funds necessary to construct a new, modern, and competitive American naval force.

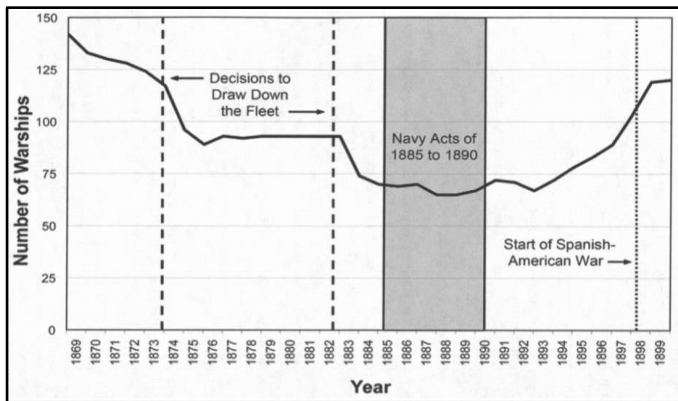


Figure 2. "U.S. Navy Warships (1869-99)." Timothy S. Wolters, "Recapitalizing the Fleet: A Material Analysis of late-nineteenth-century U.S. Naval Power." *Technology and Culture* 52, no. 1 (2011), 114.

But Roosevelt thought that these appropriations were too little and too late.³⁶ By 1898, the total strength of the fleet had almost doubled to around 110 ships, with the introduction of the "New Steel Navy." But the 50 older ships in that force were antiquated remnants from the Antebellum, Civil War, and Post-Civil War navies (see Figure 3). The critical problem was that the majority of these older ships were

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 461.

³⁶ "Shortly afterwards [the early 1880's] we began timidly and hesitatingly to build up a fleet. It is amusing to recall the roundabout steps we took to accomplish our purpose." *Ibid.*, 460.

made of wood, not steel (hence “New” and “Steel”).³⁷ They were slower and weaker than their new counterparts, making them a liability in battle and, in the worst cases, rendering them incompatible with the new additions. As Assistant Secretary of the Navy, Roosevelt knew this better than anyone else. That’s why in his order to Dewey, he included an order to leave the *Monocacy* behind.³⁸ This imbalance fed Roosevelt’s harsh judgments of the “utterly incompetent” state of the Navy heading into the 1890s, and incompetence that he hoped to counteract with his order to Dewey.

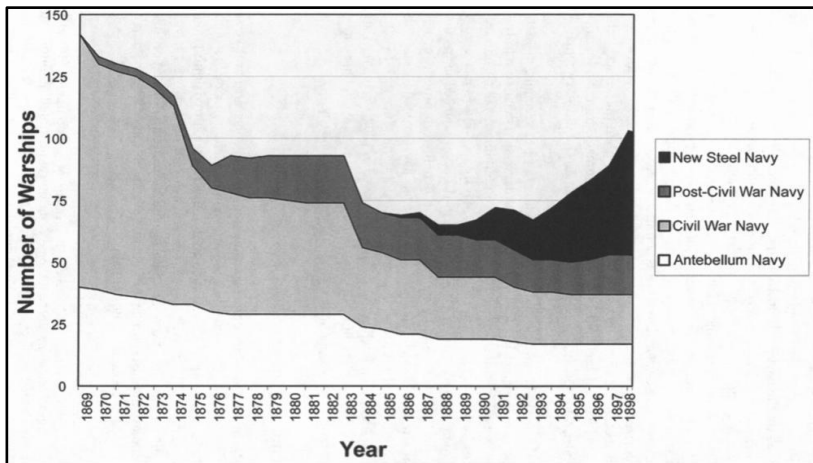


Figure 3. “U.S. Navy warships by type (1869 to the start of the Spanish-American War).” Timothy S. Wolters, “Recapitalizing the Fleet: A Material Analysis of late-nineteenth-century U.S. Naval Power.” *Technology and Culture* 52, no. 1 (2011), 117.

Roosevelt’s disquietude was further compounded by the release of Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan’s landmark work in 1890, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 1660–1783*.³⁹ In it, Mahan established one central point: naval power and superiority was the single most crucial asset for projecting power abroad and maintaining

³⁷ Timothy S. Wolters, “Recapitalizing the Fleet: A Material Analysis of Late-Nineteenth-Century U.S. Naval Power,” *Technology and Culture* 52, no. 1 (2011), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23020458>, 108.

³⁸ Timothy S. Wolters, “Recapitalizing the Fleet,” 120–121. The *Monocacy* was the only ship in entire the Asiatic Squadron from the “old navy.”

³⁹ Roosevelt, *Rough Riders*, Auchincloss, ed., 462.

international hegemony.⁴⁰ In other words, if any country wanted to develop its global presence, naval strength should be its priority. Mahan was largely inspired by the British Royal Navy, the world's preeminent naval force at the time. The Royal Navy protected the vast reach of British trade routes and colonies, effectively securing the British Empire's interests and assets around the world.⁴¹ Mahan's articulation of this blueprint for developing a global presence appeared at a critical moment in the United States, at a time when Roosevelt and other prominent leaders had begun turning their attention to developing America's commercial presence abroad.⁴²

During the decade of the 1880s, a group of advocates for the agricultural industry had emerged with a specific vision for the future of the American economy. These "agrarians" were spokesmen for collectives of American farmers, tasked with resolving the domestic surplus problem.⁴³ Industrialization had led to the production of agricultural goods at rates faster than the domestic American market could consume. The ensuing surplus drove down the prices of staple agricultural products such as corn and wheat to the point where farmers suffered huge losses and faced bankruptcy.

As a possible solution, the agrarians argued that "a more efficient and regulated transportation network for their competitive exports" was necessary to offload the surplus into foreign markets.⁴⁴ It was a straightforward idea, but with one alarming implication. Roosevelt, among other leaders, worried that a rapid American commercial expansion would lead to a commercial trade war, which could, in turn, set off a military conflict for which it was ill-prepared.⁴⁵ The United States had no intention of going to war, but in reality, it had to be prepared to defend itself if a conflict arose. Hence an additional need for a larger, modern navy capable of defending the United States and its commercial exports, during both peacetime and especially war.

⁴⁰ Alfred Thayer Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 1660-1783* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1890), 1, accessed February 5, 2019, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.49015000108135>.

⁴¹ Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 1660-1783*, 1.

⁴² Roosevelt, *Rough Riders*, Auchincloss, ed., 462.

⁴³ Crapol and Schonberger, "The Shift to Global Expansion, 1865-1900," in Williams, ed., *From Colony to Empire, Essays in the History of American Foreign Relations*, 137.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 137, 139.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 140.

Mahan emphasized this point: “it may safely be said that it is essential to the welfare of the whole country that the conditions of trade and commerce should remain, as far as possible, unaffected by an external war.”⁴⁶ The “utterly incompetent” state of the Navy in 1890 threatened to undermine any possibility of realizing the “agrarian conception of the world.”

Roosevelt had mulled over these questions at length by 1898 and worried that his worst fears had been realized. War with Spain, one of Europe’s oldest imperial powers, seemed imminent. The historian David Trask describes the moment through Roosevelt’s eyes: “No reader relying on Theodore Roosevelt’s frenzied correspondence during the last weeks of peace would have believed the United States Navy was reasonably well prepared for war.”⁴⁷ Roosevelt had good reasons to be concerned. As it became increasingly obvious that conflict was inevitable, he was incredulous to find that the Department of War “had no plans” for war with Spain, and that “[e]ven during the final months before the outbreak of hostilities very little was done in the way of efficient preparation.”⁴⁸ The fact that no one else in the army shared his sense of urgency foreshadowed doom to Roosevelt. At one point, a few days before the declaration of war, he visited “one of the highest line generals of the army” and found him trying on new uniforms; he even asked Roosevelt for “advice as to the position of the pockets in the blouse, with a view of making it look attractive.”⁴⁹

Roosevelt’s shock largely derived from his exposure to the much more thorough preparations for war with Spain that the Navy Department had undergone since 1896. On June 1, 1896, Lieutenant William Wirt Kimball presented to the Naval War College his plan, “War with Spain.”⁵⁰ Kimball’s plan had one overarching objective: securing the liberation of Cuba from Spanish control.⁵¹ To achieve this, he determined that the best method was to apply pressure on Spain across the world—not just in Cuba but also its other colonies such as

⁴⁶ Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 1660-1783*, 87.

⁴⁷ Trask, *The War with Spain in 1898*, 93.

⁴⁸ Roosevelt, *Rough Riders*, Auchincloss, ed., 475.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Trask, *The War with Spain in 1898*, 74-75; Richard H. Collin, *Theodore Roosevelt, Culture, Diplomacy, and Expansion* (United States of America: Louisiana State University Press), 198, 112-113.

⁵¹ Trask, *The War with Spain in 1898*, 74-75.

Puerto Rico, Guam, the Philippines, and even the Spanish mainland.⁵² To maintain its global empire, Spain needed a strong navy to protect its holdings—which Kimball wanted to test in the Philippines. Both historians David Trask and Richard Collin correctly argue that Kimball's inclusion of the Philippines was entirely due to strategic considerations—and that it was not motivated by any expansionist desire.⁵³ Both insist that “[s]trategy and tactics rather than economics and empire were the battlegrounds in the naval debate.”⁵⁴

The eventual plan adopted by the Naval War College in 1897 was “essentially the Kimball plan.”⁵⁵ It was this plan that Roosevelt set in motion on February 25, 1898. Both Trask and Collin use this point to refute previous historical interpretations, such as that of William Appleman Williams, that Roosevelt's actions here were inspired by expansionist thought.⁵⁶ Trask and Collin emphasize that it was Kimball, not Roosevelt, who identified the Philippines as a target. According to Trask, Roosevelt's actions were “consistent with Department thinking and reflected considerable prior planning.”⁵⁷ And despite Secretary Long's reaction to Roosevelt's actions, “Theodore Roosevelt's order to Commodore Dewey was not an innocent misunderstanding.”⁵⁸ Long may have blustered about Roosevelt's orders (he issued more than one that day), and even canceled some of them, but he allowed others, including the order to Dewey, to stand.⁵⁹ However, by minimizing Roosevelt's agency, both Trask and Collin understate Roosevelt's responsibility in shaping the fate of the

⁵² Ronald Spector, *Professors of War: The Naval War College and the Development of the Naval Profession* (Newport, Rhode Island: Naval War College Press, 1977), 91-92, accessed February 1, 2019, <https://archive.org/details/professorsofwar00spec>.

⁵³ Trask, *The War with Spain in 1898*, 78; Collin, *Theodore Roosevelt, Culture, Diplomacy, and Expansion*, 113.

⁵⁴ Collin, *Theodore Roosevelt, Culture, Diplomacy, and Expansion*, 113.

⁵⁵ Spector, *Professors of War*, 94.

⁵⁶ “Theodore Roosevelt... did what [he] could to translate the implications of [Brooks Adams'] thesis into official American policy.” Williams, “The frontier thesis and American foreign policy,” in *A William Appleman Williams Reader*, Berger, ed., 93.

⁵⁷ Trask, *The War with Spain in 1898*, 81.

⁵⁸ Collin, *Theodore Roosevelt, Culture, Diplomacy, and Expansion*, 109.

⁵⁹ Long, ed., *The Journal of John D. Long*, quoted in Trask, *The War with Spain in 1898*, 169-170.

Philippines during the war. Roosevelt's largest fear was that the U.S. Navy was not prepared for its task. As such, he acted decisively when an opportunity unexpectedly arose. But Roosevelt's efforts to contribute to the naval preparations for war had begun even earlier.

While there was only so much that Roosevelt could contribute to the material and strategic preparations for the Navy, he was pivotal in securing the appointment of George Dewey as Commander of the Navy's Asiatic Squadron. Roosevelt saw Dewey as a man of action: "I knew that in the event of war Dewey could be slipped like a wolf-hound from a leash; I was sure that if he were given half a chance he would strike instantly and with telling effect."⁶⁰ Roosevelt knew that time was essential with war approaching. He did not want the cumbersome military command to exacerbate the weaknesses he already saw in the U.S. Navy (and Army). Roosevelt wrote that "[a]ll that was needed with Dewey was to give him the chance to get ready, and then to strike, without being hampered by orders from those, not on the ground."⁶¹ Collin concurs that Roosevelt's "most notable achievement as an assistant secretary [*sic*] of the Navy was his successful campaign to promote Dewey as fleet commander over other officers higher on the promotion list."⁶² Roosevelt's relationship with Dewey adds further context to his orders on February 25. He had already succeeded in placing an effective man into a position of command before the outbreak of war; the next step was to ensure that Dewey had the best chance to successfully execute Kimball's plan in the Philippines. Dewey would exceed Roosevelt's expectations, and his performance in battle at Manila would have a significant impact on the course of the war and its outcome.

As Trask and Collin correctly argue, Roosevelt's interest in the Philippines was purely strategic at that moment of his order to Dewey. Despite being a vocal supporter of expansion in Asia, Roosevelt's primary focus was addressing the Navy's general weakness. As President William McKinley took office with promises of tariffs, commercial expansion into foreign markets, expanding the merchant marine, and strengthened navy, Roosevelt expected that the confrontation feared by the agrarians would approach soon, while the

⁶⁰ Roosevelt, *Rough Riders*, Auchincloss, ed., 468.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 466, 468.

⁶² Collin, *Theodore Roosevelt, Culture, Diplomacy, and Expansion*, 104.

U.S. was still woefully behind.⁶³ The deteriorating state of affairs in Cuba only confirmed to him that war with Spain was inevitable and that it would arrive before the United States could adequately prepare.⁶⁴

This does not mean, however, that Roosevelt's activities as Assistant Secretary of the Navy did not play a role in the eventual acquisition of the Philippines. While it was William Wirt Kimball who introduced the idea of attacking the Spanish at Manila, it was Roosevelt who had ensured that Dewey was in place and well prepared to succeed. Roosevelt's actions would not fundamentally change the value of the Philippines as a useful "hostage" for the United States.⁶⁵ But they would, however, change the realm of possibilities for the Philippines. Occupation of the Philippines was not a part of the initial plan, as it would divert valuable resources away from any campaign in Cuba.⁶⁶ With Dewey's command, occupying the Philippines would suddenly become a tangible possibility, within the constraints of Kimball's plan.

Roosevelt's order had given Dewey one crucial resource: time. Dewey had nearly two and a half months between receiving the initial order and the actual outbreak of war. Dewey attributed this preparation as the most crucial part of his victory: "This battle was won in Hong Kong Harbor."⁶⁷ Shortly after the declaration of war, Dewey was on the move to attack Manila. Ironically, Dewey did not leave Hong Kong at first because he was ordered to attack Manila, but because British neutrality required that they asked Dewey to leave before he received any communication from the U.S. (thus demonstrating Roosevelt's concerns about the slow chain of command).⁶⁸ As Roosevelt had hoped, the "wolf-hound" was at last set off his leash. The Battle of

⁶³ Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, ed., *Republican Party Platform of 1896*, The American Presidency Project (University of California, Santa Barbara), accessed October 20, 2018, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/273316>.

⁶⁴ Roosevelt, *Rough Riders*, Auchincloss, ed., 463.

⁶⁵ William Wirt Kimball to Secretary of the Navy John D. Long, 1 June 1896, RG 38, in Spector, *Professors of War*, 92.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 93.

⁶⁷ Derek B. Granger, "Dewey at Manila Bay: Lessons in Operational Art and Operational Leadership from America's First Fleet Admiral," *Naval War College Review* 64, no. 4 (2011), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26397247>, 128.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 134.

Manila Bay on May 1, 1898, was the first major battle of the war, and a stunning and decisive American victory.

While Dewey's victory on May 1 did not conquer Manila or the entire Philippines, he had essentially seized unofficial control of the island. Dewey later wrote, "[f]rom the moment that the [Spanish] captain-general accepted my terms [not to fire on the American squadron] the city was virtually surrendered."⁶⁹ Dewey, Kimball, and to an extent, Roosevelt, had taken a "hostage" for McKinley and the United States to use to pressure Spain to end the war and to leave Cuba. What Roosevelt and McKinley could not have expected, though, was how Dewey's success would change the situation on the ground in the Philippines. Dewey's victory had stunned the Spanish so much that they offered to surrender. Dewey, however, declined, knowing that his forces were insufficient to maintain order in the Philippines as the ongoing Filipino insurrection grew around Manila and throughout the other islands.⁷⁰ But his victory delivered such a blow to the Spanish forces that their docile response continued throughout the rest of the war.

Dewey deferred any full attack against Manila for four months until August when reinforcements arrived under the command of Major General Wesley Merritt. The meek Spanish defense resulted in an easy victory for the U.S., this time securing Dewey's full conquest of the islands over the course of two days. The weak Spanish defense of Manila in August of 1898 would prove critical to the future peace negotiations between the United States and Spain and spark intense debate between William McKinley and the United States Peace Commission regarding the fate of the Philippines.

⁶⁹ George Dewey, *Autobiography* (1913), 226-227, quoted in David Trask, *The War with Spain in 1898*, 105.

⁷⁰ Granger, "Dewey at Manila Bay: Lessons in Operational Art and Operational Leadership from America's First Fleet Admiral," 136; Trask, *The War with Spain in 1898*, 370-373. The Filipino insurrection had begun in 1896, and its activities against the Spanish continued after the American victory at Manila Bay. Led by Emilio Aguinaldo, the insurgent forces numbered around 30,000 and were based in Cavite, the region just south of Manila. After the Battle of Manila Bay, they continued to attack the 30,000 Spanish troops throughout the archipelago under the command of Governor-General Basilio Augustín. Had the Spanish surrendered to Dewey in May, they would not have been able to defend themselves against the Filipino insurgents, and Dewey would not have been able to help.

Chapter Three: A *fait accompli*?

The United States will occupy and hold the city, bay and harbor of Manila, pending the conclusion of a treaty of peace which shall determine the control, disposition and government of the Philippines.

— Protocol of agreement between the United States and Spain
August 12, 1898

On August 12, 1898, Spain and the United States signed a protocol establishing a cease-fire and proposing a future date for peace negotiations. The protocol's articles outlined an agreement that addressed the political status of the Philippines and agreed that Spain would relinquish sovereignty over Cuba.⁷¹ The agreement was intended to establish a framework for the future peace negotiations set to begin October 1 in Paris. When William R. Day and Jules Cambon (the French representative for the Spanish) signed the protocol, both parties understood that while the United States would assume the authority in Manila from the Spanish garrison, it was only a temporary measure. Spain was still the sovereign ruler of the Philippines, but it needed help from the American military to maintain order amidst Emilio Aguinaldo's Filipino insurrection. Notice of the agreement was immediately sent to both the American and Spanish forces in Manila. When the news arrived on August 16, however, there had been a dramatic change in the status quo at Manila. Conquest, rather than negotiation, had already established American occupation and control of the city and the Philippines at large.

The day after the protocol was signed in Washington, the newly promoted Admiral George Dewey and Major General Wesley Merritt launched a joint assault on Manila and the immediate surrounding area. The Spanish only made a token demonstration of resistance. The Spanish Governor-General Fermín Jáudenes surrendered the following day on August 14, unaware that the protocol

⁷¹ William R. Day and Jules Cambon, "Protocol of agreement between the United States and Spain, embodying the terms of a basis for the establishment of peace between the two countries, Signed at Washington, August 12, 1898," *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1898* (Buffalo: William S. Hein & Co., Inc., 2008), 828.

had been signed.⁷² This lack of knowledge was crucial, David Trask contends, arguing that “[h]ad Jáudenes possessed full information about negotiations... he might not have agreed to surrender so that the city would remain in Spanish control . . . But in the absence of such knowledge, he had every reason to avoid a serious defense.”⁷³ Here is where the weak Spanish defense becomes critical. Had they chosen to defend Manila, they might have held out long enough for news of the protocol to reach the Philippines, preventing Dewey and Merritt’s conquest. Yet the Spanish did not, largely due to control Dewey had established over Manila Bay in his victory on May 1. The defeat of Rear Admiral Patricio Montojo and the Spanish fleet had given Dewey the freedom to impose his own will throughout the region and had broken the fighting spirit of the Spanish.

Six months earlier on May 2, Dewey had asked the Spanish to use Manila’s telegram cable, connected with Hong Kong, to correspond the news of his victory with Washington. When the Spanish refused this request, Dewey responded by cutting the cable.⁷⁴ Communications between Manila and Hong Kong were subsequently delayed throughout the rest of the war, with the cable between Manila and the rest of the world not restored until August 22.⁷⁵ Because Dewey had cut the cable, news of the protocol only reached Manila on August 16, the day after Jáudenes surrendered.⁷⁶ McKinley’s biographer, Margaret Leech, writes that Dewey’s decision “reflected an egoism no less arrogant because it was ingenious... [he] avoided opening communications at all until he had consolidated his victory and could present the government with a *fait accompli*.”⁷⁷ Leech points out that Dewey recognized the strategic importance of communications, but also demonstrated a willingness to operate without them (one of his qualities that had caught Theodore Roosevelt’s attention).⁷⁸ However one characterizes

⁷² Trask, *The War with Spain in 1898*, 420.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 105.

⁷⁵ John Hay, “Mr. Hay to Mr. Day, [Telegram.], American Embassy, London, August 22, 1898” *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1898*, 980.

⁷⁶ Trask, *The War with Spain in 1898*, 421.

⁷⁷ Margaret Leech, *In the Days of McKinley* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959), 207.

⁷⁸ Dewey was not entirely cut off from communication, but he was significantly removed from the chain of command. To maintain contact with

Dewey's actions, his cutting of the cable had a profound impact on the future of the islands. Spanish and American perspectives on the status of the Philippines had to change after the Spanish surrendered on August 14. The American victory challenged the protocol's assumption of Spanish sovereignty; the United States now had a legitimate claim to the Philippines by virtue of conquest.

Dewey's first triumph in Manila Bay had also changed McKinley's strategic thinking regarding the future of the Philippines. Three days after his victory on May 1, Dewey sent a cable to Secretary Long: "We control bay completely and can take the city at any time, but have not [sic] sufficient men to hold."⁷⁹ Dewey's victory and blockade of Manila showed McKinley that the Philippines were a viable target. Dewey had created a situation where he could maintain pressure on Spain with further attacks on Manila. All he needed was additional manpower. McKinley was receptive, and on May 19 he issued orders for an expedition of 12,000 men under the command of Major General Wesley Merritt to reinforce Dewey at Manila, "for the two-fold purpose of completing the reduction of Spanish power in that quarter and giving order and security to the islands while in the possession of the United States."⁸⁰ The language of the order seemed clear: the United States was sending troops to Manila with the purpose of aiding Dewey in defeating the Spanish and taking the city. But this was not a sign of McKinley's intent to conquer the Philippines.

Trask believes that McKinley's authorization for Merritt's expedition to the Philippines was "merely... an appropriate follow-up to Dewey's victory."⁸¹ He describes McKinley's strategic approach throughout the entire war as "consistently [attempting] to force peace in the shortest possible time and at the cheapest possible cost... he adopted an 'indirect approach,' attacking the enemy's weakest

Washington, the ship *McCulloch* travelled between Manila and Hong Kong with dispatches. Trask, *The War with Spain in 1898*, 369.

⁷⁹ Dewey's telegram was received several weeks after it was sent, hence why McKinley made the decision regarding Merritt's forces much later after Dewey's victory. Granger, "Dewey at Manila Bay: Lessons in Operational Art and Operational Leadership from America's First Fleet Admiral," 135.

⁸⁰ William McKinley, "McKinley to Alger for Merritt, May 19, 1898," *Correspondence Relating to the War With Spain, Volumes 1-2* (Washington, D.C.: Adjutant-General's Office, 1902), quoted in Trask, *The War with Spain in 1898*, 384.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 384.

positions... with the strongest available forces.”⁸² Dewey’s victory at Manila had demonstrated that the Philippines were a weak point for Spain that the United States could continue to pressure without a need for too many additional resources.⁸³ It is crucial for the reader to recall here that while Dewey was enjoying success, the entire effort in the Philippines was considered secondary to the goal of victory in Cuba. William Wirt Kimball’s strategy had targeted the Philippines to pressure Spain on the side, while the full brunt of the American force landed in Cuba to drive the Spanish out.⁸⁴ McKinley may have issued the order, but Margaret Leech argues that McKinley was still “noncommittal about the intentions of the [U.S.] government” regarding the Philippines.⁸⁵ One victory, while confidence-boosting, was not enough to convince McKinley that taking the Philippines was worthwhile.

What is clear, though, is that McKinley’s authorization for Merritt’s expedition in May sought to build on the tactical momentum that Dewey had established in Manila. On June 3, a few weeks after authorizing Merritt’s expedition, McKinley made an unofficial offer to the Spanish for peace: “the Philippines would remain in Spanish hands except for ‘a port and necessary appurtenances, to be selected by the United States.’”⁸⁶ McKinley’s offer demonstrates his priority of reaching peace, as well as his disinterest in taking the Philippines. McKinley could have just waited for Dewey and Merritt to conquer Manila, but instead, he sought a solution that did not involve conquering the archipelago. But two months later in August, Dewey, now with Merritt, presented McKinley with a *fait accompli* of conquest. There was nothing the Spanish, nor McKinley, could do to return to McKinley’s previous offer.

⁸² Ibid., 423.

⁸³ The soldiers sent to Manila with General Wesley Merritt were by and large not enlisted soldiers; the majority were volunteer militiamen from California and other states, much to Merritt’s frustration. Trask, *The War with Spain in 1898*, 383.

⁸⁴ Spector, *Professors of War*, 91-92.

⁸⁵ Leech, *In the Days of McKinley*, 210.

⁸⁶ Day, “Day to Hay, June 3 1898,” in Trask, *The War with Spain in 1898*, 425.

Making Peace

On September 16, 1898, the American Peace Commission departed the United States for Paris.⁸⁷ McKinley gave the group extensive guidance regarding his objectives for the negotiations, including his belief that the Philippines were “therefore held by the United States by conquest as well as by virtue of the protocol.”⁸⁸ This position would give the United States considerable leverage if a situation arose where the Spanish held up the negotiations by insisting on their sovereign rule over the Philippines. However, the American delegation would not take this stance. John Hay, the new Secretary of State, wanted to honor the protocol signed with Spain: “While the Philippines can be justly claimed by conquest... their disposition, control, and government... should be the subject of negotiation, as provided in the protocol.”⁸⁹

As such, by framing their position within the protocol instead of immediately claiming the right of conquest, the American delegation hoped to establish good faith with the Spanish delegation, easing potential tensions or difficulties. The divergence between these statements also reveals that McKinley still refused to stake a claim to the Philippines, despite acknowledging that he could. If he had, Hay’s statement would have instead likely mirrored McKinley’s earlier claim, insisting on the United States’ control of the Philippines. Once these positions had been articulated, however, they were beyond McKinley’s control. He was not in Paris; it was up to the Peace Commissioners to act on them.

Whitelaw Reid, a prominent Republican and former minister to France from 1889-1892 played a significant role in managing the

⁸⁷ The members of the Peace Commission were Senator William P. Frye (R-Maine), Senator Cushman Kellogg Davis (R-Minnesota), Senator George Gray (D-Delaware), former Republican Vice-Presidential candidate Whitelaw Reid, and William R. Day as chair

⁸⁸ William McKinley, “Instructions to the Peace Commissioners, Executive Mansion, Washington, September 16, 1898” *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1898*, 906.

⁸⁹ John Hay, “Mr. Hay to Mr. Day, Department of State, Washington, October 28, 1898” *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1898*, 937.

relationships between the Spanish and American delegations. John Hay believed that these personal relationships made Reid the commissioner who had the most influence on the outcome of the treaty.⁹⁰ Reid's earlier time in France had given him contacts within the French government, which he utilized to foster an unofficial dialogue with the Spanish, gauging their responses throughout the negotiations. One of these contacts was the Spanish ambassador to France, Fernando de León y Castillo. On the first day of negotiations, Reid recalled Castillo saying "do not forget that we are poor... that we are vanquished... do not forget that this is the first great war you have had with a nation on the continent of Europe... that you have had an astonishing victory, and that you cannot complete it without showing magnanimity."⁹¹ It was up to the Commission, then, to decide whether to make concessions, if any, to their beleaguered Spanish peers. Throughout the negotiations, Reid's contacts with the Spanish would provide sensitive information that helped the Commissioners navigate these decisions, especially with regards to the disposition of the Philippines. It was this network in Paris that allowed Reid to operate independently from McKinley's purview, and to negotiate the future of the Philippines on his own initiative, separate from McKinley's intentions.

From the start of the negotiations, it became clear that the Spanish were desperate to keep their rule of the Philippines as acknowledged in the protocol. At the first official meeting of both delegations, the Spanish demanded that before any negotiations proceeded the United States must "join them in declaring that the status quo in the Philippine Islands existing at the time of the signing of the protocol must be immediately restored by the contracting party that may have altered it."⁹² The Americans declined. In response, the Commission presented articles of peace regarding "Cuba, Puerto Rico, and other islands in West Indies and Guam as provided in protocol," prioritizing the fate of these other islands before returning to debate the status of the Philippines.⁹³ The Spanish accepted this order of

⁹⁰ Whitelaw Reid, *Making Peace with Spain, The Diary of Whitelaw Reid: September-December, 1898*, ed. H. Wayne Morgan (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1965), 16.

⁹¹ Reid, *The Diary of Whitelaw Reid*, Morgan, ed., 39.

⁹² William R. Day, "Mr. Day to the President, [Telegram.], Paris, October 1, 1898" *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1898*, 918.

⁹³ William R. Day, "Mr. Day to the Mr. Hay, [Telegram.], Paris, October 3, 1898" *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1898*, 918.

operations and spent the following weeks mainly discussing Cuba and Puerto Rico. The issue of the Philippines was delayed, but discussions had begun within the Commission regarding the fate of the archipelago.

The central question for the Peace Commission was the value of “keeping” the Philippines compared to “returning” them to the Spanish or even granting them independence. A long-time supporter of expansion, Reid contributed to the discussion at great length in favor of the acquisition. Major General Merritt also joined the Commission in Paris to discuss the feasibility of keeping the islands. He favored acquisition, believing that the Filipinos “would utterly refuse to return to the dominion of Spain, and our withdrawal to that end would probably result in horrible massacres.”⁹⁴ Merritt’s opinion was shared by other commissioners who believed that relinquishing the Philippines to the Spanish or granting them their independence were terrible ideas.

There was additional discussion of the possibility that the United States would keep only one of the islands in the Philippines, Luzon. Luzon had Manila; it was the most developed and rich in resources and offered several locations for an American naval base and coaling station to help expand American commerce into the Asian market.⁹⁵ The Commissioners and McKinley, however, quickly rejected this idea over security concerns. It did not matter who controlled the other islands: if any power other than the United States controlled the other islands, that power would present a threat simply due to their proximity in the archipelago. By late October, Davis, Frye, and Reid informed McKinley that “it would be [a] naval, political, and commercial mistake [*sic*] to divide the archipelago.”⁹⁶ These discussions began to outline the actual parameters of what “keeping” the Philippines would entail: it was a question of all or nothing.

To McKinley, who had only months previously justified a war of intervention in Cuba on humanitarian grounds, the idea of handing another colony back to the abusive Spanish was unacceptable. One of McKinley’s innate qualities, argues Nick Kapur, was that he “held high moral standards that urged him to strive for peace,” and was also “concerned with making sure the record showed that he held those

⁹⁴ Reid, *The Diary of Whitelaw Reid*, Morgan, ed., 56.

⁹⁵ William R. Day, “Mr. Day to the Mr. Hay, [Telegram.], Paris, October 9, 1898” *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1898*, 926-927.

⁹⁶ Cushman K. Davis, William P. Frye, and Whitelaw Reid, “Peace Commissioners to Mr. Hay, [Telegram], Paris, October 25, 1898 (Received on 25th and 26th.)” *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1898*, 932.

moral standards.”⁹⁷ McKinley had already gone on the record for Cuba against Spanish rule: “we took up arms only in obedience to the dictates of humanity and in the fulfillment of high public and moral obligations.”⁹⁸ As I argued in Chapter One, it is clear that McKinley saw the issue of the Philippines as more than an opportunity for commercial expansion. The islands were a diplomatic tool that McKinley could use to achieve his greatest priority: ending the war.

This was where Dewey’s (and Merritt’s) conquest of Manila forced McKinley into making the crucial decision on the archipelago’s future. Who was actually in control? On paper, Spain was still the sovereign ruler of the Philippines, which the United States had recognized in the protocol. But in reality, the power to determine the fate of the islands lay in the hands of McKinley and the Peace Commission. When a major disagreement over the Cuban debt threatened to derail the entire negotiations, the status of the Philippines was suddenly thrust into the forefront of the discussion. On October 7, the Spanish delegation proposed articles for the treaty regarding Cuba that Reid called “an insidious scheme... ceding the sovereignty of Cuba... [as it also would] involve the United States in accepting this cession a responsibility for the entire Cuban debt.”⁹⁹ McKinley and the Commission refused.¹⁰⁰ However, unlike their earlier protest over the “status quo” in the Philippines, where they backed off, the Spanish

⁹⁷ Nick Kapur, “William McKinley’s Values and the Origins of the Spanish-American War: A Reinterpretation” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (2011), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23884754>, 32.

⁹⁸ William McKinley, “Instructions to the Peace Commissioners, Executive Mansion, Washington, September 16, 1898” *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1898*, 906-907. Commissioner George Gray also recalled McKinley’s use of this phrase in a letter arguing against the acquisition of the Philippines, saying “let us not make a mockery of the injunction contained in those instructions.” George Gray, “Peace Commissioners to Mr. Hay, [Telegram], Paris, October 25, 1898 (Received on 25th and 26th.)” *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1898*, 935.

⁹⁹ Reid, *The Diary of Whitelaw Reid*, ed. Morgan, 63.

¹⁰⁰ McKinley and the Peace Commission were conscious that accepting the Cuban debt could imply that they were planning to eventually “take” Cuba. This would be unacceptable to both President McKinley, and more importantly Congress (who would have to ratify any treaty), since the passage of the Teller Amendment had cemented in law that the United States would not establish any permanent authority over Cuba as a result of the Spanish-American War.

instead threatened to leave the negotiations entirely. McKinley's goal of peace was endangered.

At this critical juncture, Whitelaw Reid found a resolution that only he had the power to create. In a conversation with the Spanish ambassador to France on or around October 26, Reid made a "parting suggestion to Castillo concerning possibility [*sic*] of some concession, either territorial or financial in the Philippines," which William R. Day overheard.¹⁰¹ The next day, Day sent a telegram, not to Secretary Hay as he had normally done in correspondence with the White House, but directly listed as "For the President." Day detailed Reid's conversation with Castillo, noting that "Mr. Reid assured [*sic*] ambassador that we could not assume this debt," and that "Ambassador again said that if forced to direct answer on the question [of Cuban debt] now must answer no, and break off conference...then begged [Reid] to search for some possible concession somewhere, and inquired about Philippine islands."¹⁰² Day ended the message with a bombshell: "We are inclined now to believe that rupture to-day only averted [*sic*] because Spaniards grasped at hint thrown out in the conversation of Mr. Reid last night with ambassador."¹⁰³

McKinley was faced with a quandary. He did not want to make the Philippines an American territory, and as I've argued, there were several strong reasons supporting his position. Reid, however, had suddenly created an irrefutable stronger counterargument for keeping the Philippines: American accession to control of the islands offered an approach to peace with Spain that would salvage the negotiations. After receiving Day's telegram, McKinley conceded that there was "but one plain path of duty - the acceptance of the archipelago. Greater difficulties and more serious complications, administrative and international, would follow any other course."¹⁰⁴ There was only one option: "keep" the islands and offer financial compensation as recompense to Spain as the necessary concession to resolve the issue of

¹⁰¹ Reid, *The Diary of Whitelaw Reid*, ed. Morgan, 118.

¹⁰² William R. Day, "Mr. Day to Mr. Adey, [Telegram.], United States Peace Commission, Paris, October 27, 1898" *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1898*, 936.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ John Hay, "Mr. Hay to Mr. Day, [Telegram.], Washington, October 27, 1898" *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1898*, 937.

Cuban debt.¹⁰⁵ Reid had saved the negotiations; but he had also forced McKinley, against his intentions, to keep the Philippines.

Did Whitelaw Reid force McKinley's hand? On the basis of the evidence at hand, it appears so. Reid knew all too well that the Spanish were desperate. Without Dewey's victory at Manila Bay on May 1, this offer would not have been possible. The destruction of the Spanish fleet, the severing of the telegram cable to Hong Kong, and the eventual conquest of Manila effectively delivered the Philippines to McKinley. Unfortunately for McKinley, he simply did not fully appreciate this at the time. McKinley may have acknowledged the strength of the American claim to the Philippines, but where he chose not to act upon it, Reid did.

Conclusion

On December 10, 1898, the "splendid little war" came to an end with the signing of the Treaty of Paris. For the United States, however, the enduring consequences of the war were neither splendid nor little. Cuba would remain under the temporary supervision of the United States military for several years and would eventually be granted its nominal independence. In the Philippines, American forces were quickly dragged into another conflict that was much longer, costlier, and deadlier: the Philippine-American War.

Whether he liked it or not, McKinley's decision helped realize the aspirations of both Frederick Jackson Turner and Brooks Adams. The Philippines, along with Guam and the newly annexed Hawaii, provided the naval bases and coaling stations necessary to expand American commercial trade into the lucrative Chinese market. American Imperialism had begun a new phase of expansion overseas. Unlike European Imperialism, it did not seek out vast territories to conquer; the reinvigorated American Imperialism instead sought to conquer markets, facilitated by modest yet strategic conquests and acquisitions.

¹⁰⁵ "Spain cedes to the United States the archipelago [sic] known as the Philippine Islands... [t]he United States will pay to Spain the sum of twenty million dollars (\$20,000,000) within three months after the exchange of the ratifications of the present treaty." Treaty of peace between the United States of America and the Kingdom of Spain, December 10, 1898, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1898, 833.

American naval power expanded alongside its growing economic presence worldwide. In 1900, the United States still lagged behind the preeminent military powers, but it had made great progress in the previous decade. Theodore Roosevelt's fixation on naval strength continued beyond his departure from the Navy Department. In 1907, as President, he ordered the new "Great White Fleet" to complete a global tour as a demonstration of the United States' ascension in naval strength.

In my research, I noted that in the past twenty years there has been a drop in the quantity of scholarship regarding the Spanish-American War, most notably since Kristin Hoganson published *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars* in 1998. Several smaller works have also appeared, but focusing on smaller, more specific topics. Nick Kapur revisits various interpretations of William McKinley's character; Commander Derek B. Granger studies the influence Commander David Farragut had on Dewey's leadership leading up to the Battle of Manila Bay, and Hugh Rockoff performs an economic cost-analysis of the war and its effect on the growth of the United States military. But no works since Hoganson, or even Trask, have achieved a similar breadth or depth of examination into the Spanish-American War.

The absence of recent scholarship has left several gaps, most notably a gap in understanding Roosevelt's role in the Navy Department. The majority of scholarship on Roosevelt, perhaps understandably, focuses on his work as President, and scholarship on the Spanish-American War delves more into his participation with the Rough Riders. Yet my research suggests that Theodore Roosevelt's actions as Assistant Secretary of the Navy had an outsized impact on the fate of the Philippines, and possibly even on the outcome of the war. His activity deserves further analysis, rather than simple acknowledgment in historical studies.

The factors affecting William McKinley's eventual decision, while I have presented them at length here, also merit further inspection. Larger studies of the Spanish-American War, such as William Appleman Williams', have sought to place McKinley's decision within larger narratives. This thesis highlights the considerable complexity of the factors that influenced McKinley; the interplay between his underlying goal for American prosperity with the intersection of his domestic economic policies and his foreign policy.

As I have shown, McKinley's attitude towards the Philippines was much more nuanced than previously thought. Further scholarship in this area would not only benefit discussions of the Spanish-American War, but also the Presidential studies of both McKinley and Roosevelt.

It can be argued that Secretary Long would have eventually made the same order as Roosevelt since Long did not cancel Roosevelt's order to Dewey. But with Long, any such order would have come much later than Roosevelt's. Dewey's greatest advantage was his preparation, which was enabled by Roosevelt's audacity on February 25, 1898. Little could Dewey have known, however, that his success in Manila would give Whitelaw Reid the wherewithal to offer, even if in passing, a concession to the Spanish Ambassador relating to the Philippines. It is in these moments that history is made, with the culmination of discrete events leading to one inexorable conclusion.