

decisive global power a brilliant Machiavellian play? The Americans achieved global preeminence at the cost of 500,000 dead, in a war where fifty million others perished. Was Franklin Roosevelt brilliantly unscrupulous, or did becoming a superpower just happen in the course of his pursuing the "four freedoms" and the UN Charter? In the end, it doesn't matter. In geopolitics, the unintended consequences are the most important ones.

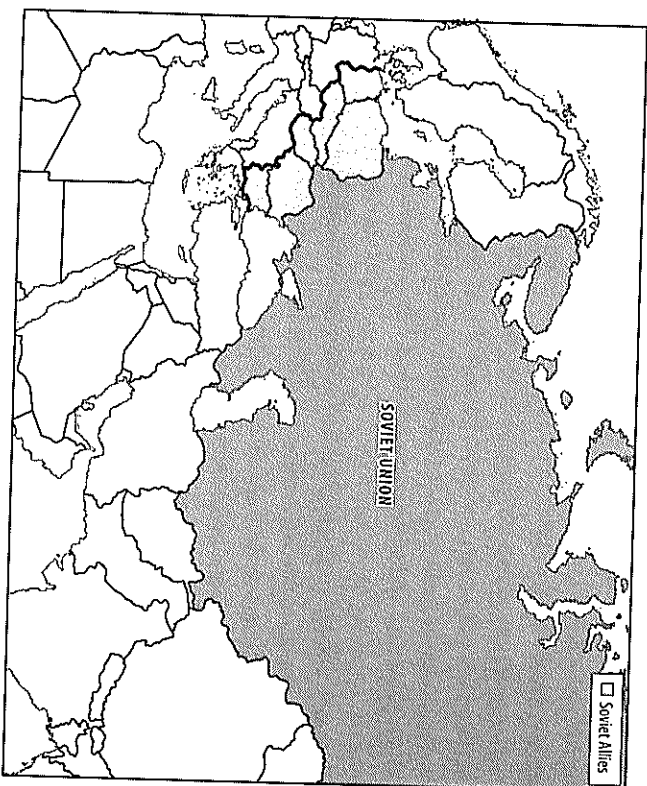
The U.S.-Soviet confrontation—known as the Cold War—was a truly global conflict. It was basically a competition over who would inherit Europe's rattered global empire. Although there was vast military strength on both sides, the United States had an inherent advantage. The Soviet Union was enormous but essentially landlocked. America was almost as vast but had easy access to the world's oceans. While the Soviets could not contain the Americans, the Americans could certainly contain the Soviets. And that was the American strategy: to contain and thereby strangle the Soviets. From the North Cape of Norway to Turkey to the Aleutian Islands, the United States created a massive belt of allied nations, all bordering on the Soviet Union—a belt that after 1970 included China itself. At every point where the Soviets had a port, they found themselves blocked by geography and the United States Navy.

Geopolitics has two basic competing views of geography and power. One view, held by an Englishman, Halford John Mackinder, argues that control of Eurasia means the control of the world. As he put it: "Who rules East Europe [Russian Europe] commands the Heartland. Who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island [Eurasia]. Who rules the World-Island commands the world." This thinking dominated British strategy and, indeed, U.S. strategy in the Cold War, as it fought to contain and strangle European Russia. Another view is held by an American, Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan, considered the greatest American geopolitical thinker. In his book *The Influence of Sea Power on History*, Mahan makes the counterargument to Mackinder, arguing that control of the sea equals command of the world.

History confirmed that both were right, in a sense. Mackinder was correct in emphasizing the significance of a powerful and united Russia. The collapse of the Soviet Union elevated the United States to the level of sole global power. But it was Mahan, the American, who understood two crucial factors: The collapse of the Soviet Union originated in American sea power

and also opened the door for U.S. naval power to dominate the world. Additionally, Mahan was correct when he argued that it is always cheaper to ship goods by sea than by any other means. As far back as the fifth century BC, the Athenians were wealthier than the Spartans because Athens had a port, a maritime fleet, and a navy to protect it. Maritime powers are always wealthier than nonmaritime neighbors, all other things being equal. With the advent of globalization in the fifteenth century, this truth became as near to absolute as one can get in geopolitics.

U.S. control of the sea meant that the United States was able not only to engage in but to define global maritime trade. It could make the rules, or at least block anyone else's rules, by denying other nations entry to the world's trade routes. In general, the United States shaped the international trading system more subtly, by using access to the vast American market as a lever to shape the behavior of other nations. It was not surprising, then, that in ad-



The Soviet Empire