

dition to its natural endowments, the United States became enormously prosperous from its sea power and that the Soviet Union couldn't possibly compete, being landlocked.

Second, having control of the seas gave the United States a huge political advantage as well. America could not be invaded, but it could invade other countries—whenever and however it chose. From 1945 onward, the United States could wage wars without fear of having its lines of supply cut. No outside power could wage war on the continent of North America. In fact, no other nation could mount amphibious operations without American acquiescence. When the British went to war with Argentina over the Falklands in 1982, for example, it was possible only because the United States didn't prevent it. When the British, French, and Israelis invaded Egypt in 1956 against U.S. wishes, they had to withdraw.

Throughout the Cold War, an alliance with the United States was always more profitable than an alliance with the Soviet Union. The Soviets could offer arms, political support, some technology, and a host of other things. But the Americans could offer access to their international trading system and the right to sell into the American economy. This dwarfed everything else in importance. Exclusion from the system meant impoverishment; inclusion in the system meant wealth. Consider, as an example, the different fates of North and South Korea, West and East Germany.

It is interesting to note that throughout the Cold War, the United States was on the defensive psychologically. Korea, McCarthyism, Cuba, Vietnam, *Spainik*, left-wing terrorism in the 1970s and 1980s, and harsh criticism of Reagan by European allies all created a constant sense of gloom and uncertainty in America. Atmospherics gave the United States the continual sense that its advantage in the Cold War was slipping away. Yet underneath the hood, in the objective reality of power relations, the Russians never had a chance. This disjuncture between the American psyche and geopolitical reality is important to remember for two reasons. First, it reveals the immaturity of American power. Second, it reveals a tremendous strength. Because the United States was insecure, it generated a level of effort and energy that was overwhelming. There was nothing casual or confident in the way the Americans—from political leaders to engineers to military and intelligence officers—waged the Cold War.

That is one of the primary reasons the United States was surprised when it won the Cold War. The United States and its alliance had the Soviet Union surrounded. The Soviets could not afford to challenge the Americans at sea and had instead to devote their budget to building armies and missiles, and they could not match American economic growth rates or entice their allies with economic benefits. The Soviet Union fell further and further behind. And then it collapsed.

The fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, 499 years after Columbus's expedition, ended an entire age in history. For the first time in half a millennium, power no longer resided in Europe, nor was Europe the focal point of international competition. After 1991, the sole global power in the world was the United States, which had become the center of the international system.

We have examined how the United States came to power in the twentieth century. There is one additional accompanying fact—a little-studied statistic that I mentioned earlier and that speaks volumes. In 1980, as the U.S.–Soviet duel was moving to its climax, transpacific trade rose to equal transatlantic trade for the first time in history. A mere ten years later, as the Soviet Union was collapsing, transpacific trade had soared to a level 50 percent greater than transatlantic trade. The entire geometry of international trade, and therefore of the global system, was undergoing an unparalleled shift.

How did this affect the rest of the world? Quite simply, the cost of sea lane control is enormous. Most trading countries can't bear the cost of controlling sea lanes and therefore depend on nations that do have the resources to do so. Naval powers therefore acquire enormous political leverage, and other nations don't want to challenge them. The cost of controlling an adjacent body of water is expensive. The cost of controlling a body of water thousands of miles away is overwhelming. Historically, there have been only a handful of nations that have been able to bear that expense—and it's no easier or cheaper today. Take a look at the U.S. defense budget and the amount spent on the navy and on related space systems. The cost of maintaining carrier battle groups in the Persian Gulf is a greater outlay than the