

POLITICS & GOVERNMENT

Is "strict construction" of the "general" clauses of the Constitution possible? Posner thinks not, because the Constitution does not include explicit instructions as to whether it is to be read "broadly" or "narrowly." A judge must base his decisions not just on the Constitution, but on his beliefs about the function and purpose of the courts. Posner cites Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, who argued that judges should legislate "interstitially"—slowly, and in a less partisan way than the elected branches of government.

Liberals who attempt to enact their political agenda into constitutional law, in Posner's view, may be "imprudent and misguided." But their actions do not violate either the letter or the spirit of the Constitution just because they offend the tenets of strict construction.

FOREIGN POLICY & DEFENSE

American Decline

"The Persistent Myth of Lost Hegemony" by Susan Strange, in *International Organization* (Autumn 1987), 55 Hayward St., Cambridge, Mass. 02142.

One of the persistent myths of our time says Strange, a professor of international relations at the London School of Economics, is that America has passed her prime as a great power. Faced with a shrinking share of world trade, a dwindling industrial base, and increasingly fractious allies, America, many scholars conclude, like Britain before it, must face an imperial sunset.

But America, Strange argues, is not in retreat. The decline of American power, she believes, has been greatly exaggerated.

Most scholars believe the best way to measure the strength of various countries is "relational power"—the ability of one nation to influence the policies of another. But "relational power," Strange contends, has become a less useful measure; the nature of the contest between states has shifted from a competition over territory to a competition over market shares in the world economy.

Strange maintains that nations should be measured by their "structural power"—the ability to shape "the global political economy." Structural power can be judged in four ways: military strength, financial clout, control over world knowledge, and production of goods and services.

In all four areas, the world is still dancing to American tunes. Of the 300 largest corporations, 142 are American, including seven of the 10 largest oil companies and the six largest computer firms. Because dollars are the currency used in most international financial transactions, the U.S. is the only government capable of creating assets "that are accepted and saleable worldwide." Large corporate research and development programs, combined with massive defense spending and universities that are bigger, richer, and less politicized than their foreign counterparts, ensure that the U.S. is the world's leading information producer. Only in military strength does the U.S. have an equally powerful rival (the Soviet Union),

 FOREIGN POLICY & DEFENSE

and even then the U.S. has far fewer rivals than the British did at their imperial zenith.

If the U.S. has such economic clout, why does it appear to be weak? Clashing special interests, Strange concludes, result in American policies that are "inconsistent, fickle, and unpredictable." Would any other nation, she asks, preach free trade and practice protectionism?

A Threat That Faded

"Whatever Happened to the Resource War?" by Jock A. Finlayson and David G. Haglund, in *Survival* (Sept.-Oct. 1987), International Institute for Strategic Studies, 23 Tavistock St., London WC2E 7NQ, United Kingdom.

A dominant theme of international politics in the late 1970s and early 1980s was that America would be irrevocably drawn into a "resource war" with the Soviet Union, as both sides sought to assure themselves access to essential raw materials. As a presidential candidate in 1980, Ronald Reagan argued that Western military strength was necessary to ensure that suppliers of such strategic minerals as copper and bauxite did not succumb to the predatory advances of the Soviet Union.

Today, few scholars or politicians contend that there is a danger of a "resource war." Why did this threat vanish? Finlayson, a doctoral student, and Haglund, director of the Centre for International Relations, both at Queen's University in Canada, point to several factors that removed the strategic mineral issue from the political agenda.

Attempts in the mid-1970s to create mineral cartels comparable to the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries proved abortive. Efforts by Third World producers of iron ore, nickel, and phosphate to create such organizations failed because prospective members did not control a sufficient share of global output for a cartel to be effective. Moreover, when developing countries sought to dictate the prices of their copper and bauxite, the industrialized nations either created substitutes or found alternative suppliers.

The most important noncommunist source of many strategic minerals is South Africa, a country which produced, in 1984, 40 percent of the world's vanadium and 32 percent of the world's chromite. Faced with rising turbulence in that nation, Western countries have attempted to diversify their imports, conserve existing supplies, and substitute comparable minerals (such as molybdenum for vanadium).

The authors believe that "third-world commodity power" will continue to decline. Prices for most minerals have fallen steadily as technological advances (e.g., ceramics) have reduced demand. "Substantial new reserves" of minerals in Brazil and China will increase competition and keep prices stable.

What can policymakers learn from the failure of the "resource war" to take place? Simply that peaceful trade, rather than "high-cost, risky, and ethically suspect remedies" such as military intervention, is the best tool Western nations have for obtaining vital raw materials.