
 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.