

Superpower influence

There are few colonies today other than a few small dependent islands such as St Helena, American Samoa and Martinique. Even these have elements of self-rule. During the colonial era, overseas possessions of powerful countries were subservient to their colonial masters. Colonial rule typically consisted of:

- forceful takeover of land and land rights by the colonial power, with ownership passed to the colonial government, armed forces, private companies or colonial settlers
- government by decree, with virtually no democratic process or suffrage, combined with the constant threat of force to put down rebellion
- imposition of colonial legal systems, religion and culture; sometimes the banning of indigenous cultural practices and even enslaving or genocide of indigenous peoples
- the removal of natural resources such as fossil fuels, ores, minerals and timber to support the home economy
- the conversion of land into plantations to produce cash crops to support the home economy

Today, powerful countries exert power in more subtle ways because the option of direct control has gone.

Mechanisms of power

At present, the world's largest economy is the EU, but few people would argue that it is the dominant superpower. Similarly, in 2009 Japan had the second largest economy of a nation state, just surpassing China's GDP figure of \$4.8 billion, but Japan is not talked of as an emerging superpower whereas China is. This tells us that while economic power is an important factor in superpower status it is by no means the only factor.

Table 2.1 shows an index of superpower status using data from 2006–07. Seven different indicators are used ranging from gross national product to oil reserves and the global influence of spoken language. To some degree the choice of data is fairly arbitrary and other indicators might be used, although the results would be similar.

Table 2.1 An index of superpower status

Data for 2006–07	USA	EU	China	Russia	India	Japan	Brazil	Gulf states*
Population (millions)	300	490	1300	145	1100	128	180	35
Rank	4	3	1	6	2	7	5	8
GNP (\$ trillion)	\$13	\$16	\$3.2	\$1.2	\$1.1	\$4	\$1.3	\$0.8
Rank	2	1	4	6	7	3	5	8
TNC HQs (out of global top 500)	162	163	24	4	6	67	5	1
Rank	2	1	4	7	5	3	6	8
Language (million global speakers)	510	510	1051	255	490	128	213	230
Rank	2.5	2.5	1	5	4	8	7	6
Oil reserves (billion barrels)	21	6	16	60	5	0.06	12	484
Rank	3	6	4	2	7	8	5	1
Patent filings 2006	391 000	308 000	129 000	29 000	8 100	514 000	4 750	304
Rank	2	3	4	5	6	1	7	8
Nuclear warheads (number)	5000+	550	400	5000+	100	–	–	–
Rank	2	3	4	1	5	7	7	7
Sum of ranks	17.5	19.5	22	32	36	37	42	46

*Gulf states are the UAE, Bahrain, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Oman combined

Table 2.1 could be interpreted as showing:

- the USA and EU as superpowers, with the USA being a **hyperpower**
- China as the key emerging superpower
- Russia and India as emerging powers — with strengths in some areas
- Brazil, Japan and the Gulf states as regional powers

It is questionable whether the EU and USA are really equal in terms of power. As one nation, the USA has greater political and economic coherence than the 27 separate states of the EU. Within international bodies such as the WTO, IMF and UN, the EU usually votes as a coherent bloc, but not always. Sometimes individual national interest takes precedence over the interests of the EU as a whole.

Using case studies

Question

- Comment on the value of the measures of superpower status shown in Table 2.1.
- Suggest some alternative measures of superpower status.

Guidance

- Some measures are indicators of size, such as population, but not necessarily indicators of power. From a power perspective, nuclear arsenal size might be seen as key although there are a number of countries (e.g. Pakistan) that have nuclear weapons but few other sources of

power. Oil reserves may be important, but oil can be bought on international markets. TNCs are huge generators of wealth, strongly correlated with total GNP.

- Other measures could include measures of development such as the Human Development Index. Linked to patent filings are royalties and licence fees which tend to accrue to the rich and powerful. Internet users and perhaps mobile phone penetration might indicate level of technology use.

International decision making

Superpowers have significant power internationally through memberships of **inter-governmental organisations**. These are key economic and political decision-making bodies, many of which were set up as part of the allied postwar consensus (see Table 1.1). Critics of these organisations see them as helping to maintain the hegemony of western capitalism and free markets at the expense of weaker countries and alternative political and economic systems. The opposing view is that these organisations serve to keep powerful nations talking and negotiating rather than fighting. Table 2.2 shows the membership of key international organisations. The data show that some countries/country groupings get to attend all of the important global meetings whereas others are much less involved. This system, essentially dating from the 1940s, is under pressure. Russia was admitted to the G7 in 1997 (now the G8) and is likely to join the OECD soon. The permanent membership of the UN Security Council may also be reformed to include Japan, Brazil, India and Egypt or perhaps a Middle Eastern state.

The G8, or Group of 8 countries, has an interesting history, which reveals changes in international power politics:

- Originally the G6 (UK, USA, Japan, France, Germany and Italy), the group formed in 1975 as an informal meeting of the leaders of western, capitalist democracies. The group's formation was largely in response to the 1973 oil crisis and the recession that followed.
- Canada joined to form the G7 in 1976 and the group pursued shared economic and political goals. All member states sat on the USA's side in the Cold War with the USSR.

Table 2.2 Membership of key international organisations

	USA	EU	Japan	Russia	China	India	Brazil	Gulf states
Member of the WTO								
United Nations Security Council seat (permanent)								
Member of G8								
OECD member country								
Member of NATO								
5%+ votes at the IMF								

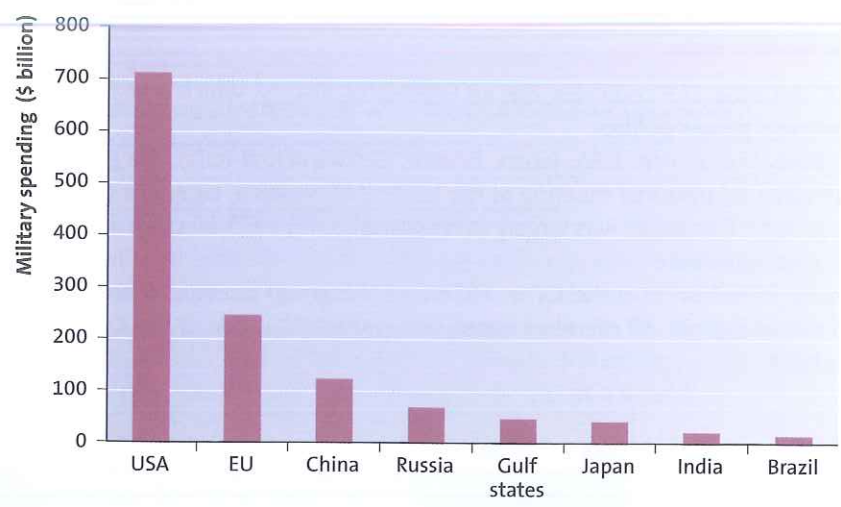
- Following the collapse of the USSR, Russia joined the now G8 in 1994. This move recognised the renewed importance of Russia as an emerging capitalist power, and exporter of natural resources and nuclear power.
- By 2005 the G8 + 5 (or G13) began meeting as the G8 plus Mexico, Brazil, China, South Africa and India. This shift reflected the increasing importance of the emerging powers in trade, climate change negotiations and the world economy.

A major power shift occurred in 2008-09 at three summits (London, Washington and Pittsburg), where the global financial crisis was top of the agenda. These summits were G20 summits (the G13 plus Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Australia, Argentina, Indonesia, South Korea and Turkey). It is likely that in the future the G20 will become the key informal international decision-making forum, reflecting a fundamental shift in power towards the emerging economies, especially in Asia.

Military reach

The EU and China lack the global military reach of the USA. As a military power the USA is unrivalled as it has the ability to deploy its armed forces across the globe rapidly. Its military spending (Figure 2.1) dwarfs that of the EU and the other powers. Other powers do have long-range nuclear weapons technology in the form of inter-continental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) but none has a military presence in so many parts of the world (see Case Study 4).

Figure 2.1
Military spending
in 2008



Case study 4 THE USA'S GLOBAL MILITARY NETWORK

The USA's military network is shown in Figure 2.2. The superpower has troops, aircraft and naval forces stationed across the globe, on every continent except Antarctica (where it keeps a permanently manned scientific station at the South Pole). The USA is able to project its power globally like no other nation. This alone represents a threat to nations that might threaten the security of the USA. The reasons for the global distribution of US military might are partly historical and partly modern:

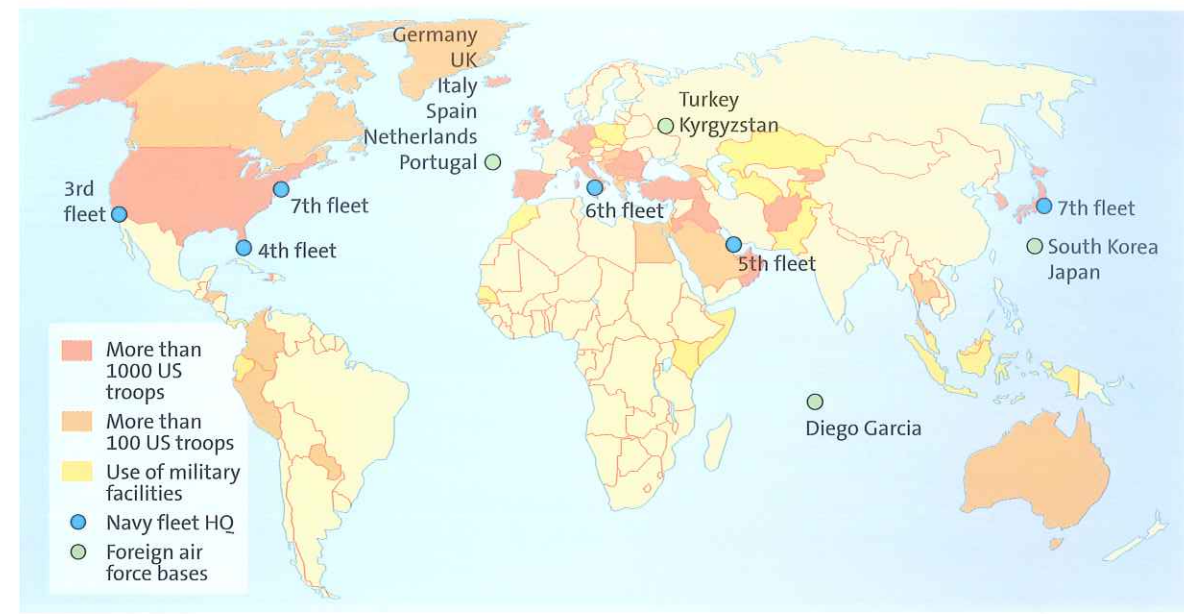


Figure 2.2
US military forces
worldwide in 2008

- US forces have been stationed in Europe since 1945, initially to combat the spread of communism from the USSR. Today these forces are seen as countering the threat of a resurgent Russia.
- The US military presence in Asia also dates from 1945. After the surrender of Japan in 1945, US forces stayed on in the region because it was the eastern edge of the USSR. After the communist revolution in China in 1949 the USA applied a policy of containment, effectively encircling China and the USSR with forces in Asia and the western Pacific. Singapore, Taiwan, South Korea and the Philippines became key US allies in the fight to stop the spread of communism and the Korean and Vietnam Wars were fought for this reason.
- US forces also protect key shipping routes and what are referred to as 'choke points'. These are narrow shipping lanes through which huge volumes of oil pass (Table 2.3), which the USA depends on. The large military presence in the Middle East protects the world's most important oil fields and in recent years has grown to cope with the 'war on terror' in Iran and Afghanistan. The USA tends to give aid, in the form of economic development assistance and military aid to 'choke point' countries (Table 2.3).

Table 2.3
Shipping 'choke points'

Shipping choke point	Volume of oil passing through per day, 2006 (billions of barrels)	Controlling country/countries	Economic and military aid from the USA in 2007 (millions of dollars)
Suez Canal	4.5	Egypt	1972 to Egypt
Panama Canal	0.5	Panama	28.4 to Panama
Straits of Malacca	15	Singapore, Indonesia	7 to Singapore; 244 to Indonesia
Straits of Hormuz	17	UAE, Oman, Iran	12 to the UAE; 16 to Oman
Bab el Mandab Strait	3.3	Yemen, Djibouti, Eritrea	38 to Yemen; 13.4 to Djibouti; 3 to Eritrea
Turkish Straits	2.4	Turkey	29.8 to Turkey

Data: Energy Information Administration and USAID



Cameron Dunn

Figure 2.3
The USS Reagan manoeuvring in San Diego harbour

No country in the world has military hardware to match that of the USA. The USA has ten Nimitz class nuclear-powered super carriers (Figure 2.3), each with over 80 aircraft and an unlimited range. The USS *Reagan* was launched in 2001 at a cost of around \$4.5 billion — equivalent to the GDP of Madagascar for that year. The USA has over 70 nuclear-powered submarines capable of firing Trident nuclear missiles and Cruise ballistic missiles. All of these vessels are capable of circling the globe and threatening, or attacking, almost any location on earth. The US Air Force has over 5000 aircraft including ‘stealth’ bombers such as the B-2, extreme fighter jets such as the F-22A Raptor, and unmanned reconnaissance aircraft like the RQ-4 Global Hawk. The USA also maintains a network of spy satellites in orbit, which effectively means it can observe the entire world — although the capabilities of these satellites are kept secret.

Trade

Table 2.1 shows that the USA and EU have broadly equal numbers of the top 500 transnational corporations (TNCs), followed by Japan and China. TNCs are important for superpower status for a number of reasons:

- They generate enormous wealth. In 2008, the top 50 TNCs in the USA had a combined turnover of nearly \$5 trillion. TNCs provide jobs, tax payments and investment that benefit the home country.
- They invest huge sums in research and development. Notice how in Table 2.1 the number of patent filings for new technologies and inventions mirrors the number of TNCs. Successful patent filings generate wealth from royalty and licence fees; in 2005 just seven countries accounted for 70% of global royalty and licence fee revenue with the USA alone collecting \$23 billion.
- As TNCs are global, they spread their global brands around the world. Many of these are synonymous with their country of origin such as Nike, Coca-Cola, Sony

and BP. In the 2008 Interbrand survey of global brand value, 52 of the top 100 most well-known global brands were from the USA.

- TNCs have complex production and trade systems which have contributed significantly to globalisation, interconnectedness and wealth creation.

Given the importance of trade in wealth creation, it is not surprising that the EU and USA both have their own trade blocs to facilitate free trade. In the EU this is the European Economic Area (EEA) or ‘single market’ and in the USA it is the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) between the USA, Canada and Mexico. In addition, the USA and EU have agreements that allow much free trade between the two blocs. Critics argue that free-trade blocs simply increase trade between the already wealthy and impose trade restrictions on those outside the bloc.

Trade patterns tend to reinforce the status quo. Table 2.4 shows inter- and intra-regional trade flow in manufactured goods in 2007 as a proportion of all trade in goods.

Table 2.4 shows that:

- most trade is within already wealthy regions; 53% of all trade in goods is intra-regional within Europe, Asia and North America
- trade between Asia, Europe and North America accounts for a further 23% of all trade in goods
- the remainder of world trade in goods (24%) has to be shared out among the rest of the world
- some regions with emerging and regional powers, such as Russia, the Middle East and South America, have a very small slice of the trade cake

Table 2.4
Interregional and intraregional trade in goods, 2007

		Destination						
		North America	South & Central America	Europe	Russia/Central Asia	Africa	Middle East	Asia
Origin	North America	7.7	0.9	2.4		0.2	0.4	2.7
	South and Central America	1.1	0.9	0.7				0.5
	Europe	3.7	0.6	31.0	1.2	1.0	1.1	3.1
	Russia/Central Asia	0.2		2.1	0.7			0.4
	Africa	0.7		1.3		0.3		0.6
	Middle East	0.6		0.9		0.2	0.6	2.9
	Asia	6.0	0.6	5.1	0.4	0.6	0.9	13.9

THE UK AND ZAMBIA: DEPENDENCY THEORY

Case study 5

Zambia was once the UK colony of Northern Rhodesia. It gained its independence in 1964. By the standards of sub-Saharan Africa Zambia has had a relatively peaceful postcolonial history, not having suffered from war and internal conflict like many of its neighbours. Zambia has the major disadvantage of being landlocked but it has large areas of good farmland growing sugar and coffee — some estimates suggest only 20% of the useable land is farmed — and vast copper reserves.

Figure 2.4
GDP per capita
UK and Zambia,
1960–2005

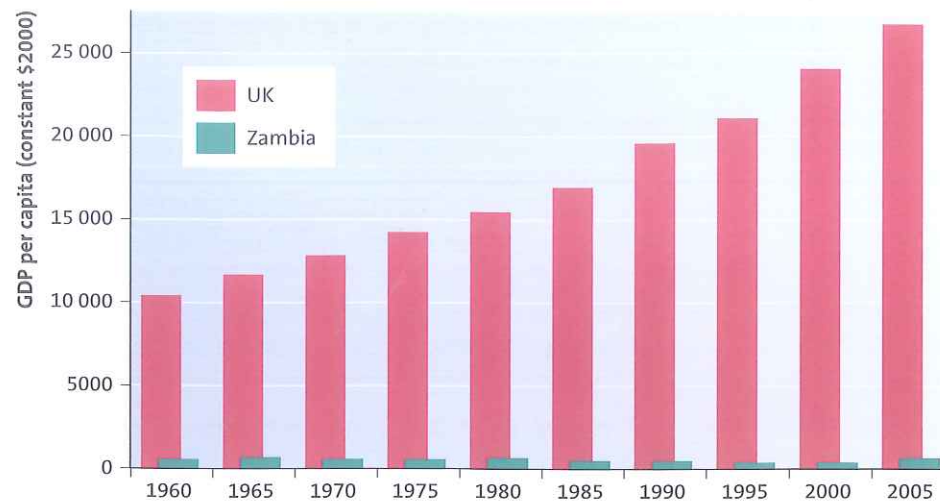


Figure 2.4 shows the startlingly different paths of GDP per capita for the UK and Zambia since 1960. Per person, Zambians were no better off in 2005 than when independence was gained in 1964, whereas in the UK income growth has been continuous. How can we explain this? It is partly to do with population growth. Zambia's economy needs to grow by 6–7% per year just to keep pace with its expanding population. However, China and India managed to grow by 8–10% during the decade 1998–2008, so why not Zambia?

In the 1960s, some left-wing academics began to argue that despite independence many developing African, Asian and Latin American nations existed in a state of **dependency** and underdevelopment. The political economist Andre Gunder Frank outlined his dependency theory in the mid 1960s. In *The Development of Underdevelopment* (1972), Frank stated that:

...contemporary underdevelopment is in large part the historical product of past and continuing economic and other relations between the satellite underdeveloped and the now developed metropolitan countries. Furthermore, these relations are an essential part of the capitalist system on a world scale as a whole.

Frank saw 'satellite' (periphery) countries as providing a range of services to metropolitan (core) countries:

- cheap commodities, such as oil, copper, coffee and cocoa
- labour in the form of migration, especially 'brain drain' migration of skilled workers
- markets for manufactured goods, and locations for investment such as mines and dams for hydroelectric power (HEP)

For their part, the developed countries controlled the development of developing nations by setting the prices paid for commodities, interfering in economies via the World Bank and International Monetary Fund and using economic and military aid to 'buy' the loyalty of satellite states. Dependency theorists argue that developed capitalist countries have no interest in the economic development of poor nations because such development would rob them of a cheap source of materials and labour.

This state of dependency is sometimes referred to as **neocolonialism**. The developed world uses trade and economic power to control developing countries as if they were still colonies. For Zambia this has meant:

- running up huge debts, totalling over \$6 billion in 2000 and then having to follow a policy of economic liberalisation under the World Bank's Highly Indebted Poor Countries Initiative (HIPC) in order to have its debt written down. Some see the HIPC scheme as a way of developed countries controlling the developing world.
- selling copper at a price set on international markets. In 2008–09, this varied between US\$8700 and US\$2900 per tonne, making revenue planning very difficult.
- nationalising the copper mines in the 1970s in an attempt to take control of the industry, only to be forced to privatise them in 2001 as part of the HIPC initiative. Future investment in copper mining will rely in large part upon the willingness of foreign investors.
- that by 2006, around 50% of Zambia's skilled medical professionals had left the country, many to work in the UK

An argument against dependency theory is that some countries *have* developed since 1945. The Asian Tiger economies and other NICs and RICs have seen strong economic growth, which surely indicates that countries can break out of the dependency model.

Using case studies 5

Question

- (a) Assess the role trade plays in maintaining the status of superpowers.
- (b) Why does the USA worry about the 'choke points' in Table 2.3?

Guidance

- (a) Trade is key to generating wealth, which is a key part of superpower status. Without wealth it would be difficult for a superpower to project itself globally. Note that Table 2.4 suggests trade creates a self-supporting system where the superpowers and emerging powers largely trade with each other. Trade blocs and agreements support this.
- (b) Choke points are vulnerable to terrorism, war or the controlling state deciding to shut down the trade route, or to charge excessively for its use. The USA only gave the Panama Canal Zone back to Panama in 1979. The USA worries about choke points due to its dependence on foreign oil imports which generally pass through one or more of them.

Cultural dominance

The USA today, and the British Empire in the past, have both been accused of **cultural imperialism**. This is the process whereby a major power imposes its cultural ideas and values on less-powerful peoples or nations. During the age of empire the UK attempted to impose Christianity, cricket, English law and the English language on its colonies. Some aspects of culture, like cricket, were accepted while others were resisted. In the postcolonial era, cultural imperialism is a more subtle process because superpowers do not rule colonies directly. The USA is accused of cultural imperialism through processes such as:

- the spread of English as the international language of business, particularly by TNCs
- the global dominance of US media companies such as Disney Corp and Time–Warner

- the spread of US electronic technology such as Microsoft Windows, Google search and Apple media players
- the spread of the culture of western consumerism, especially into Asia, led by global brands many of which are based in the USA

It is difficult to identify exactly what the 'Western values' which the USA is accused of spreading are but they might be summarised as:

- **Democracy** — the belief that a developed society is one where everyone has the right to vote
- **Individualism** — the belief that individuals should have the right to pursue their own actions and dreams
- **Consumerism** — the belief that wealth, and the ability to buy goods and services, leads to happiness
- **Technology** — the belief that problems can be solved by using technology, especially high-end technology
- **Economic freedom** — the belief that markets should be free, and people should be at liberty to make money how they choose

There is no doubt that these values do jar with the values of other cultures and nations. For instance, there is no universal acceptance that Western democracy is the best political system. Some cultures might value community and collectivism over individualism. Cultural imperialism is accused of undermining other cultures, their values and traditions. It is certainly the case that as societies become ever more tied into the global system of trade and exchange they do change and have adopted 'Western' patterns of work, family and consumption. Is this a positive or negative development? To a large extent the answer to this question is a matter of opinion.

Case study 6

MCDONALD'S: GLOBAL SUPERPOWER?

In 1993, the American sociologist George Ritzer wrote a book entitled *The McDonaldization of Society*. Ritzer's central argument was that fast-food-style systems would eventually take over the world because McDonald's, and other fast-food outlets such as Starbucks, had hit upon a universal recipe for making money that could be applied the world over:

- **Reducing costs** — in McDonald's, customers act as unpaid workers; queuing up for food (no waiters), placing rubbish in the bins provided, getting their own straws and ketchup. This maximises profit. In the USA, customers fill their own drinks.
- **Quantity** — focusing on size rather than quality, e.g. using terms such as 'Big Mac', 'Whopper' and 'go large', so that consumers perceive value for money to be more important than quality.
- **Predictability** — the idea that 'sameness' sells because people feel more comfortable with what they know. This might explain why Hollywood produces endless movie sequels.
- **Replacing humans** — mechanising the production process using factory farming, automatic ovens, coffee makers etc. because humans are more expensive and less reliable.

McDonald's, Starbucks and others have applied this 'recipe' the world over with astounding success and globalised Western consumption (Figures 2.5 and 2.6; Table 2.5).



Figure 2.5 Global spread of McDonald's since 1940



Figure 2.6 McDonald's in Shanghai

Revenue in 2008: \$23.5 billion Customers served per day in 2008: 58 million Number of restaurants in 2008: 32 000 in 109 countries/territories	Sales growth by region	USA	Europe	Asia/Middle East/Africa	Other countries
	2008	4.0%	8.5%	9.0%	13.0%
2007	4.5%	7.6%	10.6%	10.8%	
2006	5.2%	5.8%	5.5%	9.4%	

Table 2.5 McFacts

Table 2.6 McDonald's: good corporation, bad corporation?

Transnational monster?	Corporate responsibility?
Jobs are often referred to as 'dead-end' McJobs	Jobs for around 1.5 million people, often in areas with few jobs
Leakage of revenue out of host countries back to USA	Significant tax revenue for the USA from global profits
Suburban and drive-through restaurants encourage car use	Provides people with low-cost, accessible food that is of reasonable quality
Free toys given with happy meals, encourages an 'I want that' culture of consumerism	Many restaurants have playgrounds encouraging kids to exercise
Food is bland and dull, and undermines local and traditional foods	Products are adapted to local tastes, and ingredients are locally sourced
Ingredients are low quality and bad for the environment, e.g. encouraging deforestation for cattle ranching	Fair trade coffee has been introduced, and milk used in UK restaurants is organic — meat is halal in regions where this is required
Food is basically high fat and encourages an unhealthy diet and obesity	Healthy options have been introduced, such as the Australian Lean Beef Burger and nutritional information is available with each meal

This is not to say that McDonald's food is identical the world over; it has required adaptation, or **glocalisation**, to local markets but the process of making and serving the food follows the same basic recipe for success.

- In New Zealand, McDonald's offers a 'Kiwi Big Breakfast' and a burger called 'The Boss'.
- In India, much of the menu is vegetarian, or based on chicken such as the 'Chicken Maharaja Mac'.
- In the Middle East, the 'McArabia Kofta' is wrapped in pitta bread and all meat is halal.

There is no doubt that companies such as McDonald's are global and that they have spread an American concept of consumption. Often fast-food companies spread more than just their own company brand. McDonald's contributes to the spread of Coca-Cola, and happy-meal tie-ups spread Disney characters and American movies. However, there are arguments both for and against powerful Western corporations such as McDonald's (Table 2.6).

World systems theory

A weakness with dependency theory is that it is static — the theory suggests that countries are stuck in a permanently underdeveloped state. The rise of the NIC and RIC countries since 1980 suggests the world is more complex than a simple super-power core and undeveloped periphery. Immanuel Wallerstein developed world systems theory in the 1970s (see Figure 2.7). This theory argues that the world is divided into:

- core regions — the OECD countries and the USA and EU superpowers
- semi-periphery regions — the NICs and RICs of Latin America and Asia, including the emerging powers such as India and China
- periphery regions — the rest of the developing world

Wallerstein's theory has the flexibility to recognise that countries may change regional group over time. In the future, some areas such as China may move into the core world. A more classically Marxist theory such as Frank's dependency theory

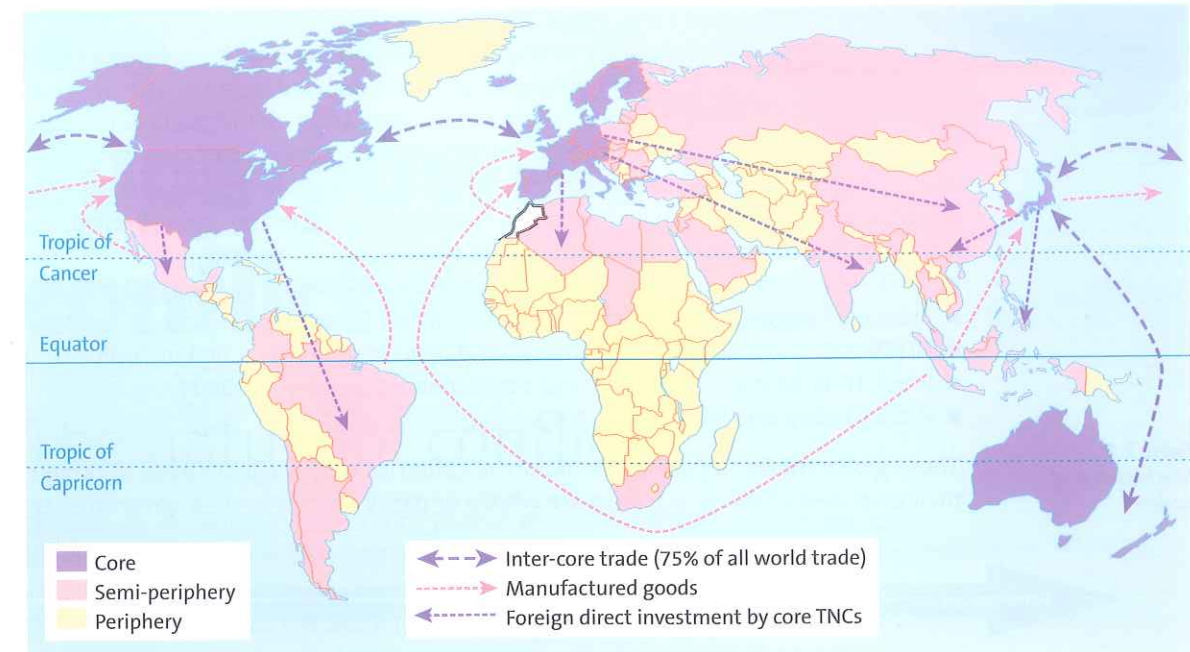


Figure 2.7 World systems theory geography

is more rigid, simply seeing the world as divided into 'owners' (rich countries) and 'workers' (poor countries). In the world systems theory model:

- Core countries use semi-periphery countries as cheap locations to make manufactured goods, such as the Free Trade Zones of China, or as locations for cheap services such as the call centres of Bangalore. Core countries get large returns on the foreign investment they make in semi-periphery countries.
- Periphery regions provide raw materials to supply manufacturing industry in semi-periphery and consumption in core regions. The periphery is furthest down the supply chain and therefore least able to benefit from profits made by selling finished goods and services.

World systems theory seems to fit today's world reasonably well, whereas dependency theory fits a 'north-south' world which existed up until the mid 1980s. A valid criticism of world systems theory is that it is really a description of the world's patterns of power and wealth rather than an explanation of them.

Hard power versus soft power

A useful way of examining how superpowers maintain their influence is to examine 'hard' versus 'soft' mechanisms of power. This theory was developed by the political economist Joseph Nye. Hard power is the military might that superpowers possess. It is overt, 'in your face' power. Soft power is more subtle and covert. It is used to gradually persuade people that the superpowers' view is the right one. In some ways soft power supports Gramsci's theory of hegemony. Soft power brings us around to the superpowers' way of thinking without us even realising. Table 2.7 shows the spectrum of power mechanisms.

Soft-power mechanisms carry much less risk than hard. The ultimate hard-power mechanism is war. Wars can go wrong and be ultimately lost. It could be argued that the US invasion of Iraq went wrong because although it overthrew Saddam Hussein it alienated much of the Middle East and Muslim world. Some politicians would argue that this has contributed to decreased US security, e.g. the global terror threat. Soft power has increased in popularity. One obvious way this can be seen is in the use of state-sponsored global news channels which are carried on satellite television alongside Sky News, the BBC, CNN and Fox News:

- CCTV-9 is China Central Television international news and was launched in 2000.
- France 24 began broadcasting in 2006 in English, French and Arabic.
- NDTV-247 is a private Indian international news channel launched in 2003.
- Press TC is an Iranian international news channel launched in 2007.
- Russia Today was launched in 2005.

Table 2.7
Mechanisms of power

These global media organisations allow the countries they originate from to project their own view of the world. Most are wholly or partly funded by their governments.

		
Military presence and force	Aid and trade	Culture and ideology
Large air, naval and land forces Nuclear weapons	Favouring certain trade partners by reducing import tariffs	Using the media to promote a particular image and message
Military bases in foreign countries giving geographical reach	Trade blocs and alliances	Exporting culture in the form of film and television, or globally recognised brands
Military alliances such as NATO	Providing allies with economic and technical assistance	Gradually persuading doubters that a particular action or view is in their interests
Diplomatic threats to use force if negotiation fails, and the use of force	Using aid to influence policy or keep allies happy Using economic sanctions against countries	

Question

- (a) Should TNCs such as McDonald's be considered as superpowers in their own right?
- (b) In the early twenty-first century, which is more important, hard or soft power?

Guidance

- (a) Large TNCs are certainly powerful. Many have global workforces equivalent to large cities and annual sales that dwarf the economies of smaller developing countries. TNCs can influence government and are a force for development. Culturally, it could be argued that they have as much influence as governments. Powerful as they are, TNCs lack the military and political facets of a superpower country.
- (b) Soft power is considered a key tool in the ammunition belt of a modern superpower or emerging power. We all stared in awe at the Beijing Olympics, and as far as the Chinese were concerned we were 'on message'. Recent conflicts, such as the invasion of Iraq and the engagement in Afghanistan, show the limitations of hard power. Controlling events on the ground, as well as the media's portrayal of conflict, is virtually impossible.