

Introduction to Superpowers

Key term: A superpower is a nation with the ability to project its influence anywhere in the world and be a dominant global force.

1. Who are the world superpowers?

- Using the data below, List the top 5 countries by: GDP, Population and Area
- How frequently do the USA, UK and China appear? What are their strengths and weaknesses?

Rank	Country	Population (1 July 2017) ^[3]	Rank	Country	GDP (US\$MM)	Pos	Country	Area (km ²)
—	World	7,550,262,101		World ^[19]	79,865,481	1	Russia	17,098,242
1	China ^[a]	1,409,517,397	1	United States	19,390,600	2	Canada	9,889,000
2	India	1,339,180,127	2	China ^[n 1]	12,014,610	3	United States of America	9,826,675
3	United States	324,459,463	3	Japan	4,872,135	4	China	9,615,767
4	Indonesia	263,991,379	4	Germany	3,684,816	5	Australia	9,596,691
5	Brazil	209,288,278	5	United Kingdom	2,624,529	6	Brazil	8,515,767
6	Pakistan	197,015,955	6	India	2,611,012		European Union	< 7,708,000
7	Nigeria	190,886,311	7	France	2,583,560	7	India	3,287,590
8	Bangladesh	164,669,751	8	Brazil	2,054,969	8	Argentina	2,766,890
9	Russia	146,989,754	9	Italy	1,937,894	9	Kazakhstan	2,727,300
10	Mexico	129,163,276	10	Canada	1,652,412	10	Algeria	2,381,740

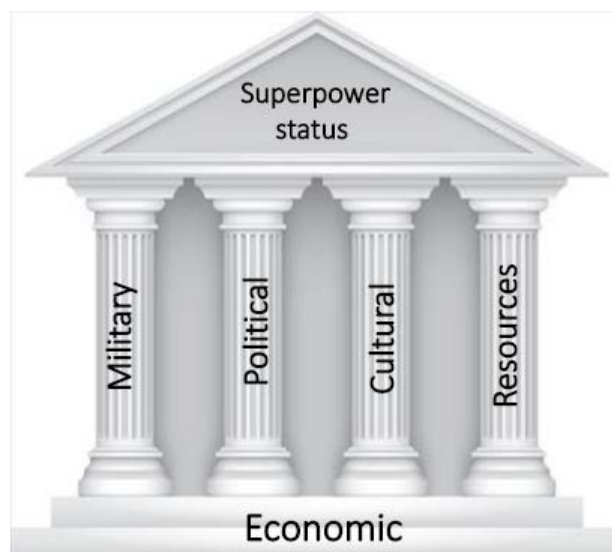
2. Read the extract from the Prisoner's of Geography on page 2

- Underline the countries mentioned and highlight the factors which influence a country's power
- Explain how one physical factor can influence a country's power in detail with reference to examples

3. Pillars of power

There are five key areas of power that determine the relative superpower status of different countries and enable them to become a superpower. Annotate with examples.

Evaluate which pillar of power you think is the most important in becoming a superpower. Can you include any examples?



4. Watch the TedEd interview with Tim Marshall on Prisoner's of Geography and complete the questions:

<https://ed.ted.com/on/OB4G7MVF>

Prisoner's of Geography by Tim Marshall

In Russia we see the influence of the Arctic, and how its freezing climate limits Russia's ability to be a truly global power. In China we see the limitations of power without a global navy, and in 2016 the speed at which China is seeking to change this became apparent. The chapter on the USA illustrates how shrewd decisions to expand its territory in key regions allowed it to achieve its modern destiny as a two-ocean superpower. Europe shows us the value of flat land and navigable rivers in connecting regions with each other and producing a culture able to kick-start the modern world, while Africa is a prime example of the effects of isolation.

The chapter on the Middle East demonstrates why drawing lines on maps while disregarding the topography and, equally importantly, the geographical cultures in a given area is a recipe for trouble. We will continue to witness that trouble this century. The same theme surfaces in the chapters on Africa and India/Pakistan. The colonial powers drew artificial borders on paper, completely ignoring the physical realities of the region. Violent attempts are now being made to redraw them; these will continue for several years, after which the map of nation states will no longer look as it does now.

Very different from the examples of Kosovo or Syria are Japan and Korea, in that they are mostly ethnically homogeneous. But they have other problems: Japan is an island nation devoid of natural resources while the division of the Koreas is a problem still waiting to be solved. Meanwhile, Latin America is an anomaly. In its far south it is so cut off from the outside world that global trading is difficult, and its internal geography is a barrier to creating a trading bloc as successful as the EU.

Finally, we come to one of the most uninhabitable places on earth – the Arctic. For most of history humans have ignored it, but in the twentieth century we found energy there, and twenty-first-century diplomacy will determine who owns – and sells – that resource.

Seeing geography as a decisive factor in the course of human history can be construed as a bleak view of the world, which is why it is disliked in some intellectual circles. It suggests that nature is more powerful than man, and that we can only go so far in determining our own fate. However, other factors clearly have an influence on events too. Any sensible person can see that modern technology is now bending the iron rules of geography. It has found ways over, under, or through some of the barriers. The Americans can now fly a plane all the way from Missouri to Mosul on a bombing mission without needing concrete along the way on which to refuel. That, along with their partially self-sustaining great Aircraft Carrier Battle Groups, means they no longer absolutely have to have an ally or a colony in order to extend their global reach around the world. Of course, if they *do* have an airbase on the island of Diego Garcia, or permanent access to the port in Bahrain, then they have more options; but it is less essential.

So air power has changed the rules, as in a different way has the internet. But geography, and the history of how nations have established themselves within that geography, remains crucial to our understanding of the world today and our future.

The conflict in Iraq and Syria is rooted in colonial powers ignoring the rules of geography, whereas the Chinese occupation of Tibet is rooted in obeying them; America's global foreign policy is dictated by them, and even the technological genius and power projection of the last superpower standing can only mitigate the rules that nature, or God, handed down.

What are those rules? The place to begin is in the land where power is hard to defend, and so for centuries its leaders have compensated by pushing outwards. It is the land without mountains to its west: Russia.