

Select ALL The Correct Answers.Which Two Factors Influenced The United States' Purchase Of Alaska In

Select ALL The Correct Answers.Which Two Factors Influenced The United States' Purchase Of Alaska In 1867, the acquisition of Alaska by the United States marked a significant expansion of American territory and influence in the northern Pacific. This purchase, often referred to as "Seward's Folly" after Secretary of State William H. Seward, was driven by several strategic, economic, and geopolitical factors. Understanding these reasons provides insight into the broader context of American expansionism and foreign policy during the 19th century. In this article, we will explore the two primary factors that influenced the U.S. decision to purchase Alaska, along with other relevant considerations that played a role in this historic transaction.

Historical Context of the Alaska Purchase

The purchase of Alaska occurred on March 30, 1867, when the United States agreed to buy the vast territory from the Russian Empire for \$7.2 million. At the time, many Americans viewed the deal skeptically, dismissing Alaska as a frozen wasteland. However, over time, the strategic and economic benefits of the territory became apparent, solidifying its importance for the U.S. on the global stage.

The Two Main Factors Influencing the Purchase

1. Strategic Geopolitical Interests

One of the most compelling reasons behind the purchase was the desire to expand American influence in the Pacific and to prevent other powers, particularly Britain and Russia, from gaining a foothold in North America.

- **Preventing British Expansion:** At the time, Canada was a British colony, and the proximity of British-held Canada to Alaska raised concerns about potential encroachment into U.S. territory. Securing Alaska helped establish American sovereignty over the northern Pacific and prevented Britain from expanding its influence closer to the U.S. mainland.
- **Countering Russian Presence:** Russia had established Alaska in the 18th century but was increasingly less interested in maintaining its distant colony. The U.S. saw the acquisition as a way to push back Russian ambitions in North America and assert dominance over the northern Pacific region.
- **Expanding Naval and Military Capabilities:** Alaska provided strategic military

advantages, including the ability to monitor and control vital maritime routes in the Pacific and Arctic, especially as global powers vied for influence in these waters.

2. Economic and Resource Potential

Apart from geopolitical concerns, economic motivations played a significant role in the decision to acquire Alaska. The vast natural resources and strategic position of the territory presented opportunities for economic growth and resource exploitation.

- **Fisheries and Natural Resources:** Alaska was rich in fisheries, particularly salmon, which were valuable for commercial purposes. Over time, the discovery of other resources such as fur, timber, and minerals increased interest in developing the region economically.
- **Potential for Gold and Minerals:** Although significant gold rushes in Alaska would come later, the potential for mineral wealth was recognized early on, promising future economic benefits.
- **Expanding American Territory and Influence:** Control over Alaska allowed the U.S. to expand its territory, opening opportunities for trade, resource extraction, and economic development in the northern Pacific region.

Other Contributing Factors

While the two main factors—geopolitical strategy and economic potential—were pivotal, other considerations also influenced the purchase.

Diplomatic Relationships and International Politics

The U.S. sought to strengthen its diplomatic position by securing Alaska and demonstrating its commitment to expanding influence in the Pacific. The deal also improved relations with Russia, which was eager to sell its distant colony due to economic difficulties and the desire to focus resources elsewhere.

Public and Political Support

Although initially met with skepticism, political leaders and some segments of the American public gradually supported the purchase, recognizing the strategic and economic benefits over time.

The Significance of the Alaska Purchase

The acquisition of Alaska proved to be a strategic masterstroke for the United States, providing a foothold in the Pacific that would become increasingly important in the 20th century. Alaska's natural resources, including oil, minerals, and fisheries, have contributed significantly to the U.S. economy, while its geographic position has played a crucial role in military and geopolitical affairs.

Conclusion

In summary, the United States' purchase of Alaska in 1867 was influenced primarily by two key factors: strategic geopolitical interests and economic potential. The desire to prevent British and Russian encroachment, along with the prospect of harnessing Alaska's abundant resources, drove policymakers to secure this vast territory. Over the years, the true value of Alaska has become evident, confirming that the purchase was a visionary move that expanded American influence and set the stage for future growth and development in the Pacific region.

In essence:

- **Strategic Geopolitical Interests:** Ensuring national security, controlling vital maritime routes, and preventing rival powers from gaining influence.
- **Economic and Resource Potential:** Accessing fisheries, minerals, timber, and future resource exploitation opportunities.

These two factors remain central to understanding why the U.S. decided to acquire Alaska, transforming it from a remote, little-understood territory into a vital part of the nation's fabric.

Frequently Asked Questions

What were the primary economic reasons behind the United States' purchase of Alaska?

The U.S. was interested in Alaska for its natural resources, such as fur, timber, and later gold and oil, which could boost economic growth.

How did strategic military considerations influence the U.S. decision to purchase Alaska?

Alaska's location provided a strategic military advantage for defense and naval positioning in the Pacific region.

Did geographic exploration impact the U.S. purchase of Alaska?

Yes, explorers like Seward's expeditions increased awareness of Alaska's potential, influencing the decision to acquire it.

Was the discovery of natural resources a factor in the purchase of Alaska?

Absolutely, the prospect of abundant natural resources like minerals and fisheries made Alaska attractive to the U.S.

Did political motivations, such as expanding U.S. territory, influence the purchase?

Yes, territorial expansion was a political goal, and acquiring Alaska was part of broader imperial ambitions.

Was the desire to prevent other countries from gaining control a reason for the purchase?

Yes, acquiring Alaska helped prevent Britain or other powers from claiming it, securing U.S. interests in the Pacific.

Additional Resources

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In 1867, the United States made a bold and somewhat surprising move by acquiring Alaska from Russia. Often dubbed "Seward's Folly" or "Seward's Icebox" at the time, this purchase marked a strategic expansion into the northern Pacific and opened the door to significant economic and geopolitical opportunities. But what exactly prompted the U.S. to undertake this costly and diplomatically complex transaction? Historians and scholars agree that multiple factors played a role, but two key influences stand out as the primary drivers behind this historic purchase. This article explores these factors in detail, providing insight into the political, economic, and strategic considerations that shaped this pivotal moment in American expansionism.

The Strategic Geopolitical Context: Securing American Interests in the Pacific

The Need to Counter British and Other Foreign Powers

In the mid-19th century, the global balance of power was shifting, and the United States was eager to establish itself as a dominant presence in the Pacific region. Russia's proximity to North America through Alaska posed both an opportunity and a threat. At the time, Russia was consolidating its holdings in North America, and the potential for European powers, particularly Britain, to expand their influence in the Pacific was a growing concern for American policymakers.

- Protection of American Interests: The U.S. sought to prevent European nations from gaining a foothold so close to North America. By acquiring Alaska, the U.S. eliminated the risk of Russia or Britain establishing strategic outposts that could threaten American security or influence.
- Control of the Northern Pacific: Alaska's strategic location offered the United States a vital foothold in the northern Pacific, allowing for better navigation, military positioning, and influence over maritime routes connecting Asia and North America.
- Precedent of Expansionism: The purchase aligned with the broader U.S. policy of Manifest Destiny, emphasizing territorial expansion to secure national interests.

The Role of the Treaty of 1867 and International Diplomacy

The purchase was also shaped by diplomatic negotiations and treaties that solidified American interests in the region:

- Russian Motivation: Russia, facing financial difficulties and geopolitical challenges, decided to sell Alaska to focus on more pressing issues in Europe and Asia.
- The Purchase Agreement: The U.S. negotiated with Russia, culminating in the Treaty of Cession, signed on March 30, 1867, with Secretary of State William H. Seward playing a key role. The treaty effectively transferred sovereignty for \$7.2 million—a bargain considering Alaska's future value.

This strategic context underscores how geopolitics and international diplomacy were primary factors influencing the U.S. decision to acquire Alaska. The move was seen as a means to expand American influence, prevent rival powers from establishing dominance, and secure a strategic position in the Pacific theater.

Economic Opportunities and Resources: Unlocking Alaska's Wealth

The Prospect of Rich Natural Resources

Another major factor behind the purchase was the anticipation of vast economic benefits

derived from Alaska's abundant natural resources.

- **Fur Trading:** Before the formal purchase, Russian-American fur traders had exploited the region's rich fur-bearing animals, notably sea otters and other marine mammals. The fur trade was lucrative and indicated the economic potential of the region.
- **Mineral Wealth:** Although early exploration was limited, later discoveries of gold, coal, and other minerals confirmed Alaska's resource richness. The Klondike Gold Rush of the late 1890s is a prime example of how mineral wealth attracted prospectors and investors.
- **Fisheries:** Alaska's extensive coastline and abundant marine life made it a critical hub for fishing industries, especially salmon and cod, which contributed significantly to regional and national economies.

The Strategic Economic Vision of the United States

The U.S. government and entrepreneurs recognized that Alaska's resources could bolster the nation's economy:

- **Trade Expansion:** Alaska's location facilitated trade routes across the Pacific, connecting the U.S. with Asian markets for commodities like timber, fish, and minerals.
- **Agricultural and Timber Potential:** The region's vast forests promised future resource extraction, while its land offered possibilities for settlement and agriculture.
- **Economic Diversification:** Incorporating Alaska into the U.S. economic sphere diversified the nation's resource base, reducing dependency on other regions and boosting economic resilience.

Additional Factors Influencing the Purchase

While the two primary factors—geopolitical strategy and economic potential—dominated discussions, other considerations also played roles in the decision:

- **Manifest Destiny and National Pride:** The belief that the U.S. was destined to expand across the continent and into the Pacific motivated leaders to pursue territorial acquisitions.
- **Domestic Politics:** Support for the purchase was influenced by political leaders eager to demonstrate American strength and to prevent European powers from gaining influence in North America.
- **Scientific and Exploratory Interests:** Alaska's vast and largely uncharted territories attracted explorers and scientists, adding to the interest in acquiring the territory.

Conclusion: The Interplay of Strategy and Resources

The United States' purchase of Alaska was a multifaceted decision driven by a confluence of strategic, economic, and diplomatic factors. Primarily, the purchase was motivated by

the desire to secure American interests in the Pacific and to counteract European influence, especially that of Russia and Britain. Concurrently, the potential economic benefits—rich resources, strategic trade routes, and future development prospects—made Alaska an attractive acquisition. Over time, the foresight of leaders like William Seward proved prescient, as Alaska became a vital part of the U.S., contributing to its economic growth, strategic security, and geopolitical presence in the Pacific region.

In essence, the Alaska purchase exemplifies how strategic geopolitics and economic opportunities often intertwine in shaping major national decisions. It was a calculated move that reflected America's ambitions to extend its influence and harness its resources, laying the groundwork for the future economic and strategic might of the nation.

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