

China or the EU, the Next Superpower?

With its rapid advancement in military power, technological and economic growth, will China replace the U.S. as the next superpower or will that honor go to the European Union?

China

This is not the first time in history that China has advanced militarily and economically as a force to reckon with. During the Ming dynasty China had built the largest naval vessels of its time. Those were the flagships of an armada that ventured as far as the east coast of Africa on several naval expeditions in the fifteenth century. Then China suddenly stopped the advancement and looked inward for the next four centuries. Now, many are expecting China to assume the role of global leadership as American might seems to be fading away.

President Obama looked timid in criticizing China on the environmental and human rights issues during his trip to the ASEAN conference recently. He also refused to meet the Dalai Lama in order to appease China. Is this an indication of a game changer in global leadership?

Maybe, not that fast! Unlike the Soviet Union, the U.S. and China are very much dependent on each other. Despite what may seem apparent, both the countries are economically tied to each other. Although China has a massive surplus against the U.S., its own economy is highly dependant on American imports. Additionally, there is no other safe haven for China to park its money than the U.S. Now that China has largely discarded socialism, it's hard to find a definition for what remains of its ideology, values and world view. A superpower needs to define itself before dominating the world.

China is still looking inward. It is busy lifting itself out of poverty; fighting disease and illiteracy; embracing technology that has put Chinese astronauts in space. All this, while allowing an unprecedented flowering of personal freedoms. Yet China is decades behind the U.S. in prosperity, education, infrastructure (outside its mega cities) and in providing freedom to its people.

As a matter of fact, China is reluctant to take a leadership role in world affairs despite America's pressure that it (China) should become a stakeholder in resolving conflicts between Iran and North Korea, Israel and Palestine and India and Pakistan. China has been a reluctant follower not a leader. China's record in the world's trouble

spots, from North Korea to Iraq and Darfur, suggests that it defines its responsibilities in ways that enhance its economic interests.

China has the potential to be a superpower but it may take decades before it can become one. In the meantime, we cannot assume that the U.S. will become a sitting duck while China will keep advancing. Americans know their weaknesses and shortcomings, thus, they have already won half the battle. They also have experience in beating their adversaries in the past – a skill that China lacks.

The European Union

The European Union is more of an economic block where the merchant states form a system of governance. It is more like a supermarket where the traders come to sell their products and services under one roof. Unfortunately, Europe lacks a strong political cohesion to face up to the existing and rising powers. Another problem facing Europe is its shrinking population combined with its inability to attract and integrate immigrants in the workplace. Unlike the U.S., Europe lacks the capacity to structure its national interest and to define international and global interests in terms of its own interests.

Any superpower will need a definite political identity which the EU lacks despite its attempt to ratify a constitution. Even after a constitution is ratified, the EU will lack the cohesion for the radical course needed to become a superpower. Under the proposed constitution, major foreign policy issues will still be decided by the 25 member states which must vote unanimously in order for a policy to take effect. The way the EU has been acting so far, it seems unlikely that they can form a comprehensive strategic policy over their own regional interest and ideology.

On the matter of defense, the EU is still dependent on NATO. The role of their own security and defense structure is limited to peacekeeping and economic sanctions. A superpower will need a more potent military posture, a rapid deployment capability and a mighty striking force. Looking at the above facts, it is unlikely that the EU will become a superpower in the near term, nonetheless, there is no denying that the EU will remain a pivotal global player, a superpower