

# The World's Superpowers: Current, Former, Future Essay

## Introduction

A superpower is a country capable of influencing others and international laws and policies (Dictionary.com, 2014). The term superpower was introduced after World War II, when it was used to refer to the USA, the UK, and the former USSR (Contemporary History, 2008). The factors that define the world's top countries have changed over the last couple of decades. The past influence superpowers, such as Great Britain and Russia, has gone down over time. This paper discusses the current, former, and emerging superpowers, and the criteria used to classify them.

## Current Superpowers (21<sup>st</sup> Century)

A country is considered a superpower if it covers an extensive geographical area and has a large population, massive resources, potent military force, and a stronger economy than most nations (Hynes, 1998). The United States is considered the sole superpower in our day (Karlin, 2011). The European Union is considered a threat due to its extensive resources and political influence (Hynes, 1998). Additionally, China, Russia, and India are considered emerging superpowers because of their current political and economic influence (Hynes, 1998).

Although geographical vastness is important in defining superpowers, some countries, such as Singapore, have very strong economies despite their small size (Dahlman & Renwick 2014). The Gulf countries, most of which have a small population, are also becoming more powerful due to the significant oil and natural gas deposits they control (Karlin, 2011). The military is also a key consideration in classifying a nation as a superpower. India, for example, has an outsized military and numerous nuclear weapons; for that reason, it is put in the same rank as the United States, Russia, China, Israel, and the UK with regard to military influence (Insana, 2014).

The economic performance of countries is another consideration in defining superpowers. The US, China, Japan, India, Germany, Russia, Brazil, the UK, France, and Italy are the world's leading economies based on GDP (Insana, 2014). These 10 countries control two-thirds of the global GDP and dictate the policies affecting the world's economy (Karlin, 2011).

## Former Superpowers (19<sup>th</sup> century)

Past superpowers were defined using variable factors, such as military strength, natural resources, population, the area covered, and economic strength, which explains why they kept changing (Hynes, 1998). The British Empire was the unrivaled superpower of the nineteenth century (Contemporary History, 2008). The country used its influence to acquire many colonies across the globe, increasing its size to comprise a third of the world's geographical area at one time (Contemporary History, 2008). The British Empire declined in terms of influence as a result of World War One and the Great Depression (Contemporary History, 2008; Hynes, 1998). World War II marked the end of the British Empire's dominance and the rise of the United States and the Soviet Union in its place (Contemporary History, 2008).

## **Future Superpowers (End of 21<sup>st</sup> Century)**

The battle for the future superpower seems to be based on political, economic, military, and technological supremacy, rather than the traditional large geographical size and population of a nation. According to Insana (2014), the United States is likely to remain the superpower for long considering its significant investments in energy and the manufacturing industry, as well as the brilliant technological innovations attributable to its population (Insana, 2014). Future superpowers include nations such as the European Union, Russia, China, India, and Brazil (Karlin, 2011). All the emerging superpowers have shown increasing military, technological, and political influence (Hynes, 1998).

## **Conclusion**

The nature of global superpowers has and will continue to change over time. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the British Empire was outright superpower due to its geographical vastness and significant influence. After the Second World War, the USSR and the United States became the world's superpowers. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 made the United States the sole superpower. Many have questioned how long the United States will remain in the top position. However, its enormous resources, military advancement, global influence, and technological knowhow dictate otherwise. However, only time will tell if China, India, the European Union, Russia, or Brazil will dislodge the USA from the top position as the world's superpower.

## **References**

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