

Time for Europe to take a long, hard look at its global decline



Global influence in international security is a zero-sum game, says **Frans-Paul van der Putten**, who warns that China is now pulling steadily ahead even though few Europeans yet understand what this means for them

Europe is ill-prepared, if prepared at all, for the way its influence in international security is declining, or for the consequences of that decline. China's rise is the forerunner of what *Newsweek's* Editor Fareed Zakaria has called 'the rise of the rest', meaning the non-Western China's emerging role as a major international security actor heralds an overall decline in the power of the West, but clearly it is one that will affect Europe more than the United States. The U.S. will retain its position as the most influential actor in international security, even though the gap between it and other powers may be narrowing. Europe is already being overtaken by China as the second most influential player, so the question is not whether Europe will be a less powerful actor in international security, because that process cannot be avoided, but whether Europe will still be capable of protecting its interests around the world.

Come the day when international security will no longer be so exclusively dominated by

the West, Europe's need to actively protect its economic interests will be all the greater. Developing the means to do so is bound to mean significant costs and sacrifices. Europeans may need to spend substantially more on military capacity, relying less on their military alliance with the U.S. They may also have to give up the permanent seats in the UN Security Council held by Britain and France in return for being able to shape the Council's post-reform structure. They will also probably have to accept a significantly less open economic model, and to impose fewer normative demands on non-Western countries.

Far-reaching changes of this calibre are for most Europeans impossible to accept at present, and probably not even to seriously contemplate. Yet as long as this mindset prevails, no major shift in Europe's security strategy will be possible. So in the meantime it is necessary to increase the flexibility with which Europe can respond to the fundamental geopolitical changes now taking place. This can be done by investing

in a robust knowledge infrastructure and by creating public debate on Europe's changing position in international security, and on the rise of new great powers.

Greater preparedness will begin with greater awareness of changing power relations outside Europe, in particular the rise of China. Europe needs to develop an independent knowledge infrastructure to supply policymakers with information on what is happening to China's international security role. European policymakers tend to depend on data and insights from American sources – universities, think tanks, defence consultancies and government agencies. But the bulk of these are from an American perspective, whereas Europe has its own distinct geopolitical position. This is particularly true of China's impact on international security. European policymakers should also initiate public debate on major new developments like the increased role of Chinese state-owned investors in the European economy, and China's growing impact on the international agenda for human rights and global governance. These debates are also needed for Europeans to decide what sort of price they are prepared to pay to stay in the global race for influence.

After the end of the Cold War, Europe once again moved to a more prominent position in global security because America's European allies automatically became the most important secondary security actors. But Europe's relative return to prominence is now being affected by the rapid rise of China. This is already visible in regional crisis management in the Middle East and Africa, regions where both Europe and China play a role in regional stability. Two

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By **Wei Pan**

How we in China see the future of global governance

It is not too early to imagine ways in which China's rising economic power might reshape the global political map. Crisis or no crisis, China will by the end of this year overtake Japan to become the world's second largest economy. Some Americans have even started to talk about "Chimerica" co-governing the world. But predicting the future is a notoriously risky business, and in any case we know that Japan with its theoretically influential economy in fact has little political impact in world affairs, while the Soviet Union with its relatively small economy was able to turn the world upside down.

It is in any case wrong to fantasise that China is likely to follow the old logic of the Western powers by spreading religious belief, projecting military power, directing value orientation, and imposing a political system. China is more likely to seek "mutual respect" rather than "dominance", and three simple doctrines may well shape its behaviour.

First, the very ancient principle of "hua bu zhi yi" would be followed; it means the Chinese should not govern foreign peoples. Please don't immediately challenge me with Tibet, because the people there are Chinese citizens. "Non-interference" may be an overly legal expression but it nevertheless reflects the maxim with which the Chinese "empire" in East Asia survived all other empires. It seems amazing to us in China that after the imperial failures of Great Britain

recent examples of regional security crises in these parts of the world are the nuclear issue in Iran-U.S. relations and the Darfur crisis. In both instances, European influence is diminishing at the local level, while that of China's is growing. This is a result of the European strategy of applying economic sanctions and adopting a confrontational stance towards Tehran and Khartoum.

China, by contrast, has preferred to keep its local economic interests intact and to remain friendly with these countries' governments. Europe's actions limiting economic ties and criticising local governments have a progressively smaller impact each time they are applied, while strengthening China's position, so that Beijing emerges as indispensable to efforts to de-escalate these crises because it has influence both in the UN Security Council and at local level. This doesn't apply to all regional security crises, but it does reveal a significant advance of Chinese influence in parts of the world where Europe and the U.S. were formerly dominant.

Another sphere in which China's rise affects the European position is the setting of international norms for global governance and human rights. Many in Europe believe that the EU's "soft power" means their part of the world has a promising future as a norm-setter and as a model for multilateralism to shape international security mechanisms. But Western-originated norms for governance and human rights are increasingly on the defensive. If they are not to become obsolete, both international norms and the international organisations built on them will need to accommodate non-Western influence and interests.

In global security governance, a key issue is the relationship between human rights and state sovereignty. China, like many other non-Western countries, is reluctant to see the UN interfering in a domestic crisis against the wishes of the local government. Europe supports the idea that the international community's responsibility is to interfere in situations where human rights are seriously threatened. China doesn't disagree in principle, but disputes the Western definition of human rights. The underlying issue is that the approach favoured by the West leads to more Western influence, whereas China's approach is more beneficial for China. Both China and European countries are keener than the U.S. that the UN Security Council should keep on functioning, and so are forced to make certain compromises. The difference is that for Europe, with its preference for soft over hard power, norm-setting spearheads its global security strategy.

The balance of direct political influence of China and Europe in each other's regions is also set to change. That Europe plays no role in East Asian security is becoming more significant than ever now that the region plays such a major role in the global economy. Europe's political absence from the East Asian region is notable not just because of the region's global importance, but also because the region faces two acute security crises. The European Union is involved in the Taiwan issue – and the military stand-off between China and the US – through the arms embargo it maintains against China and through Europe's military alliance with the United States. The EU has no viable strategy to deal with the arms embargo, and no clear policy on the

Taiwan issue. Regarding the second crisis, the North Korean nuclear crisis, Europe is formally involved through British and French permanent membership of the Security Council, even though the other three permanent members together with Japan and the two Koreas have effectively sidelined the European actors through the Six-Party Talks. Europe is currently not contributing to regional security in East Asia even though formal mechanisms exist for exerting influence there.

Although Europe's economic clout is thus not coupled with political influence in East Asia, China is becoming increasingly influential in Europe. Major Chinese companies and funds are already investing in European businesses, and are likely to do so on a larger scale in the future. Most of China's major corporations and investment funds are state-owned, but this does not mean that Chinese state-owned investors are primarily motivated by political considerations, even if such considerations are never entirely absent from their agendas. Incidentally, the activities of Chinese state-owned companies are also enhancing China's influence in regional politics in Africa and the Middle East. Chinese investors have the capital that European companies at present lack. Although the Chinese government aims to keep a low profile in this context, in the long run it is bound to have not only greater interests in Europe but also the means to exert influence.

If Chinese state-owned investors are allowed to purchase a substantial number of financial, high-tech, and logistics firms in Europe, this would provide the Chinese government with the potential to exert political influence. European governments will face a

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and the USSR, the U.S. is still trying to "govern" Afghanistan. Strategic importance, superior fire power and huge financial expenditures do not make military occupations or puppet regimes viable (unless, of course, the Afghans were to be given U.S. citizenship!). America's military budget is equivalent to those of all other countries combined, and although its military have pledged to "win two wars at the same time," they haven't won a single war since World War II. They may win battles, but they lose their wars.

My second point is that the most important value for China in international relations is "mutual respect." Our approach is that because no government is able to govern a "foreign" people, respecting foreign governments is the way to receive respect and maintain peace. If the French government, for instance, were to feel free to humiliate the Chinese government so as to win greater domestic support in France, the Chinese government would do the same. Keeping good relationships between people requires mutual respect, and so do inter-government relationships. If they were to stick to this principle, few countries would feel the need to possess weapons of mass destruction, not even Iran and North Korea.

A major departure from this principle of mutual respect is the self-imposed sense of moral superiority that we see as an amusing leftover from the era of colonialism. China respects human rights, but not when they are defined as a "superior" way of governance. China could never become a "stakeholder" in human rights of the kind that are used to justify bloody civil conflicts or even naked invasions.

Thirdly, China will strive in international economic relations for mutual benefits under

difficult choice. Either they must allow state-owned Chinese investors to expand their presence in the EU economy, or they must introduce defensive measures to screen and sometimes prohibit foreign investments, even if that compromises the principles of a free market. Allowing state-backed companies to play a greater role in the international economy could benefit large countries such as China. The stakes are in any case getting higher because the global financial crisis is due to increase China's economic influence in Europe, while the concept of state interventionism – as practiced in China – is also on the rise internationally.

Many European countries have been working hard to further strengthen European integration while adapting to the post-colonial and post-Cold War world. But in the external security strategy sphere they are not doing enough to keep up with international developments. The focus on the EU's future potential and on what has been achieved so far, and on its internal processes, has apparently distracted attention from the geopolitical realities of Europe's shifting relative position. Just as the rise of Europe between 1500 and 1900 was a fundamentally new phenomenon, so is today's rise of the non-Western world. It is very difficult for Europeans to imagine a world in which we and the Americans are no longer the politically dominant minority. But China is already successfully challenging the old system, and Europe needs to look at what is happening and think hard about the implications. □

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fair terms. China still suffers from various discriminations imposed by the "international community," such as its "non-market economy" status in the WTO and the arms and high tech embargo by both the U.S. and the EU. More debatable, perhaps, is the status of China's state-owned financial and industrial enterprises. They are independently run and listed on the stock exchanges. With more than 99% of China's registered firms being mini-sized family businesses, the Chinese government has created state-owned enterprises to undertake expensive domestic infrastructure projects and to compete internationally. In the world markets for natural resources, a few Western oligarchs have been the dominant forces, relying on their own governments as back-up and to manipulate foreign politics. "Free" markets without any state intervention have never existed as either the state captures capital, or capital captures the state. In Africa, China's state-owned enterprises emphasise mutual benefits and try to win the local people's hearts by offering sustainable cooperation in the long run. By contrast, the western oligarchs' profit-making looks more like an outdated conquistadores' offer of "cheap weapons for pure gold," and of course that is the hidden core of the Sudan dispute.

As China's industrial capacity grows, these three principles may yet prevail and help make the "free world" freer than it is today. For my part, I can only wish that Europeans could see that this approach offers a chance to achieve real progress rather than presenting the West with a crisis of "global governance". □

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