

SUPERPOWER HL ESSAY

Analyze how the global influence of different superpower states has changed over time [12].

Superpowers are countries that are considered very powerful and incredibly influential on a global scale. A country's relative power can be determined by looking at its economic, political, military and cultural power. These four areas, together with its demographic location and situation, decide whether a country can be classified as an international superpower. With this the term hegemonic influence plays a vital role in describing the degree to which a single country, or a small selection of countries, can direct and predominate other states globally.

However, numbers of global superpowers have never been consistent throughout the past decades and have experienced significant changes and shifts. In 1945, after the second world war, the word 'superpower' was first used in reference to the USA, the British Empire and the USSR. While many countries suffered from the shocks and stresses of the past war, these three regions emerged as winners by having had sufficient damage control and therefore limited destruction. This automatically made them superior to the rest of the world, as basic needs and a social balance were established and reliably maintained throughout the war. While the British Empire deteriorated fast and lost vast amounts of land, due to a weakened economy and an expensive programme of social reform, the USA and the USSR continued to increase their power and simultaneously widened their global reach. From 1946 onwards emphasis was still put on hard power, focusing on military strength and technological advances. Several Doctrines and the Cold War (1945 to 1960) have triggered further rivalry, especially between the USA and the USSR. While the USA had close alliances with Western Europe, Latin America and Some Asian Countries, the USSR had limited relations and restricted global reach. When Reagan started his presidency, it is believed that Soviet defence spending increased dramatically, and the finance system was brought out of balance. Therefore in 1991, the communist USSR collapsed, and the USA has been considered the only real superpower ever since.

The US has now extended its reach further and has established a profound base in terms of soft power. Cultural aspects, such as the American cuisine, consumer culture and the media branch have become more popular globally, as TNCs distribute these values on a global scale, via a process called "Americanization".

Nevertheless, there are rapidly emerging superpowers which are considered to become superpowers in the next few decades. China's rapid economic growth and strengthening of military and cultural power have led to many people proposing that China is the world's next superpower. The EU countries also have been considered as a superpower; however, this has been rethought due to too large internal differences within the member countries.

It can be concluded that the USA is currently the only country having a substantial global reach. Even though the US had lost its significance in 2008, due to a financial crisis, it has regained its power status quickly mainly due to the already established interconnections. The US now rules much of the world's trade markets and maintains secure international connections. Furthermore, it can be deduced that becoming a superpower nowadays is more challenging, as expectations have risen (are still rising) and large-scale competition has become more intense.