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## Will Influential Asia Shape the World?

Shoeb K. Zainuddin | September 29, 2012



Customers talk to a salesperson at a Lenovo shop in Shanghai in this February 17, 2011 file photo. Experts urged the West not to underestimate China. (Reuters Photo/Aly Song)

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*Europe should be more democratic than the rest, since it's actually run by the heads of two countries, Germany and France. It's incredibly dysfunctional.*

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**New York.** Fueled by rising incomes and a half billion new consumers by 2020, Asia will dominate the global economy over the next few decades, forcing the world's financial and security architecture to reflect the rise of emerging nations.

This point, made by Kishore Mahbubani, dean of the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, at the 12th annual Leadership Forum in New York, was countered by billionaire investor George Soros, who said that many emerging powers do not have strong internal systems, such as democratic institutions, to play a leading role on the global stage.

The forum — titled “Defining the Future: How Emerging Powers Will Shape The World Order” and co-sponsored by Strategic Review, an Indonesian journal of leadership, policy and world affairs — brought together Mahbubani, Soros and Lakhdar Brahimi, the United Nations Special Representative for Syria.

Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, who delivered the keynote address, laid the groundwork for the debate when he said the seismic power shifts now underway would continue to have an impact as the Cold War gives way to “Warm Peace.”

“One of the challenges of the Warm Peace is how to accommodate the rise of emerging powers such as Brazil, Argentina, India, Indonesia, China, Turkey and Saudi Arabia,” he said. “Economic growth is what makes a country strong, and it determines a country's influence in the community of nations.”

The emerging powers, he added, are even more influential today given the gloomy economic outlook in the developed world. “As a result, emerging powers are not just hard to ignore but they are new partners in reshaping the global landscape,” the president said.

This point was picked up by Mahbubani, who argued that despite uncertainty in the short term, the long-term outlook appeared bright as growing numbers of people from emerging powers join the ranks of the middle class.

“Indonesia is part of the larger story and the key word is confidence, which is incredibly high within the emerging countries,” he said.

“But how do we restructure the global order to reflect this significant change? The UN Security Council must change as the current permanent members are dictators as they cannot be voted out.”

Soros, however, was not convinced, saying that the collapse of the Soviet Union and other past emerging powers proved that democracy and freedom of expression are vital components of a nation's power.

“We must consider this when we talk about the emerging powers and the West, especially so for China. Will it become an open society? That is the single most important development for the world to consider,” he said.

Mahbubani countered by urging bystanders to not underestimate China, because that would be



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dangerous.

"The Chinese Communist Party of today is very different from the past. More than 70 million Chinese travel every year and they can see how the rest of the world is developing," he said, adding that the Western mindset is a black-and-white one and cannot comprehend the complexity of China.

Another region of the world that is poorly understood is the Middle East, Brahimi said. The region, he noted, has had many false starts but the Arab Spring has given people a new voice and they are not going to be silenced.

The West, he added, is too preoccupied with Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who will soon leave office.

"But Iran is an ancient civilization that has been around for a long time and will continue to be around in the future."



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