

Strategic Vision

A Review of the Volume

Zbigniew Brzezinski: *Strategic Vision: America and the Crisis of Global Power*¹

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Besides Henry Kissinger and Samuel P. Huntington, the Polish-born Zbigniew Kazimierz Brzezinski has been one of the most influential national security advisors and geopoliticians of the Presidential Cabinet in the United States of America during the last 50 years. However, his renown and authority are not specifically due to his advisory career but rather to his geopolitical activity, which he revealed to the world at large mostly in his volumes published in 1997, *The Grand Chessboard*, and in 2012, *Strategic Vision: America and the Crisis of Global Power*.

Strategic Vision appeared in the edition of the ‘Antall József Political and Social Science Knowledge Centre’ and in the translation of Tamás Magyarics, Hungary’s Ambassador to Dublin. Based on past historical examples as references, in his book, Brzezinski analyses the current internal and foreign policy of the United States of America as well as the world political events and happenings, and takes a look into the future in an attempt to provide us an overall picture of the global world order after 2025. János Martonyi, Hungary’s Minister of Foreign Affairs, writes in his foreword to the book that *Strategic Vision* is a geopolitical script in search of an answer as to whether the *unus inter pares* (one among equals) or the *primus inter pares* (the first among equals) principle will prevail in the new, emerging world order.

The picture that unfolds right before us throughout the some 300 pages is not too promising; it does not exactly provide grounds for great joy. In his book, *The Grand Chessboard*, the author placed his confidence in that the USA and the European Union would be able to counterbalance the changes in global power relations and the West losing ground; *Strategic Vision* does not strike such an optimistic note any

1 Edited by Basic Books, 2013.

more. The events that took place during the 15 years between the two publications suggest that the United States of America could not either hold on to or add to the immense benefits that it came by in world politics at the end of the Cold War.

The book contains an introduction, four chapters, and an epilogue. The central part is made up of the four vast chapters, each looking for potential answers to a specific issue concerning changes in global power.

A brief presentation of the questions raised:

1) what are the possible outcomes of the shift in emphasis that takes place from West to East at the level of the global power? (Part I: *The Receding West*);

2) what sort of external and internal regeneration does the United States of America have to undergo in order to keep its global influence and its current status of a superpower? (Part II: *The Waning of the American Dream*);

3) what are the most possible geopolitical outcomes should the USA lose its dominant status of a global power? (Part III: *The World after America: By 2025, not Chinese but Chaotic*);

4) the role and responsibility of America in developing the West in its wider sense (deepening the monetary and political union of the EU and developing a West that would include both Russia and Turkey) as well as the role of the USA in maintaining the eastern balance; what Brzezinski has in mind is that the USA should conduct such a constructive Asia policy which is not exclusively China-centred, but it also pays regard to Japan as America's key Asian strategic partner, while paying due attention to India as well, the other emerging regional superpower of the Asian continent.

We must make it clear from the start that Brzezinski does not intend on 'burying' the West – the West as such has not come to an end, and it never will. In turn, what becomes more and more certain is the approaching end of the unipolar world system, the status of the United States of America as a global power.

The wavering of the dominant position of the West in global politics has been influenced by several factors in the last period. In the case of the USA, Brzezinski deems important to highlight that the internal and foreign policy pursued by George Bush senior, Bill Clinton, and George Bush junior have significantly contributed to the weakening status of the USA as a superpower.

Internally, the USA is struggling with economic and financial crisis, an increasing public debt, deteriorating economic infrastructure, etc., which have all very much faded the world-wide attractiveness of the 'American dream', the country of infinite possibilities. In terms of external politics, Brzezinski brings up against the accountable leaders of the USA that in the period following the Cold War they ironically and self-assuredly propagated that the 21st century would be the century of the USA:

Bill Clinton (January 20, 1997): 'At this last presidential inauguration of the 20th century, let us lift our eyes towards the challenges that await us in the next

century . . . At the dawn of the 21st century . . . America stands alone as the world's indispensable nation.' George W. Bush sets an even more confident tone in his speech delivered on August 28, 2000, stating the following: 'Our nation is chosen by God and commissioned by history to be a model for the world.' These and other similar statements were followed by actions, too: after September 11, 2001, George W. Bush declares war against terrorism (2001 – attack on Afghanistan and the overthrow of the Taliban government; 2003 – attack on Iran and settling the score with the regime led by Saddam Hussein).

The Middle-Eastern politics of the George Bush period were not basically characterized by maintaining stability but rather by the liquidation of political systems supporting terrorism. 'The United States of America will not let the world's most dangerous regimes threaten us with the most destructive weapons in the world' (Iran, Iraq, and North Korea = the 'Evil Axis').

In addition to all of this, we also have to reckon with the fact that China has demonstrated a spectacular path of development over the past 15–20 years (by now, we can place it second only to the United States in terms of economic development), Russia, due to its vast oil and natural gas reserves and geopolitical situation, remains a relevant and unavoidable geopolitical factor in the future too, while India has developed into a regional superpower over the past decades, which nurtures ambitions of becoming a global superpower even though its disputes with China and Pakistan are a weakening factor.

All these suggest that the unipolar concentration of the former global power is scattered on four continents. Therefore, should the USA not be able to regenerate, to carry out internal reforms, and lay its external affairs on new foundations, that is to say, if its status of a global power becomes even weaker, then it may lead to the appearance of several regional conflicts, which will not yield great victors, but more and more losers will emerge. In case this script will prevail, the 21st century will not be that of China. 'The world after America' will not be dominated by China but rather by chaos mostly based on the competition and potential conflicts among the regional powers of Asia: China, India, and Japan.

In order to avoid this, the author comes up with a new kind of possible balance of global superpowers for the future, where the USA will play a double role. 'On the one part, it will be the driving force and the guarantor of the greater and larger unit in the West, while, on the other part, it has to create a balance and be the peacemaker among the great powers in the East.' The author immediately adds that these two roles will have to be simultaneously present in the American foreign policy; otherwise, success will not follow. In the West, the USA will be given a significant role in terms of commitment towards the NATO, in promoting the calculated and step-by-step western integration of Turkey and the increasingly democratizing Russia, as well as in deepening the EU monetary and political integration.

The challenge in the East does not get any simpler either, which the USA will have to meet. On the one hand, it will have to avoid military interventions in the future, which can only be adopted in case the threat and aggressiveness is aimed at countries where American military forces have already been stationed under contract as part of a long-standing international situation, that is the USA has signed a commitment (the case of China and South Korea). The USA has to acknowledge that peace and stability in Asia are not sustainable if associated with American military presence and its direct employment. The USA's participation in Asia will have to take place through making use of diplomatic and economic instruments and encouraging the key actors' low-profile attitude, thus contributing to the maintenance of a regional power balance. Instead of intimidation, terrorization, and military presence, peacemaking and diplomacy will have to form the credo of the 21st-century America's external policy.

As a final conclusion, we can state that in the age of nations and peoples awakening and taking political initiatives in the wake of modern communication technologies, where we can witness the restructuring and diffusion of the unipolar global power, the USA bears an enormous responsibility: a USA that is unable to control and manage the world, but one that is still present as an economic, military, and cultural superpower, will have to go under a process of regeneration both in terms of its internal and external politics. At least this is what Brzezinski considers the only secure guarantee of the 21st century's new world order. The only question left to be answered is whether the diagnosis proposed by the great doyen of the American security policy and geopolitics is a correct one and whether the cure plan prescribed for the treatment of the new world political situation that has taken shape over the past decades will be complied with, as well as whether it will yield the expected outcomes, or the 21st century will be the century of the chaos.