

Book Review
By
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Zbigniew Brzezinski, Strategic Vision: America and the Crisis of the Global Power (New York: Basic Books, 2012), pp. 224.

Zbigniew Brzezinski is a counselor, trustee and co-chair at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) advisory board, and a senior research professor of international relations at the School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University. He has previously taught at Columbia and Harvard Universities. Dr. Brzezinski was national security adviser to President Jimmy Carter from 1977 to 1981. He is the author of several seminal books on international security and strategic issues.

In his new book Brzezinski discusses prospects of much discussed power transition to the East from the West. He thinks this transition may be apparent but not necessarily inevitable. The author opines that the US decline is a choice for its people and its leadership and not destined by fate. The people of US have therefore an option for revitalization of their national resolve. He recognizes that powers in Asia are on the rise but ignores the fact that the rise of the East will result in the reduction of the relative power of the West. US power may not be declining in absolute sense but it is not rising as well and it will have lesser power in future as national power of other states increases.

The author believes that beside US, Europe, Japan and other newly industrialized countries like China, Russia, Brazil and India (BRIC) will be the primary players of international politics in future. He also identifies secondary players like Israel, Mexico, Turkey, Iran and South Korea who will be influenced by these primary players which could result in potential wars for domination. With this perspective he identifies a number of states that are likely to be “geopolitically most endangered states” in future. His list of such states also includes Pakistan.

Dr. Brzezinski has tried to restructure the “strategic vision” to help US retain its global power position. The author has laid out four questions. While exploring them he builds the main argument of the book: 1) what are the implications of the

changing distribution of global power from the West to the East? 2) Why is America's global appeal waning, what are the symptoms of America's domestic and international decline? 3) What would be the likely geopolitical consequences if America declined from its globally preeminent position? What would be the role of China then? 4) How should a resurgent America define its long-term geopolitical goals beyond 2025?

The author argues that the US role in international politics will remain crucial in coming years. He advises US to be very careful with its overwhelming military capabilities and should not react like an "ignorant garrison state". Any such misadventure can have severe implication on the evolving power transition which resultantly would harm its geostrategic interests.

On China, the author writes, although its influence is growing in international institutions, but it is more interested in issues related to its basic state interests like regional trade and stability in Northeast Asia and South China Sea and not ready to accept the role of a global leader. This reluctant Chinese behavior has led the author to the conclusion that if US loses its global paramount position in the post 2025 world order it would lead to chaos rather than a world ordered under Chinese leadership. The argument he has made seems relevant. China's reluctance is likely to give birth to a number of aspiring regional hegemonic states causing serious threat to world peace and stability; John Mearsheimer had aptly termed this situation as "unbalanced multipolarity".

Dr. Brzezinski perceptively analyzes weaknesses and strengths of the US and points out six major liabilities that pose a great threat to US: unsustainable debt, imperfect fiscal system, broadening income gaps, decaying infrastructure, a public indifferent to the world, and US' increasingly gridlocked and highly partisan political system. America's residual strengths includes US overall economic power, technological and innovative prowess, relatively strong demographic support, capacity for reactive mobilization, nationally unified population and association with a set of values, such as human rights, individual liberty, political democracy, and economic opportunity.

According to Brzezinski, US and the China are unlikely to go to war as neither side can afford it. The author also believes that US-China global partnership is more likely if the US holds considerable geopolitical presence in the Far-East by preserving ties with Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, Singapore, Indonesia and Vietnam. Due to the historical animosity between China and Japan, China feels

safer with a strong US–Japan alliance, because US then will be a check on Japanese military buildup. Without this check Japanese military buildup would be one of China's worst nightmares. The small countries if not provided with security guarantee by US will either find it compulsory to form an alliance with China or build their own military muscle. This would generate security dilemma like situation and offset US offshore balancing strategy in different parts of the world.

To accomplish the former goal of revitalizing the West, Brzezinski believes the US needs to develop more cordial ties with Europe, provide an enduring assurance to NATO, and the work for a true democratic Russia. Brzezinski argues that US needs to play an active role in Asia not only in order to maintain stability in the region but even more so to create an environment conducive to a peaceful and cooperative US–China relationship, which can eventually be elevated to a wide-ranging political and economic global partnership.

Although the book is well researched and discusses various political, social, and economic situations likely to arise in future but the author has taken hypothetical calculations and built worst case scenarios to construct his arguments. Many arguments of the author appear unconvincing. It is difficult to understand how a relatively less powerful US will not only be able to revitalize itself but also strengthen the West as a whole, which is also declining. The author is also unable to explain how Russia's true democratization will materialize. "Strategic Vision" provides a clear assessment of the responsibilities of US in international relations as well as with policy options to fulfill these responsibilities. Anyone interested in the US foreign policy must read it.

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