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Book review: Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Strategic Vision. America and the Crisis of Global Power*, Basic Books, A Member of the Perseus Books Group, New York 2012

by Piotr Mszyca

After Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, the World has entered into new era. After Cold War has ended and United States finally prevailed, America remained as the only global superpower which supremacy was undisputed. Some scientists called it as 'the end of history', when after collapsing of the communism, USA didn't have anyone to compete with. There was an illusion that the World will not have to hold its breath during every single political crisis that could lead to a global conflict. The position of the 'World's Sheriff' might have given illusory sense of security.

The most pleased with such a course should have been America itself. No one could have ever assumed however, that the lack of one defined enemy or competitor could have been the biggest danger for USA. The last decade showed that America has increasing problems with bearing responsibility of the only global power in the World.

First decade of 21st century brought the crisis of American politics and started the changes in the international balance of power. Extremely unpopular and costly wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, Europe's

demographic problems and its decreasing role in the international politics, new potential global players and international economic crisis started in 2008, proved that United States cannot longer hold a status of the only superpower in the World.

In the book *Strategic Vision. America and the Crisis of Global Power*, Zbigniew Brzezinski is striving for answer four key questions: What are the reasons for declining USA and whole West's role? What would be possible consequences if America lost its superpower status? What would have happened if any other country would take the lead in World's supremacy? Last but not least, the Author is trying to look at World's politics map in 2025 and defines geostrategic goals that America should have to, remain its role of global superpower till that time and beyond.

In the first part of his book, Zbigniew Brzezinski admits that there were many empires in the World's history, however all of them, sooner or later collapsed. Brzezinski says, that USA are the next World's empire with its leading role in North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Mr. Brzezinski is going back to the moment,

when the Western World was united within the one Pact to contain expansion of Soviet Union and communism. After Cold War has ended, uniting Europe and America had to face another challenges, after the main enemy was gone. The reality in the World's politics discredited the status of NATO, but most of all, created the necessity for re-defining the real dangers for the Pact.

Collapse of the Soviet Union and degraded role of Russia let other World's players to gain more importance. Zbigniew Brzezinski advances a thesis that geopolitical stabilization is impossible without the cooperation of all the states which striving for regional power status. Very expansive attitude such countries as China, Russia, India or Brazil have, Mr. Brzezinski calls massive political awakening phenomenon. He claims that in the last few years, because of declining America and Europe's role on World's economy, the center of gravity moved from West to East. If this tendency will remain, and above mentioned countries will intensify their rivalry for resources, security and economic advance, the number of potential conflicts will raise.

The Author debates, how those factors could contribute to the collapsing of the West. Nevertheless, he leans toward the statement that the end of the Western World has not come yet but its leading role – has. America should re-gain its leading role. The way American model of interior policy will prove useful, and the role of

USA in the international politics will determine the importance of whole Western World.

The second part of the book, is focused on the number of problems, Mr. Brzezinski points that America has to face in early 21st century. There is really high speed growth of national public debt, spreading stratification and inequality within the American society, adoration to materialism, the need for financial system reform and polarization of political regime.

The so called American dream is breaking down, according to Brzezinski. This really important feature for USA, which was the synonym of freedom and liberalism, has become discredited after global economic downturn started. Mentioned in above paragraph problems and also: massive dismissal, growing unemployment, worsening infrastructure which is a key element for country's development, poor condition of early school education, spreading ignorance of American society and bigger dichotomy of American political scene where the consensus is more rare, give a picture of today's United States of America which fell into crisis.

On the other hand, Zbigniew Brzezinski gives also USA's strong points which could be a driving force to a positive changes that could heal America. To those Brzezinski qualifies: still strong position of American economy and its impact on the international level, measured by GPD *per capita* factor. Second of all, the level of higher

education which leads to innovativeness and technical progress on later stage. The third important determinant is high population growth rate which comparing to getting older society in Europe, Russia or Japan, gives America an advantage in struggling with China or India. In the end, Mr. Brzezinski includes also: capability to ensure constant energy security and democratic values. All those factors according to Brzezinski, give evidence to the mighty of USA. If America could effectively use them, together with correcting the problems, there would be a chance for regaining superpower status again.

In the third element of the book, Brzezinski tries to answer the question: What would the World look like, if the States lost its imperial power? Possible weakening of the United States could lead to a situation, that some other countries were in danger and became an object for potential expansionist policy of other bigger players. Brzezinski mentions Georgia, Belarus and Ukraine which could have fallen back under Russian sphere of influence. Whereas China could have used weak America to control Asian tigers – Taiwan and South Korea. The scenario where USA are losing its superpower status, could also lead to partition of Pakistan with effective role of India. Additionally, the Author thinks that without the American backup, Israel could have lost the biggest ally and fallen into long, exterminatory conflict with Arabic World. What is more, Afghanistan would

have likely become a new home for international terrorists.

Furthermore, only strong United States of America could effectively face climate changes and secure common properties: seas, cosmic space, cyberspace, security the territorial waters and peaceful exploration of Arctics. According to Brzezinski, the argument that decline of America and its isolation could destabilize international security must be the main determinant in Washington's activities for remaining superpower status. That is why, America should take the responsibility to lead the World.

In the last part of his book, professor Brzezinski indicates there should crystallize a strategic vision that could reach beyond 2025. This is the keynote of the whole book. According to this idea, America should play double role in the international relations. First of all, United States have to fix themselves and overcome all the obstacles. Secondly, US should push for bigger role of the whole Western World and at the same time strive to remain the balance in the East to contain China's growing position.

To do so, American politicians need to redefine the role of Russia and Turkey in American politics and include them to this strategy. Brzezinski offers to incorporate those two countries into the idea of Western World. That could improve international security meaningly. Author also underlines that scenario is not possible to

happen, without adopting by Russia and Turkey democratic values.

Zbigniew Brzezinski in his book *Strategic Vision. America and the Crisis of Global Power*, claims that United States of America has the leading role in the World, gained after collapsing of Soviet Union. The role of the only superpower in the World, gives Washington responsibility to protect international stabilization. However the 1st decade of 21st century with its culminating moment in 2008 questions America's status. This moment in the history showed how big the problems are that Obama's Administration has to face. It also showed that America isn't perfect and let to shorten the distance between USA and other countries. The idea of strategic vision gives almost messianic role to America. The conclusion therefore is that the international stabilization is possible only, when Washington remains strong and global superpower.

Zbigniew Brzezinski approaches the subject of Russia and Turkey in a very innovative way. He claims that without those two countries the international relations cannot gain stabilization. This statement met skepticism in America and its

ally states. Turkey is one of the biggest ally for USA already and has strong position in NATO, however most of European countries do not include Turkey to their definition of 'West'. Russia's issue is even more complicated after Cold War memories and authoritarian regime in Moscow. That is kind of new thinking of Brzezinski, because he thought of Russia with huge distance and even hostility. In *Strategic Vision* we can notice an evolution of Brzezinski's opinion.

*Strategic Vision. America and the Crisis of Global Power* book is extremely interesting. On one hand, Zbigniew Brzezinski advances an undeniable thesis that United States World Sherriff status is not so obvious anymore. What is more, he gives several evidences, for example economic factors. Really fast growth of China does not fascinate but starts to scare. What would happen if USA lost their global superpower status? The Author tries to predict and name the dangers connected to this issue. On the other hand, Brzezinski has a panacea for this. He calls it Strategic Vision. Only Strong United States of America give a warranty for stabilization in the international relations.