

Book review: George Friedman, *Następna dekada. Gdzie byliśmy i dokąd zmierzamy* [The Next Decade: Were We've Been and Were We're Going], Wydawnictwo Literackie, Warszawa 2012

by *Sylwia Ewelina Serwońska*

The Publisher book *The Next Decade: Were We've Been... and Were We're Going*, posits that The United States Has evolved from a republic to an empire, not intentionally but through circumstances. Friedman's first major point in *The Next Decade* is that America, which has always been a republic, has since WWII become an empire and that it hasn't learned to how an empire sustains itself. Using ancient Rome and early 1900s Britain as examples, Friedman says that empires don't rule by brute force, but rather they maintain their dominance by setting regional players against each other and balancing their power.

Why? The United States accounts for more than 20 percent of All foreign direct investment In the World, China f.e. In 2009 accounted for 4,4 percent. So this economy is a quarter of the world economy (The U.S.). They spend over 40 percent of the Total World military budget.

They are like world's policeman. Is that suitable for long? Probably not, but the role of the U.S. should not be the world's policeman but the balance wheel that works with alliance to serve our interests. America's war on terror, according to Friedman, was a huge mistake because its

objective was misstated. Instead of trying to cripple al Qaeda, they tried to eliminate the threat of terrorism everywhere, which is an impossible objective that could bankrupt the country. "Recovering from the depletions and distractions of this effort will consume the United States over the next ten years"¹.

Friedman suggests that American foreign policy is too often debated in terms of idealism and realism, but that power is really the key – „Power as an end in itself is a monstrosity that does not achieve anything lasting and will inevitably deform the American regime. Ideals without Power are simply words – they can come alive only when reinforced by the capacity to act. Reality is understanding how to wield power, but by itself it doesn't guide you toward the end to which your power should be put.... Realism and idealism are not alternatives but necessary complements. Neither can serve as a principle for foreign policy by itself”².

¹ G. Friedman, *The Next Decade: Were We've Been... and Were We're Going*, Publishing House Literackie, Warszawa 2012, p. 42.

² G. Friedman, *The Next...*, p. 41.; to see: Joseph Nye jr., *Soft Power: The Means to Success*

Three Machiavellian³ principles should be applied to serve they strategic interests:

1. To the extent possible, enable a balance of power in each region to consume energies and divert threats from the United States.

2. Maneuver others into bearing the major burden of confrontation or conflict, supporting those countries with economic benefits, military technology, and promises of military intervention if required.

3. Use military intervention only as a last resort, when the balance of power breaks down and allies can no longer cope with a problem.

Friedman spends the bulk of *The Next Decade* going from country to country and region to region, describing what America needs to do achieve an acceptable balance of power. His starting position is that Bush's post-9/11 War on Terror was a huge mistake because terror was never an existential threat to America and therefore shouldn't have been treated as a threat that transcended all others. Rather, our objective should have been to manage the threat (and public insecurity). Perhaps that is what President Obama is doing now.

Because America became obsessed with terrorism post-9/11, it failed to manage several regional balances of power:

- Israel is becoming dominant over the Arabs;
- India is becoming dominant over Pakistan;
- Iran is becoming dominant over Iraq;
- Germany and Russia may unite and dominate the remainder of Europe;
- Japan and its navy may dominate China.

Regarding Israel, Friedman points out the America was unpopular in the Middle East even before it became Israel's sponsor, so it is inaccurate to blame Israel for our current unpopularity in the region. But he also believes that Israel is less important strategically to America since the end of the Cold War, and this should enable us to expend fewer resources.

Ironically, the second and third dot-points above reveal that countries we have been trying to help – Pakistan and Iraq – have been so weakened by our help that they are in danger of being eclipsed by their neighbors – India and Iran.

Regarding Germany and Russia, Friedman thinks they are individually powerful, but because of synergies they would be dangerous as close allies, with Russia providing the people and natural resources and Germany providing the technology. Germany no longer has much need for America, and we can expect to see our relationship deteriorate in the future. But we want to prevent Germany and Russia from getting too close, and Poland will be the key.

in World Politics, Academic and Professional Publishing House, Warsaw 2007, pp. 7–188.

³ G. Friedman, *The Next...*, p. 50.

Despite all the talk about the Indian and Chinese economic juggernauts, Friedman is concerned that Japan, when it pulls out of its current economic slump, will feel pressured to address its insecurities over lack of resources (just as Germany, France, and Russia were insecure over their borders in the 1900s). Because India is physically isolated, it doesn't figure into this regional problem, but China and Japan have a long history of not liking each other, and Friedman believes they will eventually clash, with Japan having a stronger hand because of the way its society is organized.

Friedman is not shy about admitting that America sometimes has to abandon a country that has been an ally in the past:

„The United States made promises to Georgia that it now isn't going to keep. But when we look at the broader picture, this betrayal increases America's ability to keep other commitments. Georgia is of little importance to the United States, but is of enormous importance to Russia, guaranteeing the security of their southern frontier. The Russians would be prepared to pay a substantial price for Georgia, and

U.S. willingness to exit voluntarily should command a premium⁴”.

Or that a President sometimes has to lie to the American people about what he is doing. For example, Friedman thinks the President has to tell the American people that he is going to stop illegal drugs and illegal immigrants from coming in from Mexico, when, in fact, the President knows that this is impossible unless you legalize the drugs and have a national ID card.

In the long view, history is seen as a series of events – but the course of those events is determined by individuals and their actions. During the next ten years, individual leaders will face significant transitions for their nations: the United States' relationships with Iran and Israel will be undergoing changes, China will likely confront a major crisis, and the wars in the Islamic world will subside. Unexpected energy and technology developments will emerge, and labor shortages will begin to matter more than financial crises. *The Next Decade* is a provocative and fascinating look at the conflicts and opportunities that lie ahead. I recommend you read.

⁴ G. Friedman, *The Next...*, p. 174.