

# Robert Mańk

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"Strategic Vision: America and the Crisis of Global Power", Zbigniew Kazimierz Brzezinski, New York 2012 : [recenzja]

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(rev.) **Zbigniew Kazimierz Brzezinski**, *Strategic Vision: America and the Crisis of Global Power*, Basic Books, New York 2012, pp. 224

Zbigniew Brzezinski – born in Warsaw (March 28, 1928), an eminent geostrategist and political scientist. Since 1958, a US citizen, formerly President Jimmy Carter’s National Security Advisor between 1977 and 1981<sup>1</sup>. Politically engaged not only in supporting the anti-Soviet guerrilla in Afghanistan but also in taking advantage of human rights as an instrument of ideological struggle with the Soviet Union, and in helping Polish “Solidarity”.

Laureate of numerous decorations – Order of the White Eagle, the Presidential Medal of Freedom and the First Class Ukrainian Order of Merit, to name just a few. Author of countless works, monographs, essays and reports in the field of international relations, of which the following are considered as the most popular and acclaimed: *Grand Failure: The Birth and Death of Communism in the Twentieth Century* (1990), *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and its Geostrategic Imperatives* (1997), or *Second Chance: Three Presidents and the Crisis of American Superpower* (2007). Long-term American universities lecturer – in the years 1953–1960 he worked at Harvard University, then from 1960 to 1989 – at University of Columbia. Currently a counselor and trustee at the Center for Strategic and International Studies and a professor of American foreign policy at the School of Advanced International Studies at John Hopkins University.

*Strategic Vision: America and the Crisis of Global Power* is the latest book by Zbigniew Brzezinski. The work is written from a perspective of a geostrategist concerned about the fate of his homeland. Author sees the forthcoming changes in the foreign affairs and outlines an ambitious, long-term plan of action for the United States by 2025. The strategy is not looking further ahead because of the large number of variables occurring in the interstate relations, thus the accurate predictions made on a scale greater than two decades are, to a large extent, doomed to failure.

In the book composed of an introduction, four chapters (*The Receding West*, *The Waning of the American Dream*, *The World After America: By 2025, not Chinese but Chaotic* and *Beyond 2025: A new Geopolitical Balance*) and a conclusion titled *America’s Dual Role*, Zbigniew Brzezinski touches on numerous vital issues in the field of international relations. His primary goal is to predict the most likely scenario of progress of the foreign affairs and to determine the role of the United States in such setting. Hence, author shows the reasons of decline of the United States on the world stage, both domestic (such as causing the economic crisis in 2007 and unilateral policy of the George W. Bush administration) and external (shift in the center of gravity of foreign affairs from the West to the East resulting from rapid economic development of

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<sup>1</sup> <http://csis.org/expert/zbigniew-brzezinski>.

Asia or dispersion of global power). What is more, Brzezinski thoroughly explains the origin and effects of the phenomenon known as the mass political awakening.

The next part of the book is focused on the constructive criticism of the United States. Brzezinski bluntly lists the largest and most serious weaknesses of the former global hegemon. He says that if the US do not take decisive steps – do not “rebirth” by at least achieving a political consensus on the matter of national debt or developing their infrastructure – they will deny themselves the chance to play a key role at the global level in the coming years. At the same time Brzezinski argues that American leadership will not be followed by the emergence of Chinese primacy, because the world is now in a situation in which no single state will be able to seize the role of a global leader<sup>2</sup>. Author claims that the potential failure of the US in restoring its position will make the world more chaotic – whether in the case of neighborhood with Mexico<sup>3</sup>, environmental problems, or states whose national security is largely guaranteed by the United States (South Korea and Japan to name just a few).

To prevent such an outcome, a former Jimmy Carter’s Advisor defines a dual role which, if performed correctly, will allow the United States not only to remain a key worldwide power, but also to act with their allies as a guarantor of the world’s stability and be a counterbalance to the growing Asia. According to Brzezinski, the role of the US would involve acting towards the enlargement and revitalization of the West – seen not only as the EU, but also as a Turkey, Ukraine and Russia – as well as mediating and conciliation among the Asian countries<sup>4</sup>.

While assessing the merit of the presented work, one has to keep in mind that it belongs to the branch of futurology. Author interprets current events and trends, and on such basis attempts to predict the most likely course of action. Therefore it is impossible to fully evaluate the accuracy of the forecasts themselves (since they will be reviewed in the future). They are not however totally improbable. Even more, many of them have a strong legitimacy in the contemporary geopolitical environment and with the occurrence of certain circumstances, these projections would likely become reality. In addition, Brzezinski demonstrates a comprehensive acquaintance with history, while the usage of historical references (such as noticing the similarities between the fate of the Europe of the twentieth century and the emerging competition in contemporary Asia<sup>5</sup>) often reinforces the author’s thesis and allows the reader to better understand the complexity of described issues.

Furthermore, an experienced political analyst formulates his thoughts in a transparent way (four questions implemented in the introduction are an example, as they precisely define the subject of the whole work<sup>6</sup>), and the utilization of additional

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<sup>2</sup> Z. Brzezinski, *Strategic Vision: America and the Crisis of Global Power*, New York 2012, p. 75.

<sup>3</sup> Ibidem, p. 103.

<sup>4</sup> Ibidem, p. 192.

<sup>5</sup> Ibidem, p. 155.

<sup>6</sup> Ibidem, p. 2.

graphs, maps and tables helps to justify them in a thorough and consistent manner. What is noteworthy is that individual chapters are logically interrelated – for example, the question ending one chapter is simultaneously an opening to the reflections picked up in the next section<sup>7</sup>. The only inadvertence which can be pointed out in the structure of the *Strategic Vision* is the irregular fullness of chapter four (over 60 pages) compared to the previous sections (about 30 pages each).

Finally, Brzezinski not only foresees the future global order, but, even more importantly, provides ready solutions that could and should be implemented under these circumstances. Hence, author is not a doomsayer, but an active creator of a potential strategy – be it rebuilding the international status of America described in the second chapter, or proper functioning on the East, which would avoid major clashes in that part of the world in the chapter four.

In conclusion, the recent work of Zbigniew Brzezinski is a book that broadens horizons, provokes and gives plausible vision of what might happen in the global balance of power in the forthcoming decades. At the same time I want to point out that the complexity of used vocabulary, as well as complex historical metaphors, could cause less knowledgeable receivers to find this book too difficult. However, it is a must-read for all concerned – in an amateur or professional way – with the contemporary foreign affairs. Students of politically-related courses, scientists and politicians will therefore be excellent recipients of this work.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibidem, p. 74.