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"The Next Decade: Empire and Republic in a Changing World", George Friedman, Kraków 2012 : [recenzja]

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REVIEWS

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George Friedman, *The Next Decade: Empire and Republic in a Changing World*, Kraków 2012

George Friedman is the owner of the prestigious American agency, Stratfor, and the author of the sensational forecast for the world for the next 100 years. Educated in political science, he has dealt with geopolitical analysis for many years. In his latest book, *The Next Decade: Empire and Republic in a Changing World*, he makes an analysis of the relations between the Empire (the United States), the Republic and power. The author focuses on two major issues. One of them is the concept of the unintentional empire; G. Friedman states that it was history that decided that the United States have become a global power rather than consciously taken steps. The second issue is an attempt to answer the question whether the Republic can survive. It seems that the main reason for the creation of this book was the visible decrease of the importance of the United States on the international arena, even though the author explains in the introduction that the book is only a survey of the most important problems that will appear within the next ten years, which shall be a very difficult period, full of unpredictable events.

The book consists of fourteen chapters, divided according to the three levels of analysis: geopolitical (traditional division based on regions), demographical, technological and military. The book also tries to answer the question about the steps that should be taken by the President in order to maintain the status of the Empire in the world. However, the dominating analytical approach is the classical division of the world into regions and geographical conditions; such statements as, for example that the Carpathians constitute a difficult obstacle for an invader, seem a little trivial coming from such an expert in geopolitics.

Although the book is trying to predict the scenario of world events for the next ten years, the author devotes a lot of space to introduce the history of the regions to the reader, which sometimes causes annoyance, because the author treats historical events selectively (choosing the most significant ones) and in this way tries to justify the steps that the United States must take in order to maintain the status of the Empire. The author focuses mostly on showing American weaknesses in conducting foreign policy.

Simultaneously, he puts forward a daring thesis, that the main reason why the role of the United States has changed is that it allowed small players to play leading roles in politics. One should agree with the author that in order to introduce balance to the world, the United States should start with the Middle East and Eurasia. However, the author puts forward a similar thesis pertaining to another region of the world, that is Turkey and the Middle East; yet, in order to achieve this aim it is necessary to reach an agreement with Iran. The reader may ask: it is possible at all?! G. Friedman proposes that Obama should announce this agreement to world in such a way that other states would believe that this is a step in the war with the Al-Qaeda and not an attempt to recover influence in the region. He also thinks that it is the best political option for both sides.

The author equates the decrease of importance of the United States with the financial crisis of 2008; however, it is a very short-sighted analysis: this decrease started at the beginning of the 21st century and reached its apogee in 2009. G. Friedman introduces an interesting notion of the “deep power” of the United States: economic, military and political elements in appropriate proportions balance each other out; moreover, he links them with cultural and ethical elements. Unfortunately, the author very quickly justifies his first thesis that the United States became an Empire by accident; the author almost in one sentence states (although he devoted the first chapter to this issue) that empires created according to a specific plan (e.g. by Napoleon or Hitler) had always been extremely short-lived. Even though the rest of world wants Americans to stop interfering in matters that do not directly concern them, it is not possible. Economic, military and other relations with America make the majority of the countries tied with the Empire stronger than it would be possible with any other empire with a more formal structure. G. Friedman determines three principles which should guide the foreign policy of the United States: maximum effort to balance power in the world and in every region, forming an alliance, which would make other countries take over the weight of the confrontation, and making military intervention as the last resort.

Irritatingly, *The Next Decade* tries explain the way the current foreign policy of the United States is lead by the president within the framework of the principles found in *The Prince* by Niccolò Machiavelli. The author thinks that one should realize Machiavelli’s principles in conducting foreign policy, i.e. that morality must conform to the period and that good laws cannot exist without a good military. Such revelations would probably meet with disbelief from the representatives of the International Law Commission of the UN, who would have to acknowledge that, generally speaking, progressive international law does not have a *raison d’être*. The author too literally connected the Republic with the principles formulated in *The Prince*; fortunately for the reader, he did not elaborate his concepts. Moreover, the author seems to have forgotten that N. Machiavelli lived centuries ago and that the international situation had changed entirely. The second theoretician whom Friedman mentions is Carl von Clausewitz, who in his work *On War* stated that war was imposing the opinion of one state upon another while simultaneously making it incapable of resistance. However, the author

seems to again disregard the fact that war nowadays is completely different than it was in the times of C. von Clausewitz (18th/19th century) and that peace has become a crucial principle of international relations.

Moreover, in the chapter concerning the financial crisis, G. Friedman writes that the sole reason that crisis reached such a enormous size is the lack of an adequate management of the nation's psyche by George W. of Bush and Barack Obama, who were unable to manipulate it the way Franklin D. Roosevelt or Ronald Regan did it. The author mentions three presidents of the United States who created American greatness. The first is Abraham Lincoln, who saved the Republic. The second is Franklin Roosevelt, who gave the US rule over oceans. The third is Ronald Reagan, who undermined the status of the USSR. All of them were deeply moral men, who were prepared to lie, violate laws, and betray principles for the purpose of achieving those objectives.

Despite the fact that the arguments concerning the analysis of the situation in the Middle East are material and substantive, they seem very superficial. It is visible that the author specializes in the region of such states as Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, and Israel; he formulates an accurate principle of the US foreign policy, which it is possible to sum up in a few words: the United States do not permanently engage in one region. The author highlights that the reason behind the lack of success in the war with terrorism was that the US concentrated exclusively on the fight against terrorism without attempting to make it a part of a broader strategy. He seems to disregard the issue of relations with Europe, which he equates with the European Union; he thinks that Europe shall revert to the period of strong tensions between the states, which will cause a deep crisis, leading to the EU's disintegration. Or, what according to the author is more probable, certain states shall withdraw from the EU. The Author forgot that there are countries that still aspire to become members of the EU, e.g. Croatia (which will join the EU in 2013); in spite of evident institutional weaknesses, the EU still remains an attractive form of integration. We have reached a peak of European integration not because the EU's role diminished, which is what the author thinks, but because the majority of European countries are already EU Member States. Moreover, according to the author, the EU's weakness is connected with the fact that it is predominantly an economic union, therefore one should agree with the author, that there is European bureaucracy, but there is no Pan-European state.

Amongst new powers, which may emerge within the next decade, the author lists Germany and Russia and predicts that these states will grow closer. His thesis is far from revealing, since this process is already underway: as an example one may give the construction of the gas pipeline on the Baltic seabed, which the author completely forgot about. The author also assumes that Europe more is afraid of the US influences than the Russian ones, so it will willingly take steps to form a closer alliance, which could threaten the United States. However, for the average European such a vision is extremely exaggerated, especially in the East-Central Europe, and for Poland in particular; from the point of view of the state, the prospect of being included in such an area of influence is particularly terrible. Therefore, G. Friedman puts forward a thesis that friendship

with the US can become a Polish *raison d'état*; however, the author does not understand that this *raison d'état* already existed and that it did not work out for Poland too well, as, for example, Polish citizens still need visas in order to travel to the US. The favour of Poland is supposed to be won by three factors, and one in particular: the degree of economic and technical support, so that this state is convinced that it is worthwhile to rely on the United States.

Analysis concerning the region of the Pacific Ocean was very superficial. The general thesis of the author comes down to the statement that the Chinese economy will face crisis and Japan will start to recover from recession. One can see that the author does not specialize in this region. The equally shallow treatment is given by the author to the subject matter of the relations with Latin America and Canada. In the next decade, while maintaining friendly relationships with Brazil, the United States should do everything in order to strengthen Argentina, the only country which could serve as a counterbalance in the region. One should remember that, at the beginning of the 20th century, Argentina was a superpower in Latin America, so that its current weakness is not necessary permanent. The United States should act towards establishing special relations with Argentina within the framework of a general road map for developing this part of the world. As for the situation in Venezuela, G. Friedman predicted that Hugo Chavez would lose power (admittedly, it happened due to non-political causes), however, the author did not predict that he would manage to anoint his successor.

To sum up, the author puts forward such a number of provocative theses, that the reader is having an impression that the author's imagination run riot; however, his argumentation is solid enough to convince the reader to the correctness of at least a substantial portion of his disquisitions. The author makes an impression of an unusually intelligent man with an extensive knowledge about contemporary world and one passionate about the subject. Admittedly, some of his theses seem unlikely, for instance, that the South and the North Korea shall unite within of the next decade. The number of issues which G. Friedman speaks about makes it natural that some matters are presented in less detail. However, one should consider that every book on the subject of the future must contain an analysis of the demographic potential of the world and the development of technology, and the problem of the growth in the power consumption; all of these issues were excellently handled by the author. The main assumption of the author, that a decade is enough time to predict the foreseeable future, unfortunately does not seem to be correct, which is evidenced by the revolutions on the African continent. Nevertheless, *The Next Decade: Empire and Republic in a Changing World* is so inspiring, that it will be read both by academics dealing with international relations and those readers, who want to know the probable direction of history in the nearest future. However, the book does not contain any original or daring visions. Unfortunately, it does not seem likely that the book will sell better than the previous one entitled *The Next 100 Years. A Forecast for the 21st century*.