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Zbigniew Brzezinski. *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and its Geostrategic Imperatives.* New York: Basic Books, 1997. xiv + 223 pp. $26.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-465-02725-5.

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Strategies for an American 'King' on the Grand Chessboard

Zbigniew Brzezinski dedicates this book to his students, in order to help them shape tomorrow's world. The question that needs to be asked though is just who does he consider to be his students? They could range from the students he teaches at John Hopkins, students of American Foreign policy in general, current and future American policy makers and, finally, to interested members of the American general public. While I am very sympathetic to the argument that he makes and respect the conclusions he raises, the book is better for the later two than it is for the more academic minded students of American foreign policy.

In this book, Brzezinski adopts a historical approach that at times is very reminiscent of Paul Kennedy.[1] In the first two chapters he compares the rise of the current American "hegemony" to that of the Roman, Chinese, Mongol and British Empires. The difference between these various imperial powers is that while the historical empires maintained control through superior military organisation and cultural appeal (Romans), efficient bureaucracy and ethnic appeal (Chinese), advanced military tactics followed by assimilation strategies (Mongols) and superior military organisation and cultural assertiveness (British), American hegemony is based on economic dynamism, predominant military power, maintaining the leading edge of technological development and cultural dominance. The American supremacy has also been maintained, because the Americans have been able to construct a series of interlocking international institutions that reflect the features of the American political and economic system itself.

Thus, the central argument of the book is that while the United States dominates most of the world and has significant influence on the three peripheries of Eurasia (Western Europe, South West Asia, and the Far East), it is from the heartland of Eurasia that a potential rival may emerge. He argues that the United States must therefore identify those states that may have the potential to shift the international balance-of-power and once identified to formulate policies to counter or co-opt these state, so as to preserve American interests (pp. 39-40). He identifies several, what he calls, "geostrategic players" (Germany, France, Russia, China and to a lesser extent Japan) as potential rivals for Eurasian hegemony. He also identifies several "geopolitical pivots" that would be critical for the rise of these potential hegemonic challengers. Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Turkey and Iran he argues are crucial for any revival of Russian dominance in Eurasia while South Korea is vital for either a Chinese or Japanese hegemonic challenge (pp. 40-48).

The remainder of the book is taken up with chapters dealing with each of the major areas of Eurasia. These include Western Europe, including the Former Soviet Republics of Ukraine and the Baltic states; Russia; South West Asia, including the Middle East and the Central Asian Former Soviet Republics; and finally the Far East, in which he concentrates on China and Japan. In each of these case studies Brzezinski offers a detailed examination of the current trends occurring in each region. He then offers his analysis of how America policy should be directed in this area in order to ensure continued American influence.

To return to the more pedagogical aspects of the review, the book reads more like an extended *Foreign Policy* article than a scholarly research text. While for many this is not an issue and indeed may open the book to a wider market, that is the general American public, the style does pose problems for the more academic-minded

reader. There are very few references and no bibliography in the book. Moreover, Brzezinski does not formulate the theoretical basis of his argument. This is not to say that the analysis is not deeply embedded in the neo-liberal institutionalist school of thought, but that there is no discussion of the theoretical assumptions that influence and shape the analysis.

As a teaching tool I would not hesitate to include it in the reading list of any graduate level American Foreign Policy course or even a European or Asian Security course. Indeed I will be adding it to the recommended reading list of my Master's level course on European Security Issues. I do, however, have serious reservations about including it in an undergraduate course as the students would not have sufficient analytical tools to question many of the un-referenced "facts" as they are presented in the book or the theoretical assumptions that are made in the analysis. The book is a must, though, for the current American Foreign Policy decision-makers.

Notes:

[1]. Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000*. New York: Vintage Books, 1989.

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