

Masterful understanding of the details; crystal ball was hazy on the big picture

This book is copyrighted 1997, two decades ago. My review is in two parts. First is an analysis of the last 20 years, analyzing what Brzezinski was projecting. The second is a review of the book itself, expressing my admiration for the admirable clarity with which he saw the situation in each individual country.

It is worth recalling what the world was like two decades ago:

- The Soviet Union had collapsed in 1991. Russia and the former SSRs were struggling to implement democracy and market economies all at once. The closer to the heart of the former USSR, the worse they fared.
- The European Union was poised to admit the first three former satellite countries: Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic. With the exception of Turkey, NATO did not extend eastward beyond the European Union
- The United States had won the first Gulf war, pushing Saddam Hussein back into Iraq. Islamic terror had struck Europe and America, and the Madrid train bombings in the ineffectual first world trade building bombing.
- Liberal democracy appeared to be on an upswing throughout the world, and especially in the Americas. Assuming this was permanent, Fukuyama boldly wrote "The End of History."

Brzezinski's agenda is to promote the spread of democracy worldwide, and to advocate the expansion of NATO eastward at least up to the borders of Belarus and Ukraine. He suggests that Ukraine might at some later date be a candidate for inclusion. He likewise advocates the spread of the European Union eastward and southward. To him, the biggest question is which should come first.

Brzezinski describes the political factions and interests in just about every country in the world in extraordinary detail for a relatively short book. He uses a very broad brush to describe the people's fears and aspirations. Equally significant, his descriptions employ very broad terms which he assumes need no definition: democracy, freedom, security, free trade. Who could be against any of them?

What is democracy? The most egregiously undemocratic countries in the world such as Zimbabwe and the Soviet Union have gone out of their way to ape the trappings of democracy. Democracy appears to have been a thin veneer in Chavez' Venezuela and the Kitchener's Argentina. The revelations that have come out in the US elections of the year 2016 make it abundantly clear that US elections are not free and fair. The US system is by law a Republic instead of a democracy. Nonetheless, the principle is "one person, one vote." This is obviously not the case anymore. Europe is ruled by a European Parliament that is not whatsoever responsive to its constituents. This is the reason Britain has chosen to leave. Therefore, when Brzezinski naïvely beats the drums for democracy, one has to ask what he means by that. True democracy does not exist. When Brzezinski advocates democracy, it must be seen in relative terms. Alain de Benoist examines the problem in depth in [\[\[ASIN:B007TXXOYU The Problem of Democracy\]\]](#)

What is freedom? Freedoms in America are defined by the Bill of Rights. They certainly include freedom of speech and freedom of the press. These have been enjoyed in Europe. However, in most of the developed world you can be thrown in jail for "hate speech" which is defined anyway the powers that be want to define it. In America you simply lose your job if you are not careful what you say about minorities, especially black Americans. Economic freedom is severely curtailed by an intrusive state which dictates vast numbers of onerous conditions that must be met in order to run a business. When Brzezinski advocates freedom, that too must be seen in relative terms.

What is free-trade? In today's world, nations trade relatively freely because it is to their mutual advantage. However, trade is not truly free. In addition to tariffs and duties, there are numerous

nontariff barriers to trade. There were also numerous government subsidies to business, such as Airbus in Europe. Free-trade is not an absolute concept either.

What is security? Brzezinski does not give a definition. Presumably, it means freedom from threats by neighboring states. NATO, the mechanism he advocates for ensuring security, does not seem terribly well structured for preventing aggression between NATO members. Democracies generally did not fight each other because it is simply bad business – both sides lose economically, and the spoils do not justify the risk. Outside of NATO, the only two states powerful enough to threaten their neighbors are China and Russia. China did not do so then, which leaves Russia as the only thing that Brzezinski can be talking about when he speaks of world security. He might as well have said so. The question is then, is expanding NATO up to Russia's borders likely to ensure peace with Russia? He should have phrased it more honestly.

In the conclusion of the book Brzezinski gives himself an out with a very telling paragraph. "It is important to stress here both the fact of that indispensability in the actuality of the potential for global anarchy. The disruptive consequences of population explosion, population driven migration, radicalizing urbanization, ethnic and religious hostilities, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction would become unmanageable if the existing and underlying nationstate based framework of even rudimentary political stability were itself to fragment. Without sustained and directed American involvement, before long the forces of global disorder could come to dominate the world scene. In the fragment and the possibility of such a fragmentation is inherent in the geopolitical tensions not only of today's Eurasia but of the world more generally."

As much as anything else this is what has come to pass. Brzezinski predicted the instability of the Muslim world, especially those Middle Eastern countries adjacent to Iran. He had some glimmering of the coming war on terror. He did not anticipate how thoroughly they would shape international diplomacy in the 21st century.

One wonders if his crystal ball would have predicted that his neoconservative allies would lead the country into wars in Afghanistan, Iraq (for a second time), Libya and Syria, to name only the most obvious. These ventures have been enormously costly and have hurt the prestige of the United States worldwide. They have simply gained nothing of substance at a tremendous cost in money and a not insubstantial cost in American lives. Moreover, they give a distinct impression that to Americans, foreign lives are imminently expendable.

There is a tight collusion in the halls of government in both Europe and the United States among bankers, armaments manufacturers and leading politicians of both liberal and conservative parties. The result has been an unwillingness anywhere in the first world to balance budgets. Central banks in every country have resorted to printing money to paper over increasingly large budgetary deficits. The result is a regime of zero interest rates, absolutely punishing to retirees and others on fixed income. Moreover, it has forced investors such as pension funds which must by law seek a given return on their investment into stock markets and real estate, resulting in what is now almost universally perceived as bubbles in both.

Whether by design or by accident, the impact on the common citizen in the first world has been devastating. The political blowback is overwhelmingly visible in this year 2016. Britain voted to leave the European Union, and Donald Trump has surged from nowhere to contest the presidency of the United States.

Also in the conclusion, leaving himself a way out, Brzezinski alludes to the demographic problems of the age. The African and middle eastern countries – Muslim countries – have fertility rates far higher than their ability to absorb additional people. There is immense pressure for them to immigrate to Europe.

Europe, conversely, has fertility rates well below the necessary level to sustain the population. The native white population fertility rates are even lower than the quoted national rates. Europe lacks the

will to reproduce itself. It has likewise lacked the will to resist the immigrant onslaught. Europe's primary security concern is not Russia, but the immigrants that its Marquis of Queensberry rules have been totally inadequate to deal with. The rules of fair play and respect for life worked among European populations. The brutalized populations of immigrants simply laugh at them. Unless Europe is willing to start shooting to defend itself, it will be overrun by barbarians.

This ends my analysis of how well, with 20 years hindsight, Brzezinski's crystal ball worked. The remarkable thing about the book is how clearly he saw the situation within each individual country. Here begins a book review proper.

Brezinski's first chapter provides a history of empires, describing in some detail the Roman Empire, the Chinese Empire, and the Mongol Empire. Lastly, he describes the American Empire.

All four empires projected their power over most of the known world. That is to say, there were nothing but barbarians on their periphery, nothing much worth conquering. Three of the four, the Romans, the Chinese and the Americans, have been aided by a sense of cultural superiority. The subject peoples benefited from being part of the empires to such a degree that they were not inclined to rebel. The Mongol Empire rested solely on military force, and dissolved as the local satraps were seduced by the superior cultures of the subject people. It only lasted 200 years.

After America, the only truly global power, Brzezinski names the five geostrategic players as France, Germany, Russia, China, and India. Note that Great Britain and Japan are absent from this list. Great Britain has no desire to project its power over Europe, and it has no Empire anymore. Japan likewise has been content to remain under America's protection, and simply grow as an economic power. France and Germany at the time of this writing had big ambitions for the European Union, of which they were the leading members. Note that at this writing, 2016, they have moved to do what they said they would never attempt, form a single European army.

A more interesting invention is his list of five geostrategic pivot points: Ukraine, Azerbaijan, South Korea, Turkey, and Iran. These nations geography places them between and among the five powers named above, and finds them geographically located such that they control movement and resources. Ukraine, obviously, sits between Russia and Western Europe. Azerbaijan sits athwart the pipeline routes out of the resource rich 'Stans and into European markets. South Korea, with its American presence, is Japan's bulwark against China.

The most important of the pivot points is Ukraine. It is worth quoting Brzezinski:

"Ukraine, a new and important space on the Eurasian chessboard, is a GOP political pivot because it's very existence as an independent country helped to transform Russia. Without Ukraine, Russia ceases to be a Eurasian Empire. Russia without Ukraine can still strive for imperial status, but it would then become a predominantly Asian imperial state, more likely to be drawn into debilitating conflicts with aroused central Asians, who would then be resentful at the loss of their recent independence and would be supported by their fellow Islamic states to the south. China would also be likely to oppose any restoration of Russian domination over central Asia, given its increasing interest in the newly independent states there. However, if Moscow regained control over Ukraine, with its 52 million people, and major resources as well as its access to the Black Sea, Russia automatically again regains the wherewithal to become a powerful imperial state, spanning Europe and Asia. Ukraine's loss of independence would have immediate consequences for central Europe, transforming Poland into the Geopolitical pivot on the Eastern front of a united Europe."

Brzezinski says that a united Europe must be a United States policy goal. More than that, Europe must become an equal partner to the United States in NATO. This has not happened. The United States continues to dominate NATO spending and decision-making. This chafes the Europeans and it is proving more than the American taxpayer can bear. Brzezinski does not even consider the

inequalities among the European Union member states even as of 1997. The Nordic states were simply stronger. The problem has become worse as the union has expanded. The southern and eastern members have not expanded their economies at the same rate as the north, and the ability to borrow on favorable terms has allowed them to accumulate debts that will simply never be repaid. This and asylum seekers are Europe's major political problem as I write in 2016.

Brezinski wrote "potentially, the most dangerous scenario be a grand coalition of China, Russia, and perhaps around, and "anti-hegemonic" coalition united not by ideology but by complementary grievances." At this writing, it is happening. These countries are rebelling and forming their own currency block, resisting the United States dollar as a reserve currency because this reserve currency has worked against their interests. As the United States, Western Europe and Japan have all continued to print money and not control their deficits. Other members of the world community do not want to be left holding the bag, that is, Western debt, when it all collapses.

Brezinski noticed the problem which seems more likely than any other to be the undoing of Europe. He wrote: "... talking about the deeply rooted expansion of state-sponsored social structure that favors paternalism, protectionism, and parochialism. The result is a cultural condition that combines escapist hedonism with spiritual emptiness – a condition that can be exploited by nationalist extremists or dogmatic ideologues." In Otto Spangler's words, the "Suicide of the West" by simply not having children and not defending itself. Charles Murray had different words for it in [[ASIN:030745343X Coming Apart -The State of White America, 1960-2010]]: "The purpose of life is to while away the time between birth and death as pleasantly as possible, and the purpose of government is to make it as easy as possible to while away the time as pleasantly as possible – the Europe syndrome"

Brzezinski correctly predicted the monetary union, the formation of the Euro by the year 2000. He predicted that it would accelerate Europe's economic and political integration. He did not anticipate the great problems that would come of lashing unequal parties together in a supposed partnership of equals.

Brzezinski wrote: "Without NATO, Europe would become vulnerable but also immediately would become politically fragmented as well. NATO ensures European security and provide a stable framework for the pursuit of European unity. This is what makes NATO historically so vital to Europe." It is not clear that nonmilitary partnerships could not have resolved most of the issues. The military vulnerability would be only to Russia. This reviewer's understanding of Russian history would demonstrate that that threat was never not that great.

Russia has always been a cautious aggressor, moving by small degrees and only when the opportunity seems right. The Soviets' greatest expansion took place after the Molotov/Ribbentrop treaty of 1939, and under the cover of the German attack on Poland. They annexed the Baltics and part of Poland at a time that the rest of the world could not resist in any way. After World War II they converted the countries that were occupied by the Red Army into satellites. Note, however, that the Red Army did not push for any new territorial conquests.

Brezinski helpfully notes that two regions of Georgia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, had only been rather accidentally thrown into the Georgian SSR and evidenced a desire to be free of Georgia immediately after the fall of the Soviet Union. In 2008, after defeating Georgia militarily, Russia could have done anything that it wanted. It exercised caution and only took these two small border territories over which it had a fairly plausible claim.

Brzezinski wrote about Crimea in particular, and the Russian claims over it. Note that, true to Russian history, Russia moved fairly carefully as it annexed Crimea. Russia already had troops in place. Ukraine's government was in chaos after Yanukovich's abdication. A sizable minority of Crimea's population was Russian. Some certainly favored reunification with Russia. The way the snap referendum was managed true numbers can never be known. Note also Russia's caution in the Donbass. Russia has constantly maintained deniability, however implausible it may be, for its incursion there. It appears that Russia realizes that the invasion of Lugansk and Donetsk was a strategic blunder. For all of Russia's bluster, it seems quite clear to those of us living in Ukraine that his aggression is going no further, and that he is looking for a face-saving way out of the situation.

In light of all this, it appears to this reviewer that expanding NATO up to Russia's borders serves no vital security interest. It is not Russia's nature to attack. Rather, it may be an effort on the part of the Western powers to distract

their populations from the very real economic crisis that has been brought on by unsustainable expansion of debt throughout the first world.

This book was greeted as a classic when it appeared, and it retains that status even after two decades. Nobody's crystal ball is perfect. His insights into the internal politics of countries throughout the world are really incredible. If he could not predict the rise of Islamic terrorism, the immigrant floods that have swept over the United States and Europe, and the fecklessness of all central banks in failing to control rising government debt, you can hardly blame him. You can say that he took a simplistic view of the world, with naïve definitions of his operative words democracy, freedom, security and economic freedom.

Still and all, after 20 years it is a five-star effort.