
Book Review

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The Next Decade

by: George Friedman

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George Friedman, a well-known political scientist, gives in this book a snapshot of the international affairs that US should face in the next ten years. Precisely, *The Next Decade* is an all encompassed and pretentious analysis that explores the challenges and benefits for being the only super-power. Americans know but they do not accept how their economy prosperity is based on the suffering of other countries, how the Republic has been become in the first economy of the world at the cost of loosing the democracy. These dilemmas pose Americans a serious question, is the empire a synonymous of dictatorship?

Certainly, Friedman says that Americans accepted that US emerged after the collapse of Russians. However, this power was unbalanced transforming US in a globalised empire. Although, Americans do not wish to be an empire, they want the benefits thereof. On one hand, people prioritise the growth potential of open market but like to avoid the costs. The same long term strategies, which positioned a temporal security for American homeland for a couple of decades, created an incomparable sentiment of resentment and hate, that later created 9/11. It is safe to acknowledge the US structure still seems to be informal but for that no less real.

At some extent, terrorism and Al-Qaeda not only remind citizens traumatically how far the hate goes, but also uncover the veil of ignorance (alienation) that subsumed the citizenship to date. As psychoanalysts say, sooner or later, the sense of reality imposes. G. Friedman goes on to write, “a fact that the Americans people have trouble assimilating is that the size and power of the American Empire is inherently disruptive and intrusive, which means that United States can rarely take a step without threatening some nation or benefiting another. While such a power confers enormous economic advantages, it naturally engenders hostility” (p.10).

As the previous introduction given, decisions made by US affect daily the live of many non-American across the world. An example of this is the fact that Obama rise to power was celebrated in many cities beyond the boundaries of US; he even was comically earned a Nobel Peace Prize in spite his armies were occupying Afghanistan and Iraq. It is important not to loose the sight this uncanny influence does not derive from conquest or the direct intervention, but it resulted from a process of acculturation,

admiration inherited from empires. When this power adopts some technology, the rest of the world does the same.

In classic terms, powers constructed their hegemonies by the imposition of war but US preferred a new technique, trade. At the end of Cold-war, the instrument of indoctrination seems to be the commercial relations. Nonetheless, US is not intended to be an empire, Friedman adds, and for that should pay the costs. Governments should forecast the future in order to implement the coherent strategies for the well being of their respective countries. At some extent, this belief anyway begs a more than interesting question, does imperialism entail the death of democracy?

This type of new unintended empire has faced a lot of problems, two world wars, 9/11 and almost four financial crises. One thing seems to be clear. Unlike Rome or British, the USA is not being designed from literature and science. The poet Virgil praised Rome while Kipling outlined the British colonies in their novels, but the America's growth is unsorted and disorganised. In the next decade, this country not only would strengthen its leadership in the world but also should take a proactive role in the politics configuration of developed countries. The stability of this world is determined by the success of US in maintaining its hegemony. Otherwise, terrible threats may surface. To put this in bluntly,

“bringing order to empire is a necessity because even though the United States is overwhelmingly powerful, it is far from omnipotent, and having singular power creates singular dangers. The United States was attacked on September 11, 2001, for example, precisely because of its unique power. The president's task is to manage that kind of power in a way that acknowledges the risks as well as the opportunities, then minimizing the risks and maximizing the benefits”. (p.22)

Although the Friedman's discourse sounds very ethnocentric by extending to this country the exclusive right of expanding their boundaries based on its economic growth, one thing is true, terrorist attacks have been derived from imperialism. Friedman admits that the survival of democracy is only possible by the observance of constitutional text. The founding parents as Lincoln or even Roosevelt made hard decisions as well, even ignoring some grounding rights in some contexts. Their goal, rather, was motivated to grant the constitution. Forming alliances with dictators as Stalin, Roosevelt for example prioritised the violation of some principles in view of a broader moral necessity. On the opposite, G. Bush was prey of his own moral obsession. His inaccuracy to find the enemy as well as his religious intolerance led the country to difficult position. Friedman argues that many Muslim countries would have supported Bush's preventive war, if he would have declared the war against 'radical Islam'. Iraq played a pivotal role for containing the influence of Iran in the region. It is unfortunate the decision to invade Iraq was not only disastrous but gave more power to Iran.

Trapped by its ethical illusions, America now needs not only to assume its hegemonic role in the economic system, but expanding the free-market ideology. The success of US depends on the prevention any other power emerges. Since Machiavelli, political scientists avoided to give their complacency to empires. On this book, Friedman calls for the organisation of international foreign policies in order to prevent the regional fragmentation. What is not clear is under what basis the hegemony of US is better than others? Or, what should officials do in conscientising Americans of the great future is waiting for them?.

To be honest, Friedman's examination starts from a biased old prejudice coined by scholastic philosophy. A prosperous economy is synonymous of well being and progress. Since states are aimed at protecting their citizens so that their life to be improved, economic powers reserve themselves the rights to expand this prosperity by means of the market, to other nations. Empires are based on two ethic needs: one of them refers to the elimination of conflict, the second to the expansion of prosperity. Development, for this view, serves as a platform for achieving a common state of peace. However, what this point of view is not taking seriously in consideration is that when conflict disappears, cultures declined. At time, Spaniards prohibited the right to celebrate the war to aborigines; their cultures were condemned to extinction. Conflict is human, and its lack is conducive to imperial interests. Although, we agree that US represents an empire that does not accept the costs, it is necessary to debate to what an extent the logic of empires are based on the idea that goals justify the means. Paradoxically, this is exactly the reason of their decline. If we consider that any end justifies the progress and prosperity, also it encourages a sense of mutual competition. The end of any empire is based on their foundational ideologies.

Fraught with cold-eye suggestions but impressive accurate observations, this book exhibits a new way of thinking the politics in US, which arisen post Twin Tower attacks. Immorality in politics is for Friedman the prerequisite for making coherent and duly decisions. But what this does really mean?

"an unsentimental foreign policy means that in the coming decade, the president must identify with a clear and cold eye the most dangerous enemies, then creates coalitions to manage them" (p.28). To make a safer world, a more counter-weight balanced power is needed. The military intervention is the last resource, only when the balanced power tactic does not work. Whether Rome faced serious problems to keep the spirit of republic, how will be the democracy preserved?

This question undoubtedly synthesises the most important points of this book. In any democracy, the foundational rights of self-determination end when an empire surfaces. The fears for imperial ambitions have been historically justified by the founding parents of democracy. Friedman proposes an innovative model to understand the problem. The efficient empires should prioritise democracy in their internal policies to gain legitimacy and dissuade their citizens about the cause; but beyond their boundaries, military-machine should ensure the basic resources for the next years. The second element in the Friedman's pro-empire discourse is idea of urgency.

Given the turbulent situation of today, US has no option than taking the leadership of the developing and developed economies and becomes an empire. Otherwise, for example, if US retreats the world runs a serious risk to be collapsed. Its impossibility to come back to the economy of other centuries back, accompanied with the real dangers to destabilise the entire region; for that reason, the only solution aims in the acceptance of a new America's hegemony. Friedman recognises that the danger of Republic is the fear. Greater potential hazards or enemies would sacrifice all individual liberties. The solution seems to be simple. The founding parents of the republic envisaged that the American presidency should rule in the international affairs with other nations, while the constitution, supreme court and senate should grant the internal order. Like the market where investors, consumers and managers interact, the civil society should be outside from president control. The president's power must be negotiated with many other actors who prevent the appearance of a dictator. Ideals without power become in simple words,

but power without ideals is the essence of evilness. Both should be combined in the civil society. As Machiavelli put it, war is the only mechanism that serves as catalyst. The difference between a bad or good president seems to be related to the expediency and the abilities to make what the time demands. A bad president sometimes makes what is correct, his behaviour is heedless of moral principles. Rather, a good president only acts as the moment requires. In some special way, Friedman says what many other left-related scholars denounce as well; the decline of Soviet Union made from USA the unique power, which may lead this nation to the collapse. The restoration of counter-balanced power not only is suggested but also necessary. The republic inside US flourished thanks to this idea.

The financial crisis appeared in 2008, far away of being a threat, is an opportunity, US should not pass over. Provoked by the war on terror conducted by Bush administration, the financial crash was based on the desired of low risk for making business. Every crisis needs changes. This is not true this was the worst crisis from 1930 great depression. Not only Roosevelt but also Reagan faced similar situations in past. A crisis produces a substantial change in the boundaries between market and state. In Roosevelt's time, the great depression pushed to some radical measures aimed at strengthens the role of state regulating the market. Rather, Reagan opted to des-structure the big government in favour of capital and corporations. As a result, the balance between state and market was changed according to the economic environment. Today, state must do the same by monopolising the financial elite. Seen this in perspective, there was a serious debate between left and right respecting to the role of state. For ones, if the state intervenes in market it creates instability, distrust and disinvestment. For the others, declining the state power means more independence for the market and more poverty for people. Presidency of Obama should avoid to lead this discourse to moral terms, what people should understand is that politicians should tackle off the problem in order for the boundaries between market and state to be re-adjusted. In so doing, people will recover not only the trust in their officials, but also the fear will disappear.

At some extent, "the most significant effect of the crisis of 2008 on the next decade will be geopolitical and political, not economic" (p.52).

Since the globalised order is exhausted, the national identity would come back in the next years. The importance of nation-hood will be driven to home. In view of this and the new forthcoming opportunities, Americans must change their mind. The uncertainty seems to be the primary problem of our times. Quite aside from this, US will be the dominant power for the next decade. Surely, if this happens, the balance of power would be of paramount importance to save the world order.

Last but not least, we found in this and throughout the book many conceptual problems; many of them have been patiently discussed. We have portrayed the limitations of Friedman's development to conceptualise a coherent theory of empire and democracy. Similarly to the argument of other realistic as J.P Revel, Huntington or Rashid, Friedman thinks the world under the lens of imperial eyes. Besides, considering the democracy may survive in imperial orders exhibits a euphemism. Competition is not the basis of the good democracy but the stronghold and weakness of empires. In this antinomy, the risk plays an important role making from the cultural difference a danger to be domesticated by totalitarian minds. The sense of urgency where Friedman builds his theory not only is conducive to dictatorship but subtly paves the ways for the violation of human rights.