



## Second Chance: Three Presidents and the Crisis of American Superpower

By Zbigniew Brzezinski

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Former National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski offers a reasoned but unsparing assessment of the last three presidential administrations' foreign policy. Though they cover less than two decades, these three administrations span a vitally important turning point in world history: the period in which the United States, having emerged from the Cold War with an unprecedented degree of power and prestige, managed to squander both in a remarkably short time. The tale of these three administrations is a tale of decline: from the competent but conventional thinking of the first Bush administration, to the good intentions hobbled by self-indulgence of the Clinton administration, to the mortgaging of America's future by the “suicidal statecraft” of the second Bush administration. Brzezinski concludes with a chapter on how America can regain its lost influence, if not its former dominance, in today's era of global political awakening. This scholarly yet highly opinionated book is both controversial and influential.

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

"One of the most important books on U.S. foreign policy since September 11."

"No one understands the interdependence of power and principle better than Zbigniew Brzezinski." -- Jimmy Carter

"Brzezinski's analysis of East Asian realities and of the complicated U.S.-China-Japan relationship is lucid and constructive and a joy to read."

"An indisputable road map to the current geopolitical situation, and a guide on how America must conduct herself to ensure peace and stability in the future." -- Jimmy Carter

"Brzezinski's reach is breathtaking...in a masterly fashion, he takes the reader on a trip around the world in 200 pages.... A fascinating book, and a disturbing one in the best sense of the term."

"In the furor over the war on Iraq (was it justified?), the author gets back to what the debate should be about. The polemicists on both sides of this argument would be well advised to heed Mr. Brzezinski."

"The Grand Chessboard is the book we have been waiting for: a clear-eyed, tough-minded, definitive exposition of America's strategic interests in the Post-Cold War world. A masterful synthesis of historical, geographical, and political analysis, it is geostrategic thinking in the grand tradition of Bismarck." -- Samuel P. Huntington

#### About the Author

**Zbigniew Brzezinski**, the National Security Advisor to President Jimmy Carter, is 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, the Johns Hopkins University, both located in Washington, D.C. His many books include *The Choice* and *The Grand Chessboard*. He lives in Washington, D.C.

From The Washington Post

Reviewed by James M. Lindsay

The Iraq war has America's foreign policy mavens waxing nostalgic. Partisans of the elder George Bush long for the days when realism and caution reigned in the White House. Bill Clinton's fans fondly recall an era when presidential trips overseas drew admiring crowds rather than angry protesters. U.S. foreign policy, it would seem, should go forward by going backward.

Zbigniew Brzezinski will have none of that. In his engaging and briskly argued new book, Jimmy Carter's national security adviser sees little worth emulating in the past 15 years of U.S. foreign policy. He asks how Washington has led since becoming the world's first truly global leader after the collapse of the Soviet Union. His answer? "In a word, badly."

To make that case, Brzezinski grades the performance of presidents Bush, Clinton and Bush -- or, to use the

ungainly terms he prefers, Global Leaders I, II and III. Second Chance even comes complete with a full-blown report card. (You can guess which president gets an F.) Brzezinski's unsparing assessments will warm the heart of anyone worried about grade inflation.

George H.W. Bush, Brzezinski argues, was a superb crisis manager who missed the opportunity to leave a lasting imprint on U.S. foreign policy because he was not a strategic visionary. He earns a solid B. On the other hand, Bill Clinton had the intellect to craft just such a post-Cold War strategy but lacked the discipline and the passion, leading to eight years that produced more drift than direction. He gets an uneven C. Finally, the younger Bush offered "catastrophic leadership" after 9/11 that has already stamped his "presidency as a historical failure."

These portraits will strike many readers as conventional -- and others as unfair, particularly to the first Bush. Yes, Bush 41 famously foundered with the "vision thing." But then again, less than a year passed between the Soviet Union's demise and his reelection defeat -- not much time to devise, let alone institutionalize, a new world order. And it goes beyond unfair to argue, as Brzezinski does, that had the elder Bush deposed Saddam Hussein when he had the chance in 1991, "a subsequent U.S. president might not have gone to war in Iraq." The younger Bush chose to wage war on Iraq; he was not forced into it by the choices his father made.

So much for the grades. So what does looking backward tell us about going forward? Brzezinski believes that George W. Bush's choices have been calamitous but not fatal. There's still no other country that can play the role of global leader. So America will get a second chance -- but not a third -- to reclaim the mantle of global leadership.

As much as Second Chance criticizes Global Leaders I, II and III for failing to devise a sensible geopolitical strategy, it does not offer one of its own. The few specific policy recommendations it does offer are unconvincing. Brzezinski wants to establish an executive-legislative planning mechanism to inject greater coherence into foreign policy. But this proposal fails to realize that consensus can produce bad policies as well as good ones. After all, we plunged into Iraq in 2003 because Congress followed rather than resisted the White House's lead.

Brzezinski also wants "stricter lobbying laws" because ethnic lobbies have too tight a hold on Uncle Sam's ear. But this exaggerates their importance. Yes, lobbying groups favoring countries such as Israel, Armenia, Greece and Taiwan complicate the lives of policymakers, but they seldom prove decisive on major issues. When they do -- as in the case of the Israel lobby, which Brzezinski believes distorts U.S. policy in the Middle East -- it is not because they mobilize narrow interests but because they can mobilize a broad swath of public opinion. That, for better or worse, is what democracy is all about.

What Second Chance does offer is a wise insight that should guide any effort to fashion a strategy to restore American leadership. We are in the midst of what Brzezinski rightly calls a "global political awakening." Technology has made global "have-nots" painfully conscious of their relative deprivation. It has also given them the tools to punish those they see as blocking their aspirations. If the United States is to avoid becoming the target of their resentment, its foreign policy must be seen as serving their interests as well as its own. That means exercising self-restraint rather than pressing every advantage that comes to a superpower; it means listening to others and not just working to preserve our own peace and prosperity but helping others to build their own. The Global Leader IV who can find a way to translate these precepts into practical policies should be able to impress even the redoubtable Prof. Brzezinski.

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