

Book Review
By
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***George Friedman, The Next Decade:
Empire and Republic in a Changing
World, (New York: Anchor Books, 2012)***
243

“A decade is a point at which history and statesmanship meet, and a span in which policies still matter.” –Friedman, *The Next Decade*.

In *The Next Decade* George Friedman, a Texas-based intelligence and geo-politics expert, has spelled out the likely course that events may take in different world regions in the light of individual decisions as opposed to his previous global forecast venture *The Next 100 Years*, which focused on events in the long run.

Friedman begins the book with a chapter entitled “The Unintended Empire”. This is an allusion to the pre-eminent place of the United States in the current world power structure and the measure of influence it can exert over the global economy as well as being the largest and most technologically advanced country, with great military strength. However, he points out that being founded on the basis of an anti-imperialist struggle, the United States of America does not seem to be comfortable with that position in the world. There is tension between the anti-imperialist idealism rooted in America’s psychological make up and immense power it has at its disposal to shape the world events. This duality has affected America’s identity and the author suggests that American leaders should work to address this crisis of identity. In other words, the US seems to like having power without having to face the responsibilities that comes with it.

Friedman’s projections about this decade are centered on America’s policy decisions and believes that the decisions that are taken today will shape world politics in the near future especially in context of three regional power balances of Arab-Israel, Iraq-Iran and Indo-Pakistan. Friedman elaborates that increased US involvement has deteriorated the stability in these balances which does not bode well for US foreign policy objectives.

He presents the American President’s image of something of a global emperor and envisions a Machiavellian course of action for the US foreign policy. It is clear to see that in this relationship, Friedman plays the role of the pragmatic advisor while he imagines the President akin to ‘The Prince’. His advice is clear: A future enemy can

be useful in defeating a current one. He has forecasted a rising tendency for camaraderie between Germany and Russia due to their interdependencies in technology and industry, as well as the fact that Germany has been bearing the brunt of economic crises of shrinking Europeans economies, especially Greece. He sees this development as a challenge to US foreign policy objective in Europe.

His admiration for three men in politics is evident from the positions he takes in the book. These are Machiavelli, the 16th century Florentine advisor to the prince, and three US presidents, Abraham Lincoln, F. D. Roosevelt and Ronald Reagan. Most of his foreign policy advice resonate with the leadership styles of these personalities. A style that relied on pragmatism over values or unbridled display of power alone.

Along with economic and technological influences of the US on the world, the author analyzed the inherent problems of the “War on Terror” and has pointed out that terrorism is not an enemy but a war-fighting doctrine. Therefore, to declare war on it blurs the clarity of objectives and thus results become uncertain. He suggests a change in approach and identification of actors employing terrorist tactics as enemies rather than directing energies to eradicate the nebulous concept of terrorism.

In the chapter on Africa he foresees the entire continent will remain at war with itself for a long time before a semblance of stability can be expected to emerge. In this light, he advises his “prince”, the American President, to refrain from engaging in Africa directly and allow big business houses to operate there at the most. This observation is interesting as his advice for Africa is the exact opposite of what he gives for the rest of the world, that the US should politically reshape regional balances and take up its responsibility as an empire. Moreover, it is in contradiction with his criticism over America’s want for power and lack of will to take up the responsibility entailed therein.

Apart from a short discussion on Africa, Friedman’s focus in the book is around the Asian and European continents. As for the Asia Pacific, he has predicted attempts at engaging China and Japan in more cordial ties with each other but suggests that this is only a ploy to buy more time. The two states have little in common to help reconcile them. According to the author, the China-Japan competition is vital to keeping both states engaged with each other rather than surpassing the US in military force and the economy. His main concern in Asia however, pertains to India and Pakistan. He strongly advocates American support for Pakistan and to strengthen the country in order to keep India occupied with improving its army and thus pay less attention to its growing navy. This, he feels would best serve the US interests in the region.

Overall, the book makes engaging reading and goes over some of the significant global political issues facing the world in this decade. A few of his suggestions on foreign policy have already been pursued by policy makers. The US led diplomatic campaign of P5+1, reaching a critical understanding with Iran which means Iranian sanctions will be lifted soon. Russia's resurgence which the author believes would be temporary, has already begun. However, signs of increasing German-Russia relations at the cost of US' influence in Europe, does not seem to be materializing. In case of South Asia, the US seems to be on a completely opposite path from the one Friedman has postulated to be most beneficial.

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