

Zbigniew Brzezinski and Brent Scowcroft, **America and the World: Conversations on the Future of American Foreign Policy**. New York: Basic Books, 2008, 292 pp. ISBN 978-0465015016

The political change that took place in Washington in 2008/2009 and the election of President Barack Obama intensified the debate on the redefinition of the role the United States plays in the world and on the foreign policy it should pursue to fulfill this role. A number of analyses and policy papers were published, dealing with both the long-term perspectives of the American foreign policy as well as the immediate steps the new administration should take. In the light of the events that had transpired in the previous years, it is not surprising that topics such as the war in Afghanistan and Iraq, weapons of mass destruction or energy security and climate change were among those discussed by most of the authors and experts involved.

The book under review in this article presents an interesting, yet somewhat unorthodox contribution to this ongoing debate. It is essentially a discussion between two of the most experienced foreign policy makers and experts in the United States, Zbigniew Brzezinski and Brent Scowcroft. Brzezinski, who served as National Security Advisor in the Carter Administration, still actively contributes to the American political discourse. He currently holds a position of professor at Johns Hopkins University and is also involved with the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a well known foreign policy think-tank. The career of Brent Scowcroft in the government service was even longer, starting with the position of military advisor he held in the Nixon Administration. He later served as National Security Advisor to Presidents Gerald Ford and George H. W. Bush. Both Brzezinski and Scowcroft are keen observers of the process of American foreign policy making and implementation and they regularly publish and present their observations in a number of forums. Their debate, which forms the basis of the book, was moderated by David Ignatius, a respected journalist and writer, who had worked during his long career for *International Herald Tribune*, *The Wall Street Journal* or *The Washington Post*.

The immediate impetus for the debate between Brzezinski and Scowcroft was the expected change of political establishment in Washington which by spring 2008, when their discussions largely took place, looked increasingly likely. It could thus be argued that the book presents sort of a "guidebook", a manual for the new administration on how to conduct its foreign policy. It is interesting to note in this respect that it was ultimately the candidate with lesser, or perhaps almost none, foreign policy experience who was elected president in November 2008. The often repeated assertion that President Obama needs an experienced group of advisors and assistants for his foreign policy agenda (further strengthened by the Obama's choice of his vice-presidential candidate, Joe Biden) gives *America and the World* (published in December 2008) a new relevance. It is likely that Brzezinski's and Scowcroft's advice, along with that of many other experts, was sought by Obama and his team on some of the matters discussed in the book, and that at least some of the strategies and priorities that Brzezinski and Scowcroft present here might have actually influenced Obama's policies.

The debate between Brzezinski and Scowcroft reflects their shared conviction that, as the introduction of the books duly states: “there is a widespread agreement that something in the American foreign policy is broken” (front cover). Both Brzezinski and Scowcroft were active in politics during the Cold War. They are well acquainted with the mentality that pervaded Washington at that time and the sway it still holds over certain segments of American foreign policy establishment. The world situation and the position of the United States in the new international system, however, had changed dramatically since and the Cold War paradigms, stratagems and policies no longer seem to work. Both of the authors are aware of this fact and realization of it compels them to present their own comprehensive views of the role that the United States should play in the coming decades. Brzezinski and Scowcroft are both more inclined to support international cooperation and multilateral approach as a way of solving problems rather than the sometimes openly unilateral, “super-power” based approach of the Bush Administration. Another salient characteristic of their foreign policy vision is pragmatism, focusing primarily on protecting the national interest, combined with a realistic appreciation of American strengths and weaknesses. The previous administration of George W. Bush was attacked for being too deeply rooted in the Cold War mentality and of mixing foreign policy with ideology. Thus, Brzezinski’s and Scowcroft’s vision, as presented in this book, might well appear an appealing and viable alternative to the Bush era policies. It is, however, necessary to keep in mind that neither of the two men were particularly successful themselves when in a position to directly influence American foreign policy-making. Especially the Carter Administration (where Brzezinski was one of the key influences on the president in matters of foreign policy) had suffered some heavy defeats on the international scene, leaving the country, as many would argue, in a much weaker position than it was during the Nixon and Ford years. The fact that the two main protagonists of the debate were actively involved in shaping the past events also sometimes leads them to exaggerate their role or to defend certain controversial moves which were later criticized. It is possible to mention for example Scowcroft defending the decision of the Bush Administration not to oust Saddam Hussein after the first Gulf War (pp. 12–13) and, conversely, Brzezinski praising Scowcroft and President George H. W. Bush for their handling of the fall of Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet sphere of dominance (p. 7).

The book (292 pages) is divided into eight chapters. The text is appended by an index and a short note about the authors.

The introductory chapter (*How We Got There*) focuses mostly on the issues preceding and closely following the September 11 attacks – the end of the Cold War and its ramifications, the “lone superpower syndrome,” and the lack of a unifying factor in the American foreign policy of the 1990s. One of the most interesting points in this chapter, in my opinion, is the discussion on the role of international organizations in solving the challenges of the modern world system (pp. 28–30). While both Scowcroft and Brzezinski agree that during the Bush Administration, the United States was not committed sufficiently to the multilateral approach, they also tend to agree that as of now, no efficient means exist which could be applied to manage global crises. The United Nations is described as “weak” (p. 29) and NATO as a “cold war institution” (p. 30). While both authors see the need for the United

States to actively engage the world by means of multilateral diplomacy and international organizations, they also imply that in order to make this change effective, the United States must play an important part in restructuring these institutions or assisting to establish new ones. What I somewhat miss in this account, however, is among other things the fact that it was actually President Bush and his advisors who came up with a plan to reform the UN, with the hope of making it more efficient and representative of the current world situation and distribution of power.

The second chapter (*Crisis of Our Own Making*) presents a discussion of one of the most pressing foreign policy topics for the new administration – the issue of Iraq War and the possible ways to end the American engagement there. The opinions expressed here tend to blame President Bush for starting the conflict without convincing reasons and without regard for the possible and even likely consequences of such a move. This is hardly surprising as Brent Scowcroft is known as an outspoken opponent of the attack on Iraq since the outset (pp. 37–38). On the other hand, given their experience as national security advisors, it comes as no surprise that neither Brzezinski nor Scowcroft see any chance for a fast withdrawal of American forces from Iraq without the security situation there dramatically deteriorating (p. 39). This “down-to-earth” realism is somewhat at odds with the President Obama’s pre-election promises, although it is likely that even the President was aware by the time he made these promises that they would have to be scaled down at least to a degree. An interesting complement to the debate on Iraq is the part of the chapter devoted to the negotiations with Iran. While Brzezinski and Scowcroft are quite correct in stating that Iran is not a uniformly hostile, islamistic country (Brzezinski seems to claim on p. 69 this is the view most Americans hold of Iran), the practical advice they give the new administration on the potential negotiations with Tehran is rather vague or not very practical. For example, it is likely that Ayatollah Khamenei, the supreme Iranian spiritual leader, holds more influence than President Ahmadinejad, yet it is quite unlikely that under the current circumstances he would be willing to meet with the American president as both authors suggest (p. 67).

The third chapter entitled *Two Unsolved Problems* is closely linked to the second, as it examines the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the present situation in Pakistan. Of these two parts of the chapter, it is probably the latter which offers more interesting insights. Especially the strengthening of mutual ties with the Pakistani army and support of its fight against Al-Qaeda without undermining its sovereignty and without exercising tight oversight over its activities (e.g. pp. 108–109) is a strategy that the new administration seems to have adopted (at least to a degree). Another interesting aspect of this discussion is the apparent unwillingness of both Scowcroft and Brzezinski to condone closer ties with India – a move which other experts, for example political scientist Robert Kaplan, see as a way to strengthen American position in the region. Again, the reader needs to be reminded that promoting closer ties with Delhi was a policy of the Bush Administration and that might be one of the reasons, although not the only one, for its cold reception by Brzezinski and Scowcroft.

No account of American foreign policy priorities and concerns would be complete without paying attention to China. In chapter four (*The Virtue of Openness: China and the Far East*) the relationship with Beijing and the rise of China is discussed in some detail. The

above mentioned pragmatism of Brzezinski and Scowcroft is reflected in their assertion that in order to incorporate China into the international system it would be necessary to redefine the boundaries existing within the system and adjust it to China's current position (p. 114). They both seem to be quite optimistic about the prospects of future cooperation with China and the development there. This optimism is not necessarily shared by other experts. While it is reasonable to agree with Brzezinski's prediction that Sino-Soviet alliance that once existed is not likely to pose a major threat to the American security in the future (p. 133), the Chinese influence on the mainland Asian continent (as well as other parts of the world) is likely to grow further and it is questionable whether the American diplomacy can actually handle this "complex game" to "work in [American] interest" (p. 126). This question comes to fore especially when Scowcroft repeats his skepticism of a more profound cooperation with India (p. 145), which could certainly have negative ramifications for the American relationship with Pakistan, yet on the other hand might be quite helpful in balancing out the growing influence of China.

Russia was not a major topic in the American foreign policy discourse for a time – this fact is criticized by Brzezinski and Scowcroft in the fifth chapter of the book, *The State with Unnatural Boundaries*. Both authors correctly point out that after the collapse of the Soviet Union, a weakened and unstable Russia felt humiliated and snubbed by the United States and the West in general. This theme is recurrent in the Russian foreign policy of the last two decades and did not entirely dissipate even after President Putin strengthened Russia's domestic and international position. The United States for a time certainly did not pay much attention to fostering ties with Russia, as Scowcroft mentions (p. 171), and this attitude does need to change. Again, however, the setting of priorities for the future and of the policies to achieve them is somewhat insufficiently covered. It is definitely in American (and not only American) interest for a *modus vivendi* to develop between Russia and Europe. The question, however, is how to achieve a state when Russia would not feel "irredentist," "hostile" and "resentful" (p. 191) without "giving away too much" (especially when the de facto Russian energy monopoly and its security and economical ramifications are discussed).

The transatlantic cooperation, strained by the excesses and the unilateral actions of the Bush Administration, is discussed in a chapter six (*The Indispensable Partnership*). As the title implies, according to Brzezinski and Scowcroft the European allies and the NATO should remain, quite logically, high on the American agenda. The problem they see as the most crucial for Atlantic relations is a stronger leadership on both sides, committed to a more efficient and balanced cooperation – only then can the "West" remain an important geopolitical actor (e.g. pp. 209, 225). Both authors prefer the multilateral approach to solving crises and problems – which would require, in the current situation, an enhanced engagement of the European allies in Afghanistan and Iraq, a closer cooperation on tackling the financial and economic crisis, not to mention problems such as the global climate change and the fight against poverty. While there is an obvious inclination to prefer a unified leadership in Europe, Scowcroft at the same time admits that the European Union itself is divided and that there are almost no common objectives on which the Americans and Europeans could agree (p. 211). Under such circumstances, even with a new charismatic

leader in Washington, there is, in my opinion, little room for a significant consolidation of the transatlantic partnership.

The last two chapters, chapter seven (*The Politics of Cultural Dignity*) and chapter eight (*The First Hundred Days*), form the closing part of the book. Chapter seven is devoted mainly to the issue of globalization and the form of leadership the United States should exercise in the globalized world. For all their experience here, both Scowcroft and Brzezinski seem short of answers on how to find the delicate balance between respecting other peoples' cultures, religious beliefs and customs while focusing on securing the American national interest. Sometimes the debate falls into unnecessary generalizations and stereotypizations. For example, it is true that because of the war on terror, anti-Muslim sentiments rose in the United States, but Scowcroft's assertion that the Americans have "dehumanized" Muslims, turning them "into objects of hatred and fear" (p. 239) may be just a bit overstated. Chapter eight deals almost exclusively with suggested changes in the American foreign policy establishment, which, if implemented, should make it more efficient, cohesive and equipped to face the challenges of the globalized world.

*America and the World* does not pretend to be, and certainly is not, an impartial, unbiased analysis of the current American foreign policy and an equally impartial, unbiased set of suggestions how to improve it. Rather, it is an interesting attempt to present the views, visions and prognoses of two experienced American foreign policy experts. What makes their opinions definitely worth reading is the broad extent of experience they are based on and the depth of insight they display. This experience and insight, offering unique perspectives on a number of issues, are the greatest asset of *America and the World*, which makes it a valid contribution to the American foreign policy discourse.

Jan Bečka

Steven M. Gillon, **The Pact. Bill Clinton, Newt Gingrich, and the Rivalry That Defined a Generation.** Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. 342 pp. ISBN 978-0-19-532278-1

The author, Steven M. Gillon, is Resident Historian for The History Channel and the professor of history at the University of Oklahoma. He has written numerous books and articles about modern American politics and culture. The Pact belongs to his latest books.

This volume tells the story of President Bill Clinton (D) and the Speaker of the House, Newt Gingrich (R). Both men encounter in top U.S. governmental positions in the 1990s but with very different ideas how to lead the country. Nevertheless, both soon realized that to keep the government working they need to cooperate. Once they knew it is possible to work on bipartisan basis they focused on higher goals with the prospect of making history and that was reshaping the hot issue of American politics – the social security system. Both men were in their parties influential enough to make such a change pursuable and the times of budget surplus created good point for the debate.