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The Broken Chessboard: Brzezinski Gives Up on Empire

By Mike Whitney

August 25, 2016



The main architect of Washington’s plan to rule the world has abandoned the scheme and called for the forging of ties with Russia and China. While Zbigniew Brzezinski’s article in The American Interest titled “Towards a Global Realignment” has largely been ignored by the media, it shows that powerful members of the policymaking establishment no longer believe that Washington will prevail in its quest to extent US hegemony across the Middle East and Asia. Brzezinski, who was the main proponent of this idea and who drew up the blueprint for imperial

expansion in his 1997 book *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives*, has done an about-face and called for a dramatic revising of the strategy. Here's an excerpt from the article in the AI:

“As its era of global dominance ends, the United States needs to take the lead in realigning the global power architecture.

Five basic verities regarding the emerging redistribution of global political power and the violent political awakening in the Middle East are signaling the coming of a new global realignment.

The first of these verities is that the United States is still the world's politically, economically, and militarily most powerful entity but, given complex geopolitical shifts in regional balances, it is no longer the globally imperial power.” (Toward a Global Realignment, Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The American Interest*)

Repeat: The US is “no longer the globally imperial power.” Compare this assessment to a statement Brzezinski made years earlier in *Chessboard* when he claimed the US was “the world's paramount power.”

“...The last decade of the twentieth century has witnessed a tectonic shift in world affairs. For the first time ever, a non-Eurasian power has emerged not only as a key arbiter of Eurasian power relations but also as the world's paramount power. The defeat and collapse of the Soviet Union was the final step in the rapid ascendance of a Western Hemisphere power, the United States, as the sole and, indeed, the first truly global power.” (“*The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy And Its Geostrategic Imperatives*,” Zbigniew Brzezinski, Basic Books, 1997, p. xiii)

Here's more from the article in the AI:

“The fact is that there has never been a truly “dominant” global power until the emergence of America on the world scene..... The decisive new global reality was the appearance on the world scene of America as simultaneously the richest and militarily the most powerful player. During the latter part of the 20th century no other power even came close. That era is now ending.” (AI)

But why is “that era is now ending”? What's changed since 1997 when Brzezinski referred to the US as the “world's paramount power”?

Brzezinski points to the rise of Russia and China, the weakness of Europe and the “violent political awakening among post-colonial Muslims” as the proximate causes of this sudden reversal. His comments on Islam are particularly instructive in that he provides a rational explanation for terrorism rather than the typical government boilerplate about “hating our freedoms.” To his credit, Brzezinski sees the outbreak of terror as the “welling up of historical grievances” (from “deeply felt sense of injustice”) not as the mindless violence of fanatical psychopaths.

Naturally, in a short 1,500-word article, Brzezinski can't cover all the challenges (or threats) the US might face in the future. But it's clear that what he's most worried about is the strengthening

of economic, political and military ties between Russia, China, Iran, Turkey and the other Central Asian states. This is his main area of concern, in fact, he even anticipated this problem in 1997 when he wrote Chessboard. Here's what he said:

“Henceforth, the United States may have to determine how to cope with regional coalitions that seek to push America out of Eurasia, thereby threatening America's status as a global power.” (p.55)

“...To put it in a terminology that harkens back to the more brutal age of ancient empires, the three grand imperatives of imperial geostrategy are to prevent collusion and maintain security dependence among the vassals, to keep tributaries pliant and protected, and to keep the barbarians from coming together.” (p.40)

“...prevent collusion...among the vassals.” That says it all, doesn't it?

The Obama administration's reckless foreign policy, particularly the toppling of governments in Libya and Ukraine, has greatly accelerated the rate at which these anti-American coalitions have formed. In other words, Washington's enemies have emerged in response to Washington's behavior. Obama can only blame himself.

Russian Federation President Vladimir Putin has responded to the growing threat of regional instability and the placing of NATO forces on Russia's borders by strengthening alliances with countries on Russia's perimeter and across the Middle East. At the same time, Putin and his colleagues in the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, Iran, China and South Africa) countries have established an alternate banking system (BRICS Bank and AIIB) that will eventually challenge the dollar-dominated system that is the source of US global power. This is why Brzezinski has done a quick 180 and abandoned the plan for US hegemony; it is because he is concerned about the dangers of a non-dollar-based system arising among the developing and unaligned countries that would replace the western Central Bank oligopoly. If that happens, then the US will lose its stranglehold on the global economy and the extortionist system whereby fishwrap greenbacks are exchanged for valuable goods and services will come to an end.

Unfortunately, Brzezinski's more cautious approach is not likely to be followed by presidential-favorite Hillary Clinton who is a firm believer in imperial expansion through force of arms. It was Clinton who first introduced “pivot” to the strategic lexicon in a speech she gave in 2010 titled “America's Pacific Century”. Here's an excerpt from the speech that appeared in *Foreign Policy* magazine:

“As the war in Iraq winds down and America begins to withdraw its forces from Afghanistan, the United States stands at a pivot point. Over the last 10 years, we have allocated immense resources to those two theaters. In the next 10 years, we need to be smart and systematic about where we invest time and energy, so that we put ourselves in the best position to sustain our leadership, secure our interests, and advance our values. One of the most important tasks of American statecraft over the next decade will therefore be to lock in a substantially increased investment — diplomatic, economic, strategic, and otherwise — in the Asia-Pacific region...

Harnessing Asia's growth and dynamism is central to American economic and strategic interests and a key priority for President Obama. Open markets in Asia provide the United States with unprecedented opportunities for investment, trade, and access to cutting-edge technology.....American firms (need) to tap into the vast and growing consumer base of Asia...

The region already generates more than half of global output and nearly half of global trade. As we strive to meet President Obama's goal of doubling exports by 2015, we are looking for opportunities to do even more business in Asia...and our investment opportunities in Asia's dynamic markets."

("America's Pacific Century", Secretary of State Hillary Clinton", Foreign Policy Magazine, 2011)

Compare Clinton's speech to comments Brzezinski made in *Chessboard* 14 years earlier:

"For America, the chief geopolitical prize is Eurasia... (p.30)..... Eurasia is the globe's largest continent and is geopolitically axial. A power that dominates Eurasia would control two of the world's three most advanced and economically productive regions.About 75 per cent of the world's people live in Eurasia, and most of the world's physical wealth is there as well, both in its enterprises and underneath its soil. Eurasia accounts for 60 per cent of the world's GNP and about three-fourths of the world's known energy resources." (p.31)

The strategic objectives are identical, the only difference is that Brzezinski has made a course correction based on changing circumstances and the growing resistance to US bullying, domination and sanctions. We have not yet reached the tipping point for US primacy, but that day is fast approaching and Brzezinski knows it.

In contrast, Clinton is still fully-committed to expanding US hegemony across Asia. She doesn't understand the risks this poses for the country or the world. She's going to persist with the interventions until the US war-making juggernaut is stopped dead-in-its-tracks which, judging by her hyperbolic rhetoric, will probably happen some time in her first term.

Brzezinski presents a rational but self-serving plan to climb-down, minimize future conflicts, avoid a nuclear conflagration and preserve the global order. (aka-The "dollar system") But will bloodthirsty Hillary follow his advice?

Not a chance.