

Superpower

Three Choices for America's Role in the World

by Ian Bremmer

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By Naoyuki Haraoka

Ian Bremmer is a leading thinker on geopolitical issues and global governance. His latest book, *Superpower — Three Choices for America's Role in the World*, describes the possible role of the United States in world geopolitics in the coming decades. Who will be leading the global community and how the world economy will be run would appear to be questions of no immediate concern in our daily lives and the average person with the right to vote in his or her own country may not care much about them. But as globalization proceeds, what happens in any other country could affect your own country's economy and your own life. Whether Greece leaves the European Union or not could affect an Asian person's capital gains from stocks or other funds through the fluctuation in the value of the euro. What may happen in the Ukraine-Russia conflict or in either nation's foreign policy could affect a Japanese salary through possible negative shocks to the EU economy which is closely linked to the economies of other regions including Japan. The world's nations are today closely interconnected and a certain country's behavior could be crucial to your salary or your stable economic life, even if you yourself are not working for a business directly related to this behavior.

This is the reality of the modern world, and thus Ian Bremmer's question about the future role of America could directly affect your own security of life.

What Role Should America Play?

Global governance depends on international rules and disciplines, such as the multilateral trading system represented by the World Trade Organization (WTO), global financial and monetary schemes overseen by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, and global security mechanisms endorsed by the United Nations. All the international coordination mechanisms and rules on practice are expected to be implemented and observed by organizations consisting of almost all the nations of the world. However, without superpowers taking responsibility for confirming that all members share common values and that such organizations treat all members equally and fairly, the world would fall into instability and uncertainty and the rule of the jungle could dominate, favoring only the powerful nations.

Will America continue to be the world's only superpower for the

foreseeable future? If so, what kind of leading role should it play? Bremmer paints three alternative pictures of the future of the US in this book, namely Independent America, Moneyball America and Indispensable America.

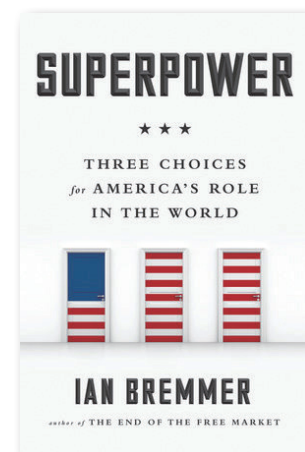
In Independent America, the US can no longer afford to play global policeman or judge and pursue a foreign policy to solve other people's problems, as this could bankrupt the treasury. It therefore declares independence from such a foreign policy in the belief that the US will be better off if it minds its own business and lets other countries get along as best they can.

Moneyball America, by contrast, will try to advance US interests at home and abroad, on the assumption that its economy is the most at risk. Since America's resources are limited, as claimed by the advocates of Independent America, it cannot meet every international challenge. The priorities must be to focus on promoting and protecting US economic interests wherever they are threatened.

Lastly, Indispensable America would be expected to lead the world in protecting fundamental values such as freedom and democracy on which global political stability, not merely economic stability, increasingly depends. This scenario involves the belief that a great leader can change the world by helping as many people as possible to topple the tyrants who deny them the freedom they deserve. According to the advocates of Indispensable America, only the US can do this and we will never live in a stable world while others are denied their most basic freedoms. If US leaders were not conscious of this responsibility, America's international reputation would be at risk.

What Would Be American People's Choice?

The author says the worst choice of all would be to refuse to choose, as that would continue to cause confusion among US allies,



rivals and Americans themselves, just as the current US administration is doing. The US presidential election next year would be the right moment to make it clear in which direction America should move in its foreign policy.

The belief that foreign policy is not as directly related to people's interests as economic policy would not be valid anymore, since a country's economic interests are crucially dependent upon the geopolitics and foreign policy affecting it, in particular in the case of a superpower like the US.

Superpower addresses the key role of democracy in determining an important foreign policy strategy. Thus, in a democratic society, ordinary people should be endowed with knowledge and wisdom about foreign policy as well as economic policy. One purpose of the book is to enable people to make the relevant decisions on foreign policy during the next presidential election.

The Author's Choice

Bremmer himself eventually chooses Independent America as the best scenario for the US to pursue. He believes it will not be realistic in the years ahead for the US to play an exceptional leading role in the world anymore. The time has come for the US to redefine its true value to the world. The sort of superhero foreign policy that the US has pursued up to now would impose on it a prohibitively high cost. Independent America would not advocate isolationist values. Instead, the strength, optimism, dynamism, openness, inclusiveness and innovative spirit of the US would serve as its message to the world. It would export these values as well as its technology, energy and food to the world and continue to welcome citizens of other countries who want to build a better life in the US and thus create a truly global workforce. But it would restrict political and military intervention beyond its borders.

The US cannot renounce its important international commitments overnight, however. But it could encourage its allies gradually to assume greater responsibility for their own security. Their wealthy allies, such as Germany and Japan in particular, would be urged to take responsibility for their own security. The author strongly recommends that the US government send a clear signal to their allies to do so.

The Best Future Scenario for the World?

In the light of Asians' interests, Moneyball America or Indispensable America could appear at first glance to be their best scenario. The region is now considered a crucial engine for global growth, but at the same time it is facing significant geopolitical risks. To lessen the political risks in this region and ensure its economic stability, US readiness to intervene in political or security conflicts would be most effective.

However, even in the scenario of Independent America, Asia can attract US interest in ensuring its political and economic stability. Independent America does not mean isolationism but alliance-based leadership. The US is clearly a major stakeholder in the Asia-Pacific region. Through trade and investment, key vehicles of globalization, the US has vital economic interests in the region and has to be confident that its security policies can overcome geopolitical risks. Expanded and multilayered US alliances in the region, not only bilateral but also plurilateral, would have to be fully utilized for that purpose. The US-Japan alliance should be the first to be considered, and the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) should be the second, though this is an alliance only concerning trade. APEC would be a third important alliance that could serve the interests of the US and the Asia-Pacific area. There are two things in particular to be noted about APEC.

First, China is a member of APEC and thus the US and China can pursue mutually beneficial relations in the context of a regional cooperation framework. Second, the APEC process covers not only economic issues but also political ones, such as human security or disaster mitigation, and pursuing integration in these two areas could lead to a remarkable stability in economic performance in this region. Independent America would thus discover the enormous merits of alliance-based governance.

Alliance-based governance perhaps could work well in other regions as well and I believe that is the best scenario for future global governance.

Lastly, Independent America would suggest that every country, in particular America's major partners, to think over their own roles in future global governance. Assuming that the US would play the role neither of police nor judge, they should start thinking about redefining their roles in a world where globalization is rapidly progressing under a changing world economic order.

Superpower is written for US citizens, non-experts in foreign policy and mostly ignorant of it, in order to show the people how important a foreign policy will be for their own lives under globalization. It aims to encourage voters in the next US presidential election to choose the best American foreign policy from among the three options. Not only in the US but also in other democracies, important foreign policy decisions must be dependent upon the voters' will.

Bremmer demonstrates in this book how to disseminate knowledge of foreign policy among voters in a clear and simple style, avoiding academic arguments as much as possible and making it easy for readers to understand the issues. **JS**

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