

## THREATENED COUNTRIES

A recent article in *Foreign Policy* magazine (January/February 2012) opines that the United States' is losing its global preeminence and will become less internationally active during the coming decades. As major regional powers like India, China, Russia and even Iran rush to fill any vacuums, some of the world's weaker countries may be adversely affected.

According to *Time Magazine* (Jan. 30, 2012), after the events of 9/11 the United States entered into a decade of considerable foreign involvement and interventions. Those over-reaching commitments, including two foreign wars, cost the country plenty—in both money and bloodshed. As they proved unpopular around the world and at home, public support for the commitments has lessened.

As the global economic crisis affected the United States, the country's foreign policy objectives became even more expensive. President Obama has now tried to set more realistic goals for America's foreign policy, reducing excess commitments. Unfortunately, some countries that are dependent on the United States may suffer.

For example, since the Korean War of the 1950s, the United States has been in charge of South Korea's security. With an estimated 28,500 troops stationed there, the United States plays a formidable role in protecting the country from its aggressive neighbor, North Korea. Current plans are that U.S. forces will transfer wartime command authority to South Korean forces by 2015. Already the United States has withdrawn some troops from the populated border area.

This troop withdrawal leaves Seoul with limited choices to defend itself from North Korea. According to Zbigniew Brzezinski, the writer of the *Foreign Policy* article, South Korea can either accept Chinese dominance in the region, relying on China to temper nuclear-armed North Korea, or forge a larger relationship with Japan out of fear of aggression from both North Korea and China.

Taiwan is another country that might be threatened if the United States becomes less involved in foreign situations. Beijing claims Taiwan is part of China. However, the United States continues to sell arms to Taiwan. If the United States pulls back its influence in Taiwan, it could leave the island vulnerable to Chinese pressure and the attraction of China's successful economy. While reunification of Taiwan and China may not necessarily be a bad thing, it would place China in a very dominant position over Taiwan.

Alongside China, Russia has become one of the biggest global players in the last decade. It also has become more imperial minded in its interactions with some countries of the former Soviet Bloc. While the United States aids many of those countries, their leaders

and economically. One-third of its exports go to Russia and it is almost completely reliant on Russia for its energy needs.

Russia already has a hand in Ukraine. It has threatened to or has cut off oil and gas supplies into Ukraine three times since 2005. Russian firms are slowly buying up many of the country's industries, leaving it susceptible to Russian interests.

President Obama has already scaled back much of the U.S. mission in Afghanistan, moving from counterinsurgency operations to counterterrorism to fight al-Qaeda and the Taliban. Even so, if the United States rapidly leaves Afghanistan, many scenarios could play out.

Brzezinski argues that Afghanistan could collapse internally, leaving it open to dominance by rival warlords instead of a functioning government. With 40 percent unemployment and little economic opportunities besides its illegal drug trade, Afghanistan is very much at risk. Nearby states like Pakistan, India and even Iran will likely vie for power and influence there.

If the United States is perceived as reducing its commitments, the political stability of

the entire Middle East could suffer. Pakistan, with its nuclear arsenal, and Israel, which could see direct confrontation with Iran, are predominantly at risk, according to Brzezinski.

Many have argued that the United States should ratchet back its foreign policy commitments, providing resources to countries or regions with particular interest to us. While this could save vital resources, it could also set off a chain of events that might weaken specific countries and even regions that are dependent upon U.S. support. While Zbigniew Brzezinski's opinions are just that, he makes a good argument that in the absence of United States power, big changes in geopolitics may occur.

And that is *Geography in the News*™. February 24, 2012. #1134.



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## The Threatened and the Threatening



may see increased pressure from Russia if the United States cuts back on its foreign support.

One country most vulnerable to Russian domination is Georgia. Since 1991, the United States has provided \$3 billion in aid to Georgia. Without this aid, Georgia could find itself intimidated both politically and militarily by Russia. At stake may be the southern energy corridor that runs through Georgia and other Caucasian countries and connects the Middle East to Europe. If Russia controlled Georgia (and potentially Azerbaijan), it could dominate that corridor.

In the absence of U.S. support, both Ukraine and Belarus would also be vulnerable to Russian intimidation. Belarus is a dictatorship that already depends on Russia politically