

On Leadership and American Power

A Discussion about the Role of Leadership in U.S. Foreign Policy

Joseph S. Nye Jr.

On 26 March 2013, former Dean of the Harvard Kennedy School Joseph S. Nye led a seminar on presidents and the creation of the American era at Georgetown University's Mortara Center for International Studies. Professor Nye discussed about to what extent leadership mattered in establishing the United States as the dominant country in the twentieth century, and what lessons can be drawn for leadership and U.S. foreign policy in the twenty-first century. The *Journal* sat down with Professor Nye after the event to hear more about his views on the role of leadership in shaping and promoting U.S. foreign policy.

GJIA: You have argued that providing American education to more international students enhances U.S. soft power by helping them better understand American culture and political ideals. Today we have a record-high number of international students studying in the United States – what can U.S. colleges do to not waste this opportunity and positively influence the thoughts of future global leaders?

Joseph S. Nye Jr. is University Distinguished Service Professor at Harvard Kennedy School. He previously served as Dean of the Kennedy School, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, Chair of the National Intelligence Council, and Deputy Under Secretary of State for Security Assistance, Science and Technology. In 2004, he published *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* and has just published *Presidential Leadership and the Creation of the American Era*.

Nye: The most important thing is to not try to shape minds of students in a propagandistic way, but to let students see the United States with all its virtues and all its flaws, and let them be able to make up their own minds. That is a lot more convincing than trying to have special programs to make foreign students love the United States, which will probably backfire. If we treat the foreign students well, integrate them into classes and courses with other

ing horizontal education. It is not just foreign students, but also American students who can benefit from such experience.

GJIA: With the tenth anniversary of the Iraq war just passed, this period has been a time of reflection for many who have traced how American power has been transformed over the last decade. Looking towards the future, what do you think the role of the

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students so that they can make friends while others help them as they try to cope with the new environment, that is more likely to produce beneficial outcomes than by deliberately trying to shape their minds.

When I was Dean of the Harvard Kennedy School, I doubled its proportion of foreign students among the entire student body from 22 percent to 44 percent. People would say to me, “Why are you giving away these very rare, scarce resources to foreign students?” I replied, “Well, for one thing, we are in the business of educating bright people, but the other point is that every foreign student here at the Kennedy School is basically a teacher to an American who wishes to learn more about the rest of the world.” By having ways in which foreign students and American students interact informally as well as formally, you are creat-

United States will be and should be in the world? What role will leaders have in making this shift?

Nye: The United States is likely to remain the most powerful country in the world for next several decades. I doubt that China will be able to pass the United States in military power, and I think their economy would probably become larger in terms of total GNP and the size of the United States simply due to their large population, but their per capita income will not be equal to that of the United States for several decades, if ever. On soft power, Chinese have a long way to go to equal the United States. The reason I mention China is that I think they are closer than any other country to the United States; they are the second largest economy, after all. That said, I do not see the Chinese passing the

United States in overall power. On the other hand, with the rise of China, the rise of India, and the rise of Brazil—and the rise of the rest—the United States does not have the same degree of dominance that it had in the late twentieth century after the decline of the Soviet Union. That means we have to have a smarter approach to foreign policy, which is to realize that the largest country is crucial in provision of global public goods. If we do not provide them, it is not clear whether or not any other nation can. If we do and do it well, it is beneficial to us, but it is also good for other countries. That, in the end, is our power and our attractiveness: both hard and soft power.

The right strategy for an American leader in the twenty-first century is to understand this context of American power. It is not declining, but it is coping with the rise of the rest. We have advantages in the way we are positioned, such as our existing alliances with Europe, Japan and others, and we have capacity to organize networks, which is very important in organizing collective action on problems that no one country can do by itself. These are problems like financial instability, pandemics, terrorism, and so forth. These are the things that we ought to be focusing on when we plan for a strategy for the twenty-first century.

For some of the transnational changes like climate change, financial stability, pandemics, or international cyber security, developing new sets of norms and institutions—ways through which you can organize cooperation to deal with these issues—is crucial. At the same time, it is important to maintain America's position as mili-

tary power—not for intervention to try to reorganize the internal lives of the countries as we tried to do in Iraq and Iran, but rather to hold a balance of power in the world. For example, the American role in the Pacific that President Barak Obama has placed at the center of his foreign policy is important not as means of containing China, but rather as a means of making sure that we shape the environment so that China has incentives not to be a bully towards its neighbors. That itself is a type of public good—that sense of broader framework of security, so that countries can essentially enjoy the prosperity of rising economic interdependence without feeling threats to their security when one country grows stronger than its neighbors.

The United States will have to deal with traditional issues such as security issues, but we will have to deal with these new transnational issues at the same time. Security issues are sometimes described as zero-sum or power over others, and transnational issues are sometimes described as positive-sum or power with others, in which you need others to be able to get the outcomes you want. I think we are going to have to focus on both of these issues.

GJIA: Speaking of Asia, to what extent do you think the recent leadership transitions—Xi Jinping in China, Shinzo Abe in Japan, and Park Geun-hye in South Korea—will affect the region's geopolitical dynamics and its relations with the United States?

Nye: It is early; all these leaders are new to their job. However, I remain rela-

tively optimistic from what we have seen of Xi Jinping. He does seem to want to cure some problems that China faces—from corruption to climate change and growing income inequality—as well as to have reasonable relationship with the United States. With Japan and South Korea, new leaders are from conservative sides, and there are some reactions against the rise of China, but both have thus far been reasonable in ways they have responded. I think the prospects there are encouraging rather than discouraging.

Yet, we should never forget that problems in international relations often rise with surprises and miscalculations. If in the bluffing and the tactical maneuvering over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands somebody makes

those events would be.

GJIA: The question of a defined role of the international community or individual foreign actors in cases of mass atrocity is one that has continued to elude global policy makers to a certain extent. Is there further legislation that should be crafted to make the obligations of international parties more clear, or is intervention destined to be dealt with on an ad hoc basis going forward and norms exist in a state of ‘organized hypocrisy?’ What role does the United States play in this process?

Nye: There are norms related to intervention now, but the problem is that they are not always clear-cut and sometimes have contradictory

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a mistake, we might see things quickly getting out of control. Or, if North Korea tries to do something that takes high risk such as the sinking of the Cheonan in 2010, and since President Park has said that she is not going to tolerate such provocations—which I think is also a broad opinion held by the South Korean people—that could also lead to disruptive surprise. Overall, I tend to be relatively optimistic, but with a realization that—as Harold McMillan has said—a lot of the problems in history are caused by surprising events and you don’t know what

effects. The UN Charter was an effort toward a framework that was largely not interventionist unless action was agreed upon by the permanent members of the Security Council under Chapter Seven, but we also have more recent norms like the “Responsibility to Protect,” which was voted by the General Assembly in 2005. R2P states that if a government is not exercising its responsibility to protect its own people, then the outside world and international community can play a role in resolving conflict. What type of intervention is justifiable is not entire-

ly clear and what we have seen is that sometimes these different approaches conflict with each other.

When the United States and the Europeans tried to persuade China and Russia to support a resolution under Chapter Seven authorizing use of force under the justification of the responsibility to protect Libya and the people of Benghazi from Muammar Gaddafi's attacks in 2011, the outcome in the eyes of Chinese and Russians led to regime change, which they argued they had not voted for. Partially because of this perception, we now cannot get the resolution in the Security Council, with the support of Chinese and Russians, in Syria. You might ask how R2P could exist and not be applied to intervention Syria, and part of the reason is that the Russians say that the norm they are observing is the norm of the UN Charter and they think that it was abused in the case of Libya. Even within Western governments it is not hundred-percent clear whether people understand what the full implications of use of force in Syria would look like

so it is not just the absence of Security Council action.

You have to remember the Hippocratic Oath—above all do no harm—so you have to ask, “Do we know how to intervene in given situations without making things worse rather than better?” You will get differences in opinion about that. It is not just the problem of norms; it is also problem of how do you make sure as you try to take an action that you are getting intended outcomes, not unintended worse outcomes. Partly it is problem of norms, partly it is problem of institutions, and it is also problem of enormous uncertainty of intervention. On that, it is worth going back to the book written by Princeton Professor Gary Bass. In American foreign policy, we have been going through arguments about intervention as long ago as the 1820s. This is not a new issue.

Joseph S. Nye was interviewed by William Handel and Daye Shim Lee on 26 March 2013.