

Review - The Future of Power

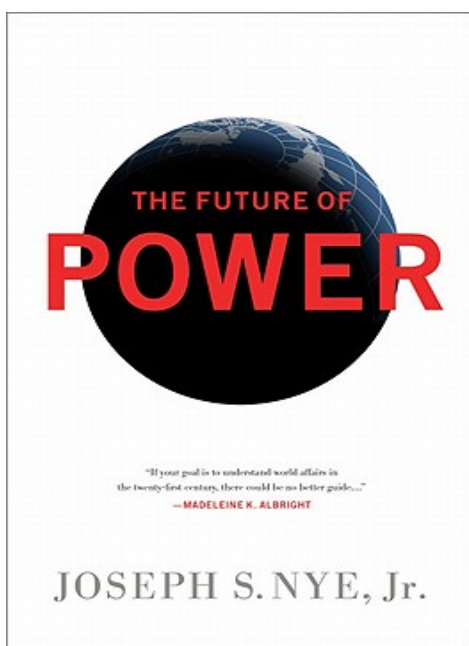
Written by Shiran Shen

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In his new book *The Future of Power*, co-founder of neo-liberalism theory Joseph S. Nye outlines a synthesis of his more than two decades of scholarship on the future of world power politics. Nye explains how power works and how it is changing under the conditions of a burgeoning revolution in information technology, globalization, and the return of Asia in the twenty-first century. Based on an understanding of power and its changing landscape internationally, Nye endeavors to discredit the popular conception of a declining America despite the resurgence of China and India in the twenty-first century by suggesting that the United States should employ a smart power strategy that combines hard power and soft power to maintain its global leadership role.

Power is the ability to alter others' behavior to produce preferred outcomes. It is not good or bad *per se*. Nye believes that there are two major types of power in international relations: hard power and soft power. Hard power implies coercion while soft power allows us to obtain preferred outcomes through cooption. Hard power is push; soft power is pull. As we progress through the 21st century, Nye suggests that the utility of military force is declining; instead, soft power will play a larger role in international relations. Since attraction and persuasion are socially constructed, soft power is a dance that requires partners, which makes it difficult to wield and maintain. Sanctions combine both hard power and soft power. Because sanctions are the only relatively inexpensive policy option, they are likely to remain a major instrument of power in the 21st century despite their mixed record.

The two major trends of power shift in the 21st century are a power transition among states and a power diffusion away from all states to non-state actors. Nye predicts that the classical transition of power among great states may be less of a problem than the rise of non-state actors. In an information-based world of cyber-insecurity, power diffusion may be a greater threat than power transition. Conventional wisdom has always held that the state with the largest military prevails, but in an information age it may be the state (or non-states) with the most favorable presentation that wins.

In a century marked by global information and a diffusion of power to non-state actors, soft power will become an increasingly important part of smart power strategies. Nye warns that government efforts to project soft power will have to accept that power is less hierarchical in an information age and that social networks have become more important, thereby leaders need to think of themselves as being in a circle rather than atop a mountain.

Based on his analysis of how power works, Nye casts serious doubt that America is in precipitate decline and endeavors to dismiss this popular conception through a sober and rigorous analysis of the power resources the United States possesses and is able to possess through a smart power strategy. Becoming less dominant on the international stage is not a narrative of decline. The United States, he argues, needs a liberal realist strategy to cope with "the rise of the rest" among both states and non-state actors; that is, the United States needs to rediscover how to be a smart power.

"A smart power strategy requires that the old distinction between realists and liberals needs to give way to a new synthesis that we might call liberal realism ... First, it would start with an understanding of the strength and limits of American power ... Second, a liberal realist strategy would stress the importance of developing an integrated grand strategy that combines hard power with soft power into smart power of the sort that won the Cold War ... Third, the objective of a liberal realist strategy would have the key pillars of providing security for the United States and its allies, maintaining a strong domestic and international economy, avoiding environmental disasters (such as pandemics and negative climate change), and encouraging liberal democracy and human rights at home and abroad where feasible at reasonable levels of cost" (231-2).

Furthermore, it is not enough to think in terms of power *over* others. We must also think in terms of power to accomplish goals that involves power *with* others. The problem of American power in the 21st century is not one of decline but of a failure to realize that even the largest country cannot achieve its goals of both national and international significance without the help of others.

Despite the clarity and depth of Nye's reasoning, he does not explain why it is important that the U.S. maintain the maximum influence possible internationally. Hard power, soft power, and smart power that are explained in length

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and depth are just tactics. The unspoken premise that the U.S. should make its best effort to remain its top dog status, which often requires mass spending on warfare, remains unexplained and unquestioned. War Resisters International has calculated that approximately 48 percent of U.S. tax revenue goes toward military-related expenditures. The National Priorities Project shows that U.S. military consumes 58 percent of federal discretionary spending. Cutting U.S. military spending and attributing the money to humanitarian needs at home and abroad may be more appealing than maintaining or expanding U.S. military leverage in the world. Every minute the U.S. spends approximately \$2.1 million on the military, which can alternatively be used to establish 16 new schools with 12 classrooms each in Afghanistan. The deficit in Washington D.C. is \$175 million this fiscal year, nearly half of which is in education and medical care. Cancelling one day's fund for bombs in Libya will be more than enough to cancel the \$175 million deficit. By not explaining why it is important to maintain U.S. prominence internationally through mass spending, Nye makes his whole argument less persuasive than he intended. Otherwise, this book will make a good resource for teaching realism in international politics at the introductory and intermediate levels.

Shiran Shen is a senior at Swarthmore College majoring in political science and minoring in environmental studies in the Honors Program. Shiran's research interests include American foreign policy, Asia-Pacific security, energy and sustainability, and Sino-American relations.