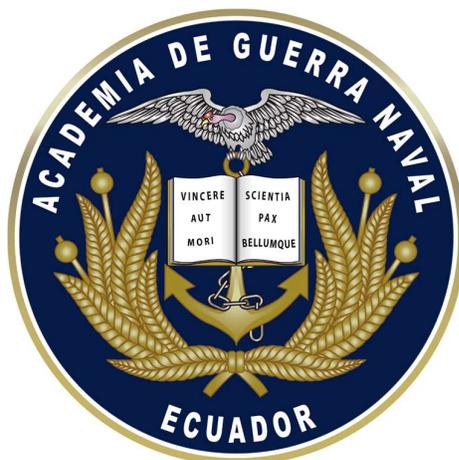


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**LECTURAS RECOMENDADAS**

**SMART POWER AND US LEADERSHIP:  
A CRITIQUE OF JOSEPH NYE  
PAUL COMMACK, 49<sup>th</sup> Parallel**

**Lectura Recomendada por:**

CPNV-SP Javier Paredes Salazar  
Asesor de la Academia de Guerra Naval

2.020

**“Smart power and US leadership: A critique of Joseph Nye”, de Paul Cammack**

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Joseph Nye es un politólogo, profesor e investigador norteamericano, creador junto con Robert Keohane de la Escuela Neoliberal de las Relaciones Internacionales y uno de los teóricos de la teoría del “poder suave” (hacer que los otros quieran lo que tú quieres), es decir del empleo de la cultura, de los valores políticos y de la política exterior de los EE. UU. para atraer a los aliados y simpatizantes a apoyar los intereses de ese país para imponer su hegemonía en el escenario mundial.

Paul Cammack es un escritor, profesor e investigador del Instituto de Desarrollo Global perteneciente a la Universidad de Manchester. Cammack es el autor de este “papel” en el cual hace observaciones a las teorías del poder inteligente de Nye, que se refiere al uso del “poder suave” respaldado por la amenaza del uso del poder militar. Su crítica se refiere, principalmente, a que la posición de Nye, no es multilateralista, sólo usa el multilateralismo para beneficio americano; y que sus teorías tienen fallas tanto en la teoría, porque usa incorrectamente la teoría de la acción colectiva, así como en la práctica, ya que como él mismo lo señala: “Los Estados Unidos son incapaces de brindar un liderazgo cooperativo y constructivo.”

La lectura de ese documento me parece que es interesante, ya que las teorías de Nye influenciaron la política exterior del presidente Obama, un gran impulsor del globalismo, siempre que los más beneficiados fueran los EE. UU y, probablemente, puedan influenciar nuevamente la política exterior norteamericana si Joe Biden gana las elecciones para presidente en noviembre del presente año y se impongan, de nuevo, políticas menos nacionalistas, que las actuales.

**Bibliografía**

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## Smart Power and US Leadership:

### A Critique of Joseph Nye

Paul Cammack

This paper subjects Joseph Nye's advocacy of soft power (recently repackaged as 'smart' power) to critical scrutiny, and reflects on the implications for US global leadership. It shows that Nye's position is far from multilateralist, still insisting as it does on hard power supremacy and the need for America to lead. It then argues that the case made is weak, both in theory (because of a misuse of collective action theory) and in practice (because of the evidence he himself provides that America is unable to provide constructive, co-operative leadership). It concludes that the best contribution that America could make to global stability would be to relinquish the claim to leadership, not only in cases where it is at odds with the international community, or widely seen as itself the source of instability, but particularly in cases where shared perspectives regarding common goals and approaches do exist.

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Paul Cammack teaches at Manchester Metropolitan University, where he is Head of the Department of Politics and Philosophy. His recent work is on the governance of global capitalism [ [www.politicsofglobalcompetitiveness.net](http://www.politicsofglobalcompetitiveness.net) ]. He can be reached at [p.cammack@mmu.ac.uk](mailto:p.cammack@mmu.ac.uk)

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# Smart Power and US Leadership:

## A Critique of Joseph Nye

Paul Cammack



Joseph Nye's much reiterated insistence on the importance of 'soft power' is invariably deployed to support the argument that in the absence of a credible alternative the United States can and must lead in global affairs in the twenty-first century world. He has argued consistently over two decades, and continues to argue today, that the US remains unchallenged in terms of 'hard' power (military and economic strength combined), but that because hard power alone is insufficient it must be married to 'power over opinion' (the power to persuade others to want what the US wants). Recent formulations in terms of 'smart power' are partly presentational ('smart' being easier to sell to public and policy-makers alike than 'soft'); at the same time, Nye uses the term 'smart power' to make the point that soft power must be backed by hard power.<sup>1</sup> However, the argument has remained the same over two decades. His question, as put in the bipartisan 2007 CSIS Report *A Smarter, More Secure America* he co-chaired with Richard Armitage, is 'How does America become the welcomed world leader for a constructive international agenda for the twenty-first century?'.<sup>2</sup> His answer is that, in terms of style, it must learn to cooperate, and to listen;<sup>3</sup> in terms of substance, it must 'first ensure its national survival, but then focus on providing global public goods'.<sup>4</sup> Underpinning this stance are two assumptions: that America (and America alone) can and should lead; and that American leaders can win domestic and international support for their leadership. I argue that as both are unfounded, insistence on American leadership is a massive *obstacle* to the development of a constructive international agenda.

The context in which these issues are addressed is not only the current presidential campaign, but also the growing debate over the character and future of American global leadership. In particular, I am interested in marking the distance between Nye's views and those of commentators who call for American recognition of the need for genuine multilateralism.<sup>5</sup> On the grounds that Nye's position is and has been influential, and may continue to be in the future, this paper has the specific and limited purpose of establishing precisely what it is that Nye argues and assessing the credibility of the argument, as a contribution to the larger developing debate over US global leadership. The first section lays out the foundations of Nye's argument, identifying fundamental flaws in his theorisation of leadership. The second and third sections set out and assess his agenda for foreign policy reform, finding it wrong-headed, incoherent and lacking in credibility. The final section concludes, against Nye, that the greatest contribution to the global public good that America could make would be let others lead, and to contribute to and engage fully

with their leadership. As will become apparent, this conclusion does not apply only to high-profile cases in which American actions and preferences have been significantly at odds with those of other leading states (Iraq, Israel–Palestine and Kyoto, among others, readily come to mind), or even to those, such as the management of the current global financial crisis, where America is widely seen as the source of the problem and is therefore unlikely to inspire trust as the source of the solution. Rather, it suggests that there is an imperative need to rethink, in a much more fundamental manner than Nye imagines, the place of American leadership in a ‘post-American World’.<sup>6</sup> To this extent, the argument applies just as much, and perhaps even more, to issues on which America is at one with allies and partners as to those on which it is not. In sum, Nye continues to concern himself with the question of *how* America should lead, taking it for granted that it must. If the move to a genuinely multilateral world requires acceptance that it cannot and should not, it would be a mistake to underestimate the extent to which even those elite American actors such as Nye who are identified as moderate and internationalist remain to be convinced.

### **Soft power, liberal realism and the issue of leadership**

Soft power, according to Nye, involves three resources—culture, political values and foreign policies—and is an essential component of effective policy-making in the ‘global information age’. In an analogy to which he repeatedly returns, ‘the agenda of world politics has become like a three-dimensional chess game in which one can win only by playing vertically as well as horizontally’.<sup>7</sup> In this game, classic interstate military issues are on the top board, interstate economic issues are on the middle board, and on the bottom board are transnational issues—terrorism, international crime, climate change and the spread of infectious diseases. On the top board the US is ‘the only superpower with global military reach’; on the second it must cooperate with the European Union, Japan, China and others, and on the third, ‘power is widely distributed and chaotically organized among state and nonstate actors’.<sup>8</sup>

As Nye is quick to point out, it was E.H. Carr who identified ‘power over opinion’ as the third form of power alongside military and economic power.<sup>9</sup> Whether Nye was wise to introduce the contrast between ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ power and thereby to blur Carr’s insistence that power over opinion was ‘not less essential for political purposes than military and economic power, and has always been closely associated with them’<sup>10</sup> need not concern us, because he remains faithful to Carr in arguing that soft power complements hard power, but does not replace it. It is consistent with this that Nye should call himself, as he does, a ‘liberal realist’.<sup>11</sup> His fundamentally realist approach is revealed in the hierarchy the three-dimensional chess game reflects and in a persistent statism that survives his early association with ‘interdependence’.<sup>12</sup> Although he argued in *Bound to Lead* that contemporary developments in global politics were more consistent with ‘a hypothesis of power diffusion related to a new agenda in world politics...than with a theory of hegemonic decline of a United States pressed by rising challengers’,<sup>13</sup> the core of the book was

devoted to an assessment of the capacity of the Soviet Union, China, the European Union and Japan to challenge for power. And even though he concluded again that the problem was ‘not that one or the other of America’s postwar allies will challenge the United States for hegemony, but that the United States will have to adapt to new patterns of interdependence and new political agendas in the twenty-first century’, he still went through the exercise of assessing the claims of each potential challenger in turn.<sup>14</sup> In this respect, and in his normative preference for state over non-state actors, Nye in 2008 is as unreconstructed as ever:

At the moment, the United States is unlikely to face a challenge to its pre-eminence from other states unless it acts so arrogantly that it helps the others to overcome their incompatibilities and work together. *The greater challenge for the United States will be to learn how to work with other countries to better control the non-state actors that will increasingly share the stage with nation-states.* How to control the bottom chessboard in a three-dimensional game and how to make hard and soft power reinforce each other are the key foreign policy challenges for American leadership [emphasis mine].<sup>15</sup>

As is evident, Nye has never embraced the implications of his own ‘hypothesis of power diffusion’. Within the uncompromisingly realist framework to which he clings, he cannot imagine any situation other than one in which the US unequivocally takes the lead—and this despite a youthful flirtation with the notion of ‘multiple leadership’.<sup>16</sup> In successive prefaces to the hardback and paperback editions of *Bound to Lead* he argued that ‘if the most powerful country fails to lead, the consequences for the rest of the world may be disastrous’;<sup>17</sup> and ‘if the largest power does not lead in organizing multilateral action, no one will’.<sup>18</sup> His argument at that time, that interdependence could only be managed by continued US leadership, was no aberration.<sup>19</sup> It is consistent with his more recent insistence that the need to cooperate does not preclude the claim to lead: ‘we are not only bound to lead, but bound to cooperate’.<sup>20</sup> Elsewhere, however, he goes further, adopting rhetorical formulations that overlook cooperation altogether to represent the choice as being between American leadership on the one hand, and abstention or isolationism on the other:

[H]ow will the only superpower guide its foreign policy after the experience of the Iraq War? Will it provide global leadership or conclude that the best course in world affairs is to remain uninvolved?<sup>21</sup>

Again, this is no aberration, but a reflection of an enduring cast of mind. The same thought was expressed as follows in *Bound to Lead*:

Although polyarchy rests in part on the diffusion of power to nonstate actors and small states, its implications for stability and welfare will depend heavily on whether the largest state takes a lead in organizing

collective action among other states or *if it simply allows a new feudalism to develop* [emphasis mine].<sup>22</sup>

Given Nye's various remarks on multiple leadership, the diffusion of power, and cooperation (not to mention the everyday understanding of cooperation as association for common benefit), one might have expected a middle term—engagement with and active contribution to the leadership of others when appropriate. As it is, his own definition of cooperation seems to be 'my way or the highway'. To see why, we need to turn briefly to the theoretical foundation on which his position rests.

Nye's conflation of the need to cooperate with the need to lead can be traced back to a recurrent slippage in his use of collective action theory. Consider the following statements, in the light of the categorical insistence on the need for US leadership highlighted above:

According to the logic of collective action, if the largest beneficiary of a public good (like the United States) does not take the lead in providing disproportionate resources toward its provision, the smaller beneficiaries are unlikely to be able to produce it because of the difficulties of organising collective action when large numbers are involved.<sup>23</sup>

The United States has provided a disproportionate share of the resources to address these challenges, but has also been the largest beneficiary. In the absence of U.S. leadership, regional powers would be unlikely to achieve the same degree of cooperation because of the difficulties of organizing collective action. Although it may be true that regional powers enjoy the benefits of this system without expending the same resources, American engagement is critical to any meaningful manifestation of global collective will.<sup>24</sup>

As is stated in the first of these passages, the implication of collective action theory is that the largest beneficiary should assume the largest cost, or take the lead *in the share of resources provided*, not that they should organise or dictate the terms of the collective action that ensues. Similarly, in the second passage, the reference to US leadership in the second sentence is clearly understood in context as involving two things: the contribution of a 'disproportionate share of resources' mentioned in the first, and the *engagement* in the process itself mentioned in the third. It is clear here that it is crucial that the United States should contribute and cooperate, but again, it does not follow that it must also dictate the terms, and no such argument is made. The problem is that Nye does not respect these crucial distinctions elsewhere in his work. He moves away from *leadership in the provision of resources* and *engagement with collective regimes* to argue for US provision, leadership and control of collective regimes. If he were consistent with the claims of collective action theory he would not ask how America can become a 'welcomed world leader', but rather how America can contribute and cooperate (at times accepting the leadership of *others*) in the shared provision of a constructive world agenda.

As we shall see in the following section, this theoretical slippage has real effects; shaping the agenda Nye sets out for a new foreign policy and forcing him into an impasse. On issue after issue, he recommends that the US should put forward its own alternative to collective regimes, either under discussion or in force without US participation or support, rather than commit to those regimes. At the same time he piles up evidence that it is far from ready or willing to do so. Insistence on America's status as the 'only superpower', obsessive concern with potential rivals, and jealous defence of the coveted position of 'Number One' has become counter-productive. Far from it being the case that hard power plus soft power equals smart power, America's reluctance to compromise its preponderance in terms of hard power acts as an impediment to rational action in the international arena. Hard power can detract from soft power, and the smart thing to do would be to recognise it.

### **The agenda for reform: American national interest and global public goods**

Nye has made a case in the 2007 CSIS Commission Report and in a number of individual publications over recent months for a foreign policy that answers both to America's national interest and the need for global public goods. Taken together, they identify an agenda against which his aspirations for smart power and the recovery of US leadership can be assessed.

The starting point for the CSIS Report is the frank admission that 'America's image and influence are in decline around the world'.<sup>25</sup> The task ahead, then, is to restore America's capacity to lead. The Report argues that 'the United States must become a smarter power by investing once again in the global good—providing things that people and government in all quarters of the world want but *cannot attain in the absence of American leadership* [emphasis mine]'.<sup>26</sup> Five critical areas are identified: alliances, partnerships and institutions; global development; public diplomacy; economic integration; and technology and innovation. The first of these involves both renewed commitment to a reformed United Nations (in relation to peace-keeping and peace-building, counterterrorism, global health, and energy and climate), reinvigorated alliances, and 'working to erase the perception that the United States has double standards when it comes to abiding by international law'.<sup>27</sup> The second requires 'strengthening relationships with international and domestic partners and trying to build a more unified approach at home and abroad'.<sup>28</sup> The third calls for 'respect toward other countries and a willingness to understand local needs and local issues'.<sup>29</sup> The fourth notes the benefits of trade (and calls for them to be more widely distributed), warns that the United States 'must do more to prepare itself for increasing economic competition', and urges the next administration to 're-examine the public school system to ensure that we are graduating high school students ready for work, college, and citizenship', and to engage the corporate sector in the task of training the next generation of workers.<sup>30</sup> The fifth calls for US leadership 'to shape a new energy framework in a carbon-constrained world'.<sup>31</sup>

Nye's subsequent publications offer variations on the same themes. In one version six priorities are identified: the US should maintain regional balances of

power, promote an open economic system, 'keep the international commons [the climate, endangered species, outer space, cyberspace] open to all', develop and maintain international legal regimes and institutions, make international development a higher priority, and act as a mediator and convenor of coalitions.<sup>32</sup> In another, explicitly addressed to 'the next president', the same case is made for leadership on the issue of global public goods, while the general priorities are identified as '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 [*sic*].'<sup>33</sup> Here, five major challenges that a new leader could face are identified: the intersection of terrorism with nuclear materials; political Islam and how it develops; the rise of a hostile hegemon in Asia; 'an economic depression that could be triggered by financial mismanagement or a crisis that disrupts global access to the Persian Gulf; and ecological breakdowns such as pandemics or climate change.'<sup>34</sup>

The CSIS Report in particular provides detailed evidence that American leadership is in crisis. It argues that America has relied over much on hard power and enjoyed limited success in building soft power instruments, and that it attracts hostility and distrust precisely because it is the sole superpower.<sup>35</sup> It laments the fact that 'one opinion poll after another has demonstrated that America's reputation, standing, and influence are at all-time lows, and possibly sinking further', so that for foreign leaders, endorsement of US policy is the 'kiss of death'.<sup>36</sup> It recognises that America's refusal to sign up to Kyoto, accept the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court, or put its name to the Mine Ban Treaty and the Convention on the Rights of the Child have won it a reputation for unwillingness to cooperate with other states; and it notes that the ineffective response to Hurricane Katrina at home and to the task of restoring civil order and basic services in Iraq have damaged its reputation for technical competence.<sup>37</sup> As a consequence of these and other failings it concludes that America's standing is very low in the Middle East (where 'deep and growing hostility' prevails among the crucial moderate middle sectors) and in Pakistan, low in Europe, Russia, Latin America; and only middling in Southeast and Northeast Asia and China (though better in Africa and India).<sup>38</sup>

As regards the domestic environment, the Report finds that 'U.S. foreign policy institutions are fractured and compartmentalized', while spending on public diplomacy 'has remained at levels well below the USIA budgets at the start of the 1990s'.<sup>39</sup> And it notes that most Americans 'do not wish to have domestic laws that have been written and passed by elected representatives superseded by international institutions over which [they] feel they have little input or control',<sup>40</sup> while their confidence in the government's ability to handle international problems is at its lowest level since 1972.<sup>41</sup> Nye's subsequent articles reinforce this assessment: the US Congress is too assertive on international issues and insufficiently robust in relation to domestic problems; Americans are unwilling to invest resources in 'non-military

aspects of foreign affairs; on the global climate, 'America has failed to lead'; and on the promotion of international development, its record is 'less than impressive'.<sup>42</sup>

In large part, this situation is blamed upon the poor integration of hard and soft power tools. In the concluding chapter of the CSIS Report, ten 'interrelated factors that hinder the U.S. government's ability to bring about this integration' are identified: there is little capacity for making trade-offs at the strategic level; programmes promoting soft power lack integration and coordination; the US government had not invested sufficiently in civilian tools; civilian agencies have not been staffed or resourced for extraordinary missions; diplomacy today requires new methods compared to traditional diplomacy; insufficient authority resides in field organisations; civilian agencies lack regional operational capabilities; short-term exigencies tend to drive out long-term planning; Congress and the executive branch need a new understanding; and many of the tools that promote change are not in the hands of government.<sup>43</sup>

The detailed policy recommendations that flow from this candid depiction of the crisis of America's global leadership are set out in five general principles that should guide the next administration, and seven specific recommendations arising from them. The five principles are to make strategic trade-offs among competing priorities; elevate and integrate the unique dimensions of development, diplomacy, and public diplomacy into a unified whole; have Congress act as a partner and develop proper authorising and appropriating structures to support a smart power strategy; move more discretionary authority and resources into field organisations and hold them accountable for results; and have the government learn to tap into and harness the vast soft power resources in the private sector and civil society.<sup>44</sup> And the seven specific recommendations for reform are to create a 'smart power deputy'; to add greater coordination capacity to the executive secretariat; to create a cabinet-level voice for global development; to establish a Quinquennial Smart Power Review; to resource a 'float' for civilian agencies; to strengthen civilian agency on a regional basis; and to establish a new institution for international knowledge and communication.<sup>45</sup> At the same time, five 'signature initiatives' are proposed, one for each of the areas covered in the Report: to invest in a new multilateralism, build a global health network, invest in educational exchanges, relaunch the Doha Round on more equitable terms, and invest in a clean energy future.<sup>46</sup>

A large part of the Report is concerned, then, with internal reforms to foreign policy-making. At the same time, it ties the development and operation of smart power generally to the cause of restoring American leadership, as the detailed agendas for each of the five signature initiatives reveal. All feature significant new ventures to be *originated* by the United States, often in place of existing international organisations and regimes. On the new multilateralism the new administration should 'propose a set of high-level meetings' through the G-8 summit process on energy and climate, non-proliferation, global health, education and the world economy; on health, it should create a 'US Global Health Corporation'; on educational exchanges, it should prioritise bilateral programmes with China and

India; on Doha, it should ‘negotiate a “plurilateral” agreement among those WTO members willing to move directly to free trade on a global basis’; and on the issue of energy and environmental policy it should launch its own new initiative around a common principles charter.<sup>47</sup> Elsewhere Nye expresses the view that ‘the United States will continue to be in a position to provide leadership in managing global security in all its dimensions’.<sup>48</sup> His ambitions for American leadership across the board, then, are undiminished.

### **Bound to lead?**

In advocating a liberal realist foreign policy, Nye cautions that ‘one should judge a vision by whether it balances ideals with capabilities: anyone can produce a wish list, but *effective* visions combine feasibility with the inspiration’.<sup>49</sup> How convincing, then, is his argument that the generation of smart power can restore American leadership?

To begin with the obvious, one of the clearest conclusions to be drawn from the CSIS Report in particular is that whatever its aspirations, America is in no position to lead at present, or in the foreseeable future. The premise of the Report, after all, is that America is *not* investing in the global good: that it lacks commitment to the United Nations and is widely seen as applying double standards; that it has weak relationships with international and domestic partners and weakly aligned international and domestic agendas; that it lacks respect for other countries and a willingness to listen and understand; that it distributes economic rewards unequally at home and is ill-prepared for international competition; that its education system is failing, and its corporate sector is poorly attuned to national imperatives; and that its position on energy supplies and environmental issues is at odds with the rest of the world.

At the same time, the fractured and compartmentalised nature of US foreign policy institutions which the Report highlights is not a consequence of the Bush presidency, but according to Nye himself the legacy of a government system designed in the eighteenth century ‘to maximize liberties rather than efficiency in power conversion’.<sup>50</sup> If the tendency of the ‘notoriously messy’ foreign policy-making process to give rise to short-termism, parochialism and the need for a greater power of co-ordination from the White House is as embedded as Nye supposes,<sup>51</sup> it is unlikely to be resolved by the exhortation that the executive and legislative branches should work together better, or by the appointment of a smart power deputy, however smart.

Similarly, the domestic and international impediments to American leadership the Report enumerates long predate the Bush presidency and the Iraq war. Two decades ago, as today, the priority was for the United States to ‘develop better approaches to multilateral burden sharing’.<sup>52</sup> Two decades ago, as today, the problems thrown up by interdependence were ‘ecology, drugs, AIDS, terrorism’.<sup>53</sup> Two decades ago, as today, fundamental domestic reforms were required if America was to realise its potential to lead.<sup>54</sup> Two decades ago, as today, Americans were too

parochial, and inattentive to external changes.<sup>55</sup> In fact over-reliance on hard power, limited success in developing soft power instruments, the weakness of and low investment in public diplomacy, the failures of the educational system and the dwindling capacity of America to compete internationally were all identified as problems in *Bound to Lead*. Nye's confidence that they can be swiftly overcome flies in the face of his own evidence.

The intractability of these problems, and the extent to which they have been compounded during the Bush presidency, is nowhere better illustrated than in those relating to 'international competitiveness and its ability to convert power resources into effective influence'.<sup>56</sup> In *Bound to Lead* Nye highlighted four areas of concern in the economy: the slowdown in the rate of growth of productivity (on which he was relatively sanguine); the diminishing lead in research and development; the inadequate return on investment in education; and the decline in savings, matched by rising levels of personal and national indebtedness; and he suggested on the latter that 'the key constraints may be more political than economic'.<sup>57</sup> According to the OECD's latest Economic Survey, all of these remain issues of concern.<sup>58</sup> Rising inequality, faltering investment in research and development, continuing reliance on a low tax regime that favours debt-led consumption and widespread concerns about the quality of primary and secondary education were major concerns even before the 'credit crunch' and the prospect of low to flat growth for the foreseeable future put a major question mark against the sustainability of America's lead in international competitiveness.<sup>59</sup>

In this context, it all but beggars belief that Nye should offer the bland comment, with the 'credit crunch' and its impact upon global financial markets already in full swing, that 'international financial stability is vital to the prosperity of Americans, but the United States needs the cooperation of others to attain it'.<sup>60</sup> In this case in particular, the credibility of the United States is so low that the notion of a general welcome for American leadership verges on the surreal. At the same time such insouciance, when the current causes of global financial instability stem directly from reckless domestic policies in the United States, themselves rooted in the incapacity of its government to break with the culture of indebtedness, betokens a lack of awareness of sentiment around the world.

This in turn raises a broader question regarding Nye's unswerving commitment to such 'American values' as democracy, globalisation, and an open international economy. Nye himself is intermittently aware that commitment to such values does not necessarily translate into support for America.<sup>61</sup> Kohut and Wike, similarly inclined to assert American ownership over these ideas, have recently commented that 'the 2007 Pew Global Attitudes survey revealed the extent to which there is broad support for democracy, capitalism and globalization throughout all regions of the world, including Muslim nations. Support for American ideas, however, does not necessarily translate into warm feelings for the United States'.<sup>62</sup> The data on which they base this statement bear examination (Table 1).

**Table 1:** Political Attitudes in Selected Muslim Countries

	Egypt	Indonesia	Malaysia	Turkey
Positive towards trade	61	71	91	73
Positive towards foreign companies	68	62	80	–
Positive towards free markets	50	45	71	60
Favourable to the US	21	29	27	9

**Source:** Andrew Kohut & Richard Wike, 'All the World's a Stage', *National Interest online*, 5 May 2008

In the light of such evidence, it is entirely counter-productive for the United States to claim ownership of such ideas, or leadership in their dissemination. It is unequivocally the case here that American interests, in so far as they revolve around these values, would be best served by dropping the counter-productive claim that they are intrinsically 'American' values, and *dissociating* them from the United States—in other words, by entrusting leadership in these areas to others. There are after all plenty of candidates—the OECD and the European Union prominent among them.<sup>63</sup>

The case against American leadership in international political economy is all the stronger because Nye's assumption that promoting an open international economic system is good for American economic growth is itself coming under question in the United States itself. It is not that American liberals have lost faith in openness, but that it is increasingly identified as politically problematic. As Larry Summers put it in a widely noted commentary, 'In a world where Americans can legitimately doubt whether the success of the global economy is good for them, it will be increasingly difficult to mobilise support for economic internationalism'.<sup>64</sup> The ambitious reform agenda he advocates echoes Nye in insisting that America must 'take the lead' (in promoting global co-operation in the tax arena in this case).<sup>65</sup> But at the same time it points directly to real and enduring difficulties on the domestic political front, which the protectionist gestures that surfaced in the contest for the Democratic nomination have only served to highlight. More broadly, the view expressed by Philip Stephens, also in the pages of the *Financial Times*, suggests that Nye is light years away from grasping the implications of the new world in which they find themselves: 'Globalisation need not be a zero-sum game. But if the west is going to adapt, it must recognise that it can no longer expect to write the rules'.<sup>66</sup>

### Conclusion

More than thirty years ago Nye put his name to the observation, in the context of the need for 'multiple leadership' in conditions of interdependence, that the leaders on any particular issue 'should be those with large stakes in a regime and *a political and economic system at home that allows them some leeway for leadership on the*

*issue* [emphasis mine]'.<sup>67</sup> Since then, he has insisted that America must be 'able to control the political environment and to get other nations to do what it wants'.<sup>68</sup> Yet on the evidence marshalled above, American 'soft power'—the means through which this goal is to be achieved—is comprehensively in crisis: its culture widely rejected, its political values betrayed in the eyes of many around the world, and its foreign policies lacking in legitimacy and moral authority.<sup>69</sup> What is more, some of Nye's own analysis, and much else besides, suggests that this is precisely because the political and economic system of the United States today does not afford the leadership the leeway required to take an international lead for the global public good. It follows that the United States can best secure its interests by dropping the insistence that it must lead, and offering active support for initiatives arising elsewhere instead. Fareed Zakaria puts the point clearly: 'The fundamental issue is whether the United States has the desire to create common ground and can place common interests above the desire to be in control'.<sup>70</sup> Or to put the point another way, one could say that there are some specific issues on which America should not lead, and other specific issues on which America, for the foreseeable future at least, cannot lead. But my argument goes further, to suggest that America's greatest contribution to a multilateral world, in which the massive changes that have taken place over the last two decades are recognised and accepted and their challenges addressed, would be to relinquish the claim to leadership *particularly* in cases where shared perspectives regarding common goals and approaches do exist. Otherwise, it wastes soft power resources in both areas—on the one hand by insisting on initiatives and actions that do not command general consent, and on the other by insisting on being accorded the leadership role when it has no reason to do so except to retain the claim to leadership itself.

In such a general context, America's demand to lead itself becomes the central problem, and an obstacle to the development of a constructive international agenda. One of the reasons that Nye cannot think this thought has been identified above—his ill-founded assumption that collective action theory supports the claim for American leadership across the board. Another, ironic in view of the insistence throughout *Soft Power* on the need for America to listen, is that neither he nor his illustrious colleagues associated with the CSIS Commission Report show any interest in opinions inaccessible either from the Beltway or the banks of the River Charles.<sup>71</sup> Such, of course, is the way with fading empires.



## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Joseph Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Basic Books, 2004), xiii
- <sup>2</sup> CSIS Commission on Smart Power. *A Smarter, More Secure America* (Washington DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2007), p.4
- <sup>3</sup> Joseph Nye, *The Paradox of American Power: Why the World's Only Superpower Can't Go It Alone* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), xiv; *Soft Power*, p.111, 125
- <sup>4</sup> Joseph Nye, 'Recovering American Leadership', *Survival*, 50, 1 (2008), p.64
- <sup>5</sup> For such commentary, see in particular Thomas L. Friedman, 'Imbalances of power', *New York Times*, 21 May 2008; Robert Hormats and Jim O'Neill, 'A new world for America's next president', *Financial Times*, 27 June 2008; Philip Stephens, 'Last chance for the US to shape the new global order', *Financial Times*, 4 April 2008, 'Uncomfortable truths for a new world of them and us', *Financial Times*, 30 May, 2008, and 'A new president and a wake-up call', *Financial Times*, 12 September 2008; and Fareed Zakaria, 'Playboy Interview', *Playboy*, May 2008. For sharply contrasting views on the issue of American leadership, see Timothy J. Lynch and Robert S. Singh, *After Bush: the Case for Continuity in American Foreign Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Simon Bromley, *American Power and the Prospects for International Order* (Cambridge: Polity, 2008); and Fareed Zakaria, *The Post-American World* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2008).
- <sup>6</sup> The reference is to Zakaria, *Post-American World*, ft. 5
- <sup>7</sup> *Soft Power*, 4. See also *The Paradox of American Power*, 39. Joseph Nye, *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power*, paperback edition (New York: Basic Books, 1991), p.181–2, offered a similar but less developed version in which the game was poker rather than chess.
- <sup>8</sup> Nye, *Soft Power*, p.4
- <sup>9</sup> E.H. Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), p.120. Nye (*Soft Power*, p. 8) refers to the 1964 edition published in New York by Harper & Rowe.
- <sup>10</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>11</sup> Joseph Nye, 'Toward a Liberal Realist Foreign Policy: a memo for the next president', *Harvard Magazine* p.110, 4 (2008)
- <sup>12</sup> See Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye, *Power and Interdependence: World Politics in Transition* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1977)
- <sup>13</sup> Nye, *Bound to Lead*, p.107; see also pp.182–8
- <sup>14</sup> Ibid, p.170; and see *Paradox of American Power*, pp.17–35; *Soft Power*, Ch. 3; 'Recovering American Leadership', p.56–7
- <sup>15</sup> Nye, 'Recovering American Leadership', p.62
- <sup>16</sup> Keohane and Nye, *Power and Interdependence*, pp.232–4, esp. 233: "More powerful states, such as the United States, will have a greater effect on more issues; but for symbolic as well as substantive reasons, several states will need to take leadership roles".
- <sup>17</sup> Joseph Nye, 'Preface', *Bound to Lead*, xviii
- <sup>18</sup> Joseph Nye, "Preface to the Paperback Edition", *Bound to Lead*, xv
- <sup>19</sup> "Absence of leadership by the largest country would reduce the ability of all states to deal with... problems of interdependence": *Bound to Lead*, p.239
- <sup>20</sup> *Paradox of American Power*, xiv
- <sup>21</sup> 'Recovering American Leadership', p.61
- <sup>22</sup> *Bound to Lead*, p.238
- <sup>23</sup> This formulation is from 'Recovering American Leadership', 63. See also *The Paradox of American Power*, p.142
- <sup>24</sup> CSIS, *A Smarter, More Secure America*, p.13
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid, p.1

- <sup>26</sup> Ibid, p.5
- <sup>27</sup> Ibid, pp.29–30
- <sup>28</sup> Ibid, p.43
- <sup>29</sup> Ibid, p.47
- <sup>30</sup> Ibid, pp.53–4
- <sup>31</sup> Ibid, p.58–9
- <sup>32</sup> ‘Recovering American Leadership’, pp.64–6
- <sup>33</sup> ‘Toward a Liberal Realist Foreign Policy’, p.38; as will be apparent, Nye draws heavily here on earlier work, and in particular on *The Paradox of American Power*, Ch. 5
- <sup>34</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>35</sup> *A Smarter, More Secure America*, pp.7–9, 19
- <sup>36</sup> Ibid, pp.17–19
- <sup>37</sup> Ibid, p.20
- <sup>38</sup> Ibid, pp.21–25
- <sup>39</sup> Ibid, p.9, 47
- <sup>40</sup> Ibid, pp.33–4
- <sup>41</sup> Ibid, p.61
- <sup>42</sup> ‘Recovering American Leadership’, p.63, 65
- <sup>43</sup> *A Smarter, More Secure America*, pp.62–5
- <sup>44</sup> Ibid, p.65
- <sup>45</sup> Ibid, pp.66–8
- <sup>46</sup> Ibid, p.34, 43, 52, 56, 59
- <sup>47</sup> Ibid, p.35, 44, 46, 56, 59
- <sup>48</sup> ‘Recovering American Leadership’, p.67
- <sup>49</sup> ‘Toward a Liberal Realist Foreign Policy’, p.36
- <sup>50</sup> *Bound to Lead*, p.222
- <sup>51</sup> Ibid, p.219, 227
- <sup>52</sup> *Bound to Lead*, xv
- <sup>53</sup> Ibid, p.20
- <sup>54</sup> Ibid, p.199
- <sup>55</sup> Ibid, p.200
- <sup>56</sup> Ibid, p.203
- <sup>57</sup> Ibid, p.218
- <sup>58</sup> OECD, *OECD Economic Surveys: United States* (Paris: OECD, 2007), p.8
- <sup>59</sup> *A Smarter, More Secure America*, 14; Council on Competitiveness, *Thrive: the Skills Imperative* (Washington DC: Council on Competitiveness, 2008)
- <sup>60</sup> ‘Recovering American Leadership’, p.60
- <sup>61</sup> *Soft Power*, p.40, 56
- <sup>62</sup> Andrew Kohut and Richard Wike, ‘All the World’s a Stage’, *National Interest online*, 6 May 2008, n.p.
- <sup>63</sup> Paul Cammack, ‘The Politics of Global Competitiveness’, *Papers in the Politics of Global Competitiveness*, No. 1, Institute for Global Studies, Manchester Metropolitan University, e-space Open Access Repository, 2006
- <sup>64</sup> Larry Summers, ‘America needs to make a new case for trade’, *Financial Times*, 27 April 2008
- <sup>65</sup> Larry Summers, ‘A Strategy to Promote Healthy Globalisation’, *Financial Times*, 5 May 2008
- <sup>66</sup> Philip Stephens, ‘Uncomfortable truths for a new world of them and us’, *Financial Times*, 30 May 2008
- <sup>67</sup> Keohane and Nye, *Power and Interdependence*, p.233

<sup>68</sup> *Bound to Rule*, p.175

<sup>69</sup> cf. *Soft Power*, p.11

<sup>70</sup> Zakariah, 'Playboy Interview', p.52

<sup>71</sup> It is symptomatic of this that the CSIS Report "sent a commissioner and staff around the United States to engage in a listening tour with the American people", but relied on CSIS scholars to assess the views of the rest of the world (*A Smarter, More Secure America*, p.13, 20 et seq.). As for Nye himself, he barely draws for support in *Soft Power* on the opinions of citizens of countries other than America, and when he does—as with Josef Joffe, Paul Kelly, Hisashi Owada, Jehangir Pocha, and Koh Buck Song—it turns out that they have an intimate connection either with Harvard, or the CSIS, or both.

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