

## THE UNITED STATES CAN'T GO IT ALONE

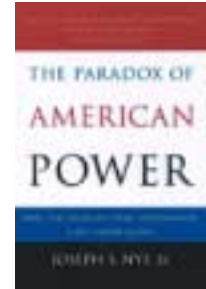
A Review of "The Paradox of American Power" by Joseph S. Nye, Jr.

by

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One of the more prescient thinkers on the role of the United States in a changing world is Joseph Nye, a former intelligence council chairman, assistant secretary of defense and now Dean of Harvard's Kennedy School of Government. Back in the days when people were worrying about that the United States was in terminal decline, bound to lose to the Japanese, Nye wrote a book called "Bound to Lead," which argued the opposite. He was soon proved right.

Nye articulated the concept of "soft power," arguing that America's real strength lay not only in military prowess but in the attractions of its open society, its universities, its popular culture, and economic opportunities that had become a world magnet.

Then, at century's end, when the United States had reached a zenith of power and authority, Nye started a new book to warn against hubris and unilateralism - the soon-to-be-published "The Paradox of American Power : Why the World's Only Superpower Can't Go It Alone." Before the book was finished the events of Sept. 11 came along and underscored his thesis.

As the 21st century dawned, Americans had forgotten their fears of being overtaken by the Far East and instead had become "arrogant about our power, arguing that we did not need to heed other nations," according to Nye. "We seemed both invincible and invulnerable." Then came September to put paid to all that.

To some, the very freedoms that make up our soft power are "repulsive," particularly to fundamentalists. But "hard nuggets of hate are unlikely to catalyze broader hatred unless we abandon our values and pursue arrogant and overbearing policies that let the extremists appeal to the majority in the middle," Nye argues.

There are world problems that simply cannot be tackled by one country alone, no matter how powerful: financial instability, climate change, drugs, infectious diseases, and terrorism. If the United States is bound to lead, it is also bound to cooperate, Nye writes. With the end of the Cold War America went too quickly from declinism to triumphalism. All the trends of globalization and the information age favor the growing soft power of the United States, "but only if we avoid stepping on our own message."

Nye writes that "isolationists who think we can avoid vulnerability to terrorism by drawing inward fail to understand the realities of a global information age." As for going it alone, unilateralism is not a viable option; it risks undermining our soft power and invites coalitions to form against us, which would eventually limit our hard power.

When Condoleezza Rice, now national security adviser, was on the campaign trail for George W. Bush, she said that the United States should "proceed from the firm ground of national interest and not from the interest of an illusory international community." Nye argues that the interests of the international community are not illusory, that they are part and parcel of our national interests, which cannot be achieved without help from other nations.

This is not a new debate in American history. President Woodrow Wilson's hopes for the United States to join the League of Nations after World War I were dashed by Senator Henry Cabot Lodge of Massachusetts, who was not an isolationist but a dedicated unilateralist who didn't want American foreign policy and power to be fettered by foreigners.

Nye does not argue that this country should not strike out on its own from time to time. Our interests may not always coincide with the aims of others. The international pressure to ban land mines, for example, ignored the very real need of the United States to be able to defend South Korea from a northern attack across the 17th parallel. If proposals for an International Criminal Court "cannot protect US troops from unjustified charges of war crimes, they might deter the United States from contributing to the public good of peacekeeping," Nye writes. But in areas where we can cooperate with the community of nations we should.

Sept. 11 has changed some of the unilateralist perceptions the current Bush administration held when it first came to power, but the need for allies to combat terror should be broadened to accept the principle that there is no going it alone in a globalized world.

Nye agrees with Henry Kissinger's dictum that the "test of history for the United States will be whether we can turn our current predominant power into international consensus and our own principles into widely accepted international norms." That was the greatness achieved by Rome in ancient times and by 19th century Britain when it stood alone at the head of the table in terms of world power.

*H.D.S. Greenway's column appears regularly in The Boston Globe.*