

Open Doors, Open Questions

by William R. Hawkins

Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power

by Joseph S. Nye, Jr.
New York: Basic Books;
307 pp., \$19.95

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“Many believe that the country is overextended and should reduce its external commitments. But in a world of growing interdependence among nations, this advice is the wrong answer, and U.S. decline is the wrong question.” So Joseph Nye begins his rebuttal of those doomsayers who have welcomed proclamations of America’s decline. If the nation’s loss of power and economic advantage can be accepted as inevitable or natural, the result of a process beyond control and already irreversible, then its leaders have no choice but to follow the policies of retreat, disarmament, and isolationism. But Nye, the Ford Foundation professor of international security at Harvard, rejects this conclusion and presents a strong case why, by the traditional accounting of “power resources,” the United States remains the dominant power on the planet, with no close challengers.

Nye disputes the comparison, made popular by Paul Kennedy, of the U.S. with Edwardian England. Though it ruled a quarter of the globe, England did not have a position as inherently strong as the United States enjoys as a unified continental power. The notion of a *Pax Britannica* is in Nye’s view a myth, particularly in regard to the establishment of a global economic order through supposed liberal policies of “free trade”: “British gunboats occasionally forced poor countries in what would today be termed the Third World to open their ports to trade. But there is a significant difference between coercing distant, less-developed countries and winning the adherence of major European rivals.” The United States, Germany, and Russia all built their economies outside of this liberal system, as indeed England had originally gained its economic advantage under strongly mercantilist precepts. Nye, however, underestimates England’s economic strength in the first

half of the 19th century by using GNP as the primary measurement. By this unrefined standard Nye has China outranking England until 1880, yet it was England that was carving China into spheres of influence well before this.

Nye does see one disturbing similarity between London then and Washington now:

So why did Britain decide it could not afford to maintain naval supremacy or an adequate continental expeditionary force? In large part, it was because the adherents of the prevailing economic orthodoxy believed in the negative effects of government spending and they particularly opposed raising income taxes. Here the analogy to modern American politics is striking. The popular belief that Britain was suffering from imperial overstretch . . . caused it not to invest as well as it might have in the domestic and external power resources that could have slowed its decline.

Nye particularly blames British conservatives for adopting these views, though they “disguised that fact by keeping the same slogans” about imperial strength while practicing appeasement. The parallel acquires added meaning given the massive defense cuts proposed by the Bush administration — totaling more than \$160 billion by 1994. Entire divisions, air wings, and carrier groups are to be deactivated. With the door to disarmament thus opened, it is no surprise that Congress has walked through with an additional \$100 billion in cuts. For all this, three justifications are commonly made: 1) the U.S. cannot afford present force levels given the budget deficit; 2) military spending makes the country less competitive economically; and 3) military force has lost its value in world politics. Nye offers strong rebuttals to all three of them.

The United States is spending less of its GNP, and of the federal budget, on defense now than thirty years ago, and far less than major powers have spent in the past; its debt, moreover, is not so heavy relative to the underlying economy as to warrant a dangerous weakening of national security. Nye argues: “Few careful and balanced economic studies show conclusively that defense

Some of the articles are straightforward and without bias. Richard A. Wehmhoefer does an excellent job of explaining water law in the Southwest and giving the historical precedent for it, as does Albert E. Utton in his study of Mexican-American water relations. Other articles, as one would expect in a book largely written by professors of political science and public administration, are heavily slanted in favor of increased federal bureaucratic management and yet more congressional oversight. Almost all the writers end their chapters with a list of “suggestions” requiring greater government intervention in one form or another. Several of the authors seem to favor a gigantic and expensive federal program of water transfer from as far away as Arkansas and East Texas to the Great Plains of western Oklahoma and the Panhandle of Texas, regardless of the cost, while yet other contributors believe the ultimate solution to Southwestern water problems will be in the courts, with arbitrary division of available water.

This volume has some value. It provides an interesting overview and an introduction to an extremely complicated subject, and it is worthy of attention. I would compliment the 17 contributors for their avoidance of shrill environmentalism, but simultaneously I would urge some special penance be devised for a university press that allows a study such as this to appear without an index.

Smith’s book is volume three in the University of New Mexico’s Public Policy Series. The editor of this series is Fred Harris, once a semi-serious contender for the Democratic nomination for President and a former senator from Oklahoma. I suggest that Harris probably had not read all these papers when he wrote in his foreword that a primary



goal of the series is to reach not only scholars, students, and policymakers, but also the general public. Despite the subject matter, this volume is dry reading, and few of the general public will try to plow through it.

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spending had a significant negative net impact on the economy." Those who cite only Japan as an example of a country exhibiting lower defense spending with higher economic growth as compared to the United States overlook the counterexamples of South Korea (higher defense spending, higher growth) and Western Europe (lower defense spending, lower growth). What is more, "the reduced role of ideology [in the world] does not mean the end of great power politics, nor does it allow states to be indifferent to the military balance of power."

The United States enjoys strong positions across the board, whereas its rivals are afflicted by areas of weakness. The Soviets suffer from a disastrous economy, restive minorities, and a discredited ideology. Western Europe lacks political cohesion and is burdened by expensive welfare systems. Japan lacks natural resources, has no military power, and is overly dependent on trade for its economic health. Rivals can mount challenges in selected areas, but if the United States plays to its strengths, it can prevail. The key word in that sentence is "if."

"America is rich but acts poor," says Nye. American politics "stresses the optimism and innocence of an isolated liberal culture which successively encounters and withdraws from a harsh outside reality," while its government is hobbled by "the eighteenth century liberal view that power is best controlled not by centralization and socialization but by fragmentation." America has long been ineffective in converting its assets into power. Nye believes the *Pax Americana* to have been a myth, citing Herbert Tilema's list of 149 incidents between 1945 and 1972 that might have reasonably provoked U.S. intervention but didn't; they run from such major events as the fall of China and Cuba to violence in Cyprus and the Congo. Ninety-six of them involved communist activity. And in those instances when the United States did intervene, it often failed, as in Vietnam. Washington, Nye concludes, did not win the Cold War in the field; Moscow lost it at home.

In the future, events will be more difficult to manage. Transnational issues (ecology, drugs, terrorism) will require more cunning diplomacy and a more deft manipulation of internation-

al organizations (or their replacement, if they are controlled by hostile forces). Economic leverage will be more important, Nye says; and here he is being contradictory. He supports in principle "an open international economy" but his practical examples support neomercantilist policies to maintain America's share of world production, to advance technology, and to avoid becoming vulnerable to trade and financial shocks.

The title of Nye's book is seen finally to be overly optimistic. America *can* lead, and for the sake of world order as well as its own survival it *must* lead; but it remains an open political question whether it is "bound to lead."

William R. Hawkins writes from Knoxville, Tennessee.

Executive Popycock by Michael Lind

Ethics, Politics, and the Independent Counsel: Executive Power, Executive Vice 1789-1989

by Terry Eastland
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187 pp., \$10.95

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Terry Eastland, formerly of the Reagan Justice Department, has written a learned book explaining that, according to the Constitution, embarrassing crimes in an administration can only be investigated by prosecutors on a leash held by the President whom those crimes embarrass. Eastland's target is Title VI of the Ethics in Government Act of 1978, which provides for court-appointed independent counsels (special prosecutors) to investigate allegations of wrongdoing by high-ranking executive officers. In the eleven years since the act was passed, there have been at least nine investigations, including those of former Attorney General Edwin Meese III, Lieutenant Colonel Oliver North, and former National Security Advisor John Poindexter. The statute, which limits the power of the attorney general to remove an independent counsel, originated after the "Saturday Night Massacre" of 1973, when

Solicitor General and Acting Attorney General Robert Bork fired Watergate special prosecutor Archibald Cox, who had presumed to request Nixon's White House tapes. (Bork's superiors, Attorney General Elliot Richardson and Deputy Attorney General William Ruckelshaus, had resigned rather than aid Nixon in suppressing the investigation by firing Cox.)

The independent counsel law applies only to members of the executive branch. Eastland sensibly suggests that it be amended, so that independent counsels can investigate wrongdoing in Congress and the judiciary as well. Eastland argues, with some justification, that liberal Democrats in Congress have used the independent counsel law to harass executive officers of whose policies they disapprove.

Eastland's other practical arguments against the statute are less persuasive. Since 1979, the total cost of all independent counsel investigations has been only \$20 million. In the past several years alone the Reagan and Bush administrations have reportedly spent \$40 million to catch D.C. Mayor Marion Barry smoking crack with his girlfriend, a police stooge. While the Reagan administration burned mountains of tax dollars to catch Barry, "Silent Sam" Pierce, the former secretary of HUD, reportedly gave away up to \$8 billion worth of contracts and other favors to Republican contractors and allies. The Pierce scandal makes any suggestion that an administration can be counted on to police its own look rather dubious.

Eastland also attacks independent counsels because, after lengthy initial investigations, they sometimes decide not to press charges. "Expect as a result of an investigation—even one that does not result in indictment—some damage to your reputation, more than would have occurred under normal circumstances." Therefore there should be no independent counsels. Because innocent people are sometimes falsely suspected, should no one be prosecuted for murder? "Ordinary citizens do not experience this kind of investigation." Eastland does not believe that high-ranking executive branch officials should be held to higher standards than the taxpayers who pay their salaries. It is difficult for Americans outside of the Beltway,