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Recalling Joseph Nye's Reflections on Public Diplomacy, Space Exploration and AI

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In a 2021 interview, Professor Joseph Nye, who passed away last month, generously shared his thoughts on disinformation, soft and smart power in the 21st century, space exploration, and artificial intelligence. His observations remain as timely now as they did then. Below is adapted from an article published by [Marinho Media Analysis](#), October 26, 2021

Public diplomacy and disinformation

The topic of disinformation is on the international agenda. In the field of international relations, sometimes it's hard to make out shadows, appearances, diversions, simulations and disinformation from what truly matters. In this regard, Joseph Nye has vast experience.

Nye, a world-renowned authority on international relations, coined the term soft power in the late 1980s and introduced the concept of smart power in 2003. He also served distinguished roles in the U.S. government, including as Deputy to the Under Secretary of State for Security Assistance, Science and Technology; Chair of the National Security Council Group on Nonproliferation of Nuclear Weapons; Chair of the National Intelligence Council; and Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs.

Nye, in an interview, pointed out that good analysts in the disinformation field should place themselves in the mind of someone from a foreign nation. Given that we see the world through our own cultural lenses, Nye adds that it is essential to travel, read, and learn foreign languages in order to gain a cultural understanding on the international stage. Analysts should be multidimensional and should have comprehensive training, even if it is compatible with some degree of specialization, said Nye.

The relative ease with which messages are currently sent and received over the Internet boosts the number of players in the field of local, national and international communication. Presently, disinformation and so-called "fake news" is often attributed to private players via social media.

We asked Professor Nye what he thinks of deliberate disinformation or misleading information by federal authorities or covert state-sponsored organizations disseminated through the mainstream media and social media. With regard to the 2016 US election, said Nye, two situations occurred: the Russian Government disseminated disinformation over the Internet while prodding U.S. groups to get involved in the conflict.

As for relations between intelligence services and public diplomacy, Nye maintained that it's better to keep both domains separate. He explained that, if it is perceived that said type of diplomacy is linked to intelligence operations, there is a loss of credibility that renders it

impossible to generate soft power. This is why, according to Nye, there should also be a separation between public diplomacy and covert psychological warfare.

Soft and Smart Power

Public diplomacy is not used solely by civilians. According to Nye, when, in the military sphere, in strategic and tactical terms, hard and soft power are combined, while mutually reinforcing each other, we then have smart power, which enables saving in terms of carrots and sticks while turning attraction into a multiplying force.

As for the possibility of public diplomacy serving to neutralize duly identified potential threats, Nye acknowledged that attracting other people can be an important means of reducing their hostilities and threats. However, he also stressed that proper public diplomacy includes knowing that the attracting ability varies with the target culture.

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With regard to the importance of storytelling in public diplomacy, Nye asserted that human beings live by narratives. By taking this into account, said Nye, success in international politics does not depend solely on knowing which are the victorious armies, but also which are the stories that prevail. Persuasive competence is crucial, said Nye. This includes bringing together know-how from professionals in several areas: screenwriters, advertisers and Public Relations practitioners, for example. These communications professionals need to know and do their work according to the dual dimension of human being and receiver; as well as rational and emotional. Effectiveness and efficiency require a deeply in-depth knowledge of a target public. To this end, gathering and processing information are essential.

Obviously, it is necessary to have the ability not only to create the narratives, but also to accurately get them to the target public using the appropriate channel. A large number of people concentrated in a country or scattered among several continents can be aimed for, just as a single individual can be reached. The media can be used by a variety of entities, so that, externally, a country exercises attraction while projecting its influence. This somehow depends on the contexts for receiving the messages: receivers can either be in a situation where they receive content freely or there can be restrictions, as is the case with censorship or cyber-warfare.

Space exploration

The ability to communicate at an international level is linked to infrastructures such as satellites. To this end (among others), the Space Force exists within the U.S. military context. According to Joseph Nye, space can be used for many things, including the field of

communications, in the form of satellites. Undersea cables also enable the internet. Transatlantic links are therefore geostrategically important for air and sea surveillance, including submarines. They concern various individual countries and, collectively, NATO. Protecting information, in general, both via undersea cables and through satellites, also goes by way of encryption.

Nye argued that the growing reputation of a country's competence related to space exploration and space tourism can contribute toward developing soft power. For such purpose, we need to pay attention to dissemination, throughout the media, of space conquests and their link to space economy. Nye pointed out that public diplomacy, by increasing a country's attractiveness, can be the driving force for trade and investment. Leading and being at the forefront on the international stage, said Nye, requires being able to create and innovate in the technological sphere, including space technology.

Artificial Intelligence

Machines, such as computers and Artificial Intelligence (A.I.) are increasingly present in various domains in our society. A.I. has repercussions in terms of decision-making by various organizations, including governments.

Nye feels that, depending on a certain computer programming, A.I. can enable the user to look into a foreign audience's perspective. He added that it is also necessary for A.I. to have a human interpreter, especially when emotions and creativity are involved. To this end, Nye stressed that an algorithm badly assembled can lead to bias in machine learning. In the future, said Nye, human resources training and management will continue to be decisive for the progress of society, by creating and deploying opportunities for humans to advance alongside AI.

Can AI someday change the international geopolitical balance, such as in Sino-American relations? Nye pointed to those in China who believe their nation will prevail because it will have more data. However, Nye argued that data is not the same as oil; we need to differentiate the value of data according to its origins, which is why, both quality and quantity need to be considered.
