

# **IS THE AMERICAN CENTURY OVER?**

**JOSEPH S. NYE, JR.**

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“The future of American power is the great question of our century. No one is better equipped than Joe Nye to answer it.”

**Lt. Gen. Brent Scowcroft, USAF (ret.) former Presidential National Security Advisor**

“This calm, reflective, and thoughtful antidote to alarm about American decline displays Nye’s astonishing capacity to engage with the full range of challenges to American leadership.”

**Michael Ignatieff, Harvard Kennedy School**

“In this timely, compact book, Joe Nye makes a ‘powerful’ case for the continuation of American primacy through diplomacy and cooperation. This strategy would not be overstretch or retrenchment but instead the application of American exceptionalism to shrewd power.”

**Robert B. Zoellick, former President of the World Bank Group, US Trade Representative, and US Deputy Secretary of State**

“The irreversibility of American decline is no longer a given. Joe Nye’s compelling analysis shows that the future of the international order, and the respective roles of the US and China within it, will be shaped by a range of core domestic and foreign policy choices, rather than by some overwhelming, determinist, historical force that has somehow already decided the ‘natural’ dimensions, depth, and duration of American power. The history of nations, as Joe Nye rightly asserts, is a more dynamic process than that.”

**Kevin Rudd, former Prime Minister of Australia**

“Joe Nye is always worth reading – objective without being aloof, insightful without lecturing. Our disordered world needs answers to the challenges posed here.”

**David Miliband, UK Foreign Secretary 2007-10**

“Nye’s masterful analysis shows the defenders of America’s continued primacy how to make their most credible case while forcing the declinists to engage with its arguments, and even rethink their assumptions.”

**Amitav Acharya, American University, and author of *The End of American World Order***

“In this tour de force, Joe Nye proves that smart books about big ideas are best served in small packages: and if you are looking for one volume to read on a topic about which so much nonsense has been written since the disaster that was the Bush administration, this is the one to go for. Balanced, accessible, informed – but above all, wise – Nye demonstrates once more why he continues to influence the way we all think about the world.”

**Michael Cox, LSE IDEAS**

“Joe Nye’s clear-eyed analysis makes a very compelling case that the ‘American century’ is far from over, even though, with a less preponderant America and a more complex world, its next chapter will look different. It’s not the sexiest argument. But utterly convincing.”

**Wolfgang Ischinger, Chairman of the Munich Security Conference and former German Ambassador to the US**

“With his usual clarity and insight, Joe Nye gives us a fascinating analysis of the complexities of power, exploring hard and soft power, state and non-state actors, and how to retain leadership once domination is

over. European readers have much to learn from the US experience and its lessons for the evolution of the EU.”

**Mario Monti, Prime Minister of Italy (2011-13) and President of Bocconi University**

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Joseph S. Nye Jr.

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No author is an island. I have had the benefit of learning from many people as I have lived through the American century. To them all, I am grateful.

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## **The Creation of the American Century**

Is the American century over? Many seem to think so. In recent years, polls showed that in 15 of 22 countries surveyed, most respondents said that China either will replace or has already replaced the United States as the world's leading power. A Pew poll in 2014 found only 28 percent of Americans thought their country "stands above all others" compared to 38 percent in 2011. Yet perhaps, as Mark Twain famously quipped, "reports of my death have been greatly exaggerated."

After American independence in the eighteenth century, the British politician Horace Walpole lamented that Britain had been reduced to the level of Sardinia. In fact, Britain was about to be transformed by the industrial revolution that created its second century as a global power. In the mid-1980s, an MIT economist asked why, if the British empire had lasted two centuries, "are we slipping after about 50 years?"<sup>1</sup> On the eve of the collapse of the Soviet Union that left the United States as the world's only superpower, best-selling books compared the US situation to the decline of Phillip II's Spain. And after the United States became the sole superpower in a unipolar world, a leading political scientist predicted it would quickly come to an end.<sup>2</sup> With such cautionary examples, we need to keep humility in mind as we try to answer the question in our title.

### ***When did the century start?***

First, we need to be clear about what we mean by "the American century." When did it start? One possible date would be the end of the nineteenth century when the