

Power and interdependence in the information a media essay



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Introduction:

In the article “ Power and Interdependence in the Information Age”, Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, Jr. 1 focused on the idea of “ complex interdependence” 2 in international system – this concept is characterized by an increase in interconnections and the decline of military forces in order to achieve cooperation between states and various actors.

This article aimed to provide further evidence to what extent is the international politics transformed by interdependence in modern global environment. It also highlights that the contemporary globalized world is significantly driven by information technology and the Internet, because ‘ soft power’3 is becoming more utile for states and non-state actors. Keohane and Nye’s approaches to the Information Age and to faces of power are bound up with neoliberal theories so the principal focus is the neo-liberal institutionalism.

1 Robert O. Keohane is a professor of International Affairs at Princeton University and a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the American Philosophical Society, and the National Academy of Sciences. (Princeton University, 2008)

Joseph Nye Jr. is current dean of the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University and former Under-Secretary of State. (Harvard Kennedy School, 2009)

2 Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, Jr. define complex interdependence as a state of affairs where institutions and “ interstate reliance” play an

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important role such that it transforms “ the nature of the relationships between states and possible strategies that choose to pursue”. (Future of European Foreign Policy Seminar, 2007, p. 2)

3 Soft power is the capability to achieve required goals because others agree with what one wants. It grounds “ largely on the persuasiveness of the free information that an actor seeks to transmit...information technology, broadly defined, is likely to be the most important power resource”. (Keohane & Nye, 1998, p. 86-7)

Summary:

Over the 20th century, modernists pronounced that the technological progress will lead to transformation of world politics where states and their control of force will dwindle in importance but non-state actors will experience boom. Whereas futurists assume that the information revolution results in a “ cyber-feudalism” where the government is replaced by communities aspiring to achieve citizens’ allegiance. States are more tenacious and continue to control people’s loyalties and frame politics in an information age, but they tend to be far more credible to a public.

Critique:

First of all, Keohane and Nye assert that “ earlier transnational flows were heavily controlled by large bureaucracies like multinational corporations and institutions”. 4 However, in these days, there is practically no institutionalized control over the free dissemination of information – the power is widely spread to individuals and private organizations (NGOs) who undermine the “ monopoly of traditional bureaucracy” 5, and governments

possess less control of their agendas. 6 Therefore the easy availability of technology and the Internet plays a key role in the decline of initial need for official institutions in the Information Age.

Secondly, the main weakness of the article is the assumption that the information technologies are mainly located in the West. This seems to be irrelevant nowadays because the article was written ten years ago and from that time very significant shift in technological development has taken place throughout the world. For example in 2008 China said “ the number of Internet users in the country reached about 338 million... helping China overtakes the United States as the world’s biggest Internet market [253 million]”. 7 (China Today, 2009) Both authors primarily concentrated on the future progress of Western countries and underrated the emerging powers, such as China and India. 8

Furthermore, Keohane and Nye assumed that “ the dominant American market share in → film and television programs in world markets is... to continue” 9 but this prediction proved to be inaccurate.

4 Keohane, Robert and Joseph Nye (1998), ‘ Power and Interdependence in the Information Age’, Foreign Affairs, Vol. 77, Issue 5: pp. 83.

5 Nye S. Joseph (2002), ‘ The Information Revolution and American Soft Power’, Asia-Pacific Review, Vol. 9, Issue 1: pp. 61.

6 It is essential to realize that the persuasion and influence increases as more channels of contact between societies and organizations are created and states have to recognize other key actors in world politics.

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7 China Today, 1/06/2009, ' China Statistics.' <http://www.chinatoday.com/data/data.htm>, accessed 9 November 2010.

8 “ China’s biggest Internet companies, including Baidu, Sina, Tencent and Alibaba, are thriving, and in many cases are outperforming the China-based operations of American Internet giants like Google, Yahoo and eBay”. (Barboza in New York Times, July 26 2008)

According to Screen Digest research, “ in 2005, India produced 1, 041 feature films, compared to 699 films made in USA”. 10 These figures clearly indicate that other nations have increased their competitive ability and surpassed Hollywood. Apparently, the evolution of West modernity seems to be superseded by more rapacious East Asia. 11

Lastly, according to Keohane and Nye democratic states are more likely to “ familiar with the free exchange of information” 12 because they are able to form information and use “ soft power”. 13 The article emphasizes the necessity of ideology, context, credibility and transparency in democracy to form a truth and relevant information. However some scholars argue that democracy as well as totalitarianism could not be possible “ without the mass communications”. 14 Unlike democratic states, totalitarian states repress competitive sources of information and are not reliable and transparent enough. But authors ignored that the sovereignty of democracies is influenced by free information flow because the decision-making of political leaders may be affected by other actors.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, it has to be admitted that the article is quite critical towards political realism and focuses mainly on the development and progression of Western world in the Information Age. Further studies and theories must be taken into account to present a current situation and improve our understanding concerning the “ complex interdependence” as well as neo-liberalism in the Informative Revolution. Despite obsolete presumptions, the article has provided some detailed insights to demonstrate the values of power and the importance of interdependence in the Information Age.

9 Keohane, Robert and Joseph Nye (1998), ‘ Power and Interdependence in the Information Age’, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 77, Issue 5: pp. 88.

10 Screen Digest, June 2006, ‘ World Film Production/ Distribution’: <http://www.fifo.at/download/WorldFilmProduction06.pdf>, accessed 9 November 2010.

Most prolific feature film producing nations in 2005: China – 260 films; Brazil – 90 films; Russian

Federation – 160 films; Latin America – 275 films. (Screen Digest, June 2006, p. 206)

11 Despite the fact that China “ still controls the access to the Internet and monitor a certain number of users” (Keohane and Nye, 1998, p. 93), it has maintained a dominant position in the Information Age.

12 Keohane, Robert and Joseph Nye (1998), ' Power and Interdependence in the Information Age', Foreign Affairs, Vol. 77, Issue 5: pp. 93.

13 The Iraq invasion of Kuwait in 1990 serves as an example of American ' soft power' in action " when Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990, the fact that CNN was an American company helped to frame the issue, worldwide, as aggression. Had an Arab company been the world's dominant TV channel, perhaps the issue would have been framed as a justified attempt to reverse colonial humiliation". (Keohane and Nye, 1998, p. 91) This case shows that CNN acted its role of reliable source of information very skillfully; it gained a respected international reputation due to its credibility and professionalism to " frame the issue". (Keohane and Nye, 1998, p. 91)

14 Nye S. Joseph (2002), ' The Information Revolution and American Soft Power', Asia-Pacific Review, Vol. 9, Issue 1: pp. 61.