

## **“Thailand and New Zealand in a new era of partnership: the smart power approach”**

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### ***What is power?***

Professor Joseph Nye of Harvard University has explored aspects of power and its usage in the context of international relations in his various books, including: *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* (1990), *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (2004) and his latest *The Future of Power* (2011).

Basically ‘power’ is defined as the ability to attain goals. ‘Power’ is also essentially interchangeable with ‘influence.’ But in practical international relations situations the important question concerns the method used to attain the goals that are sought after.

Hard power involves compulsion, the use force or the threat of force against an adversary to overcome resistance. Hard power is generally confrontational, macho, absolute and zero sum. It is the ability of a nation to dictate, using economic and military means; to force another nation to perform the desired course of action. It is most commonly used by larger nations with considerable economic, financial and military resources.

Soft power, in contrast, involves attracting a partner through dialogue or exchange, developing mutual understanding and seeking commonalities, persuasion, subtlety, confidence, trust and respect; and a win-win outcome. Soft power therefore, involves various means to avoid resistance, to find a way around the points of difference. It is often indirect; involving various quite legitimate means to persuade, set agendas and structure situations, so as to attract others to follow a desired course of action, rather than by either forcing or paying others to follow that course.

On the scene of current world events, some recent commentators characterize America as a super-power in decline: it faces serious economic difficulties, over-extended military capabilities, almost to the point of exhaustion; and on the other hand, is up against the rise of other powers, usually characterized as rivals, sometimes economically and sometimes militarily, depending upon who may be speaking.

Nye, on the other hand, sees not a multi-polar world, but a world in which power is becoming chaotically distributed. There is an historic re-balancing of world economic growth (particularly towards Asia), alongside the diffusion of economic power into the hands of non-state actors. Therefore, Nye sees the United States as still

replete with hard power and still a leader among nations, but needing to adjust to these new realities by employing smarter methods of using power.

Nye calls this '*smart power*' – which is essentially the strategic integration of both hard and soft power methods, in different mixes and combinations. It's not that soft power approaches haven't been utilized before, but in today's circumstances newer and smarter combinations of methods and approaches are required.

This train of thought has been picked up by both President Obama and Secretary of State Hilary Clinton. Obama has stated that America needs to learn to apply its leadership role more through 'moral example' than military might. In his inauguration address he said, "...our power grows through its prudent use; our security emanates from the justness of our cause, the force of our example, the tempering qualities of humility and restraint." And from Secretary Clinton: "America cannot solve the most pressing problems on our own, and the world cannot solve them without America. We must use what has been called '*smart power*,' the full range of tools at our disposal."

Thus, '*smart power*' is characterized as the right combination and admixture of approaches, including suitable components of the hard and soft power approaches of the past, integrated together in such a way that goals can be attained with greater assurance and with greater sustainability. It is often indirect, and definitely co-optive and non-coercive. It makes use of diplomacy, persuasion, empathy, respect for cultural norms and religious sensibilities, building bridges, building confidence and trust, and providing support through research and analysis, - as well as possible limited use of military actions, sanctions, embargoes, suspension of privileges, and other such 'hard power' approaches. Therefore, 'smart power' involves not only avoiding resistance, as in side-stepping it - so that it remains in existence, to become a problem again later on - but positively eliminating those causes of resistance, and thereby achieving goals on a sustainable basis.

### ***Thailand – New Zealand relations***

Thailand and New Zealand established diplomatic relations in 1956. At that time they were both members of the SEATO alliance, and the bilateral relationship was largely focused on security concerns. However, over the years the relationship has increasingly broadened and deepened to encompass many other areas of cooperation.

The Colombo Plan, through the 1960s – 90s, brought many Thai (and other Asian) students to New Zealand for tertiary studies. Many graduated after spending several years here – and in Thailand at least, many Colombo Plan graduates from New Zealand universities are today in prominent positions in government and business in Thailand.

The advent of regular air travel and, also from the 1960s its gradual accessibility to larger numbers of people, has contributed to the development of the international tourism trade, which has benefited both Thailand and New Zealand. Creating opportunities for greater people to people contact - for the peoples of each country to get to know each other.

Their Majesties the King and Queen of Thailand paid an Official Royal Visit to New Zealand for eight days in August 1962. They were flocked by crowds of New Zealanders wherever they went. Many who saw Their Majesties on that visit still talk enthusiastically of the impression which Their Majesties made. It was an important catalyst in allowing Thais and New Zealanders to get to know each other. Also, during the 1990s in particular, New Zealand felt a need to build better relations with Asia, and seeing Thailand as an important strategic hub: sought a strategic partnership. Later, that led on to the 2005 Closer Economic Partnership Agreement, which has facilitated a marked growth in bilateral trade.

In the aid and development area, New Zealand and Thailand cooperated together to establish the Mekong Institute, based at Khon Kaen University in north-eastern Thailand. The institute is involved in research and training aimed at improving economic and social development in the whole Mekong basin area.

However, at the government-to-government level, New Zealand and Thailand have over the years developed sophisticated mechanisms to encourage meaningful interaction and cooperation. The Closer Economic Partnership mandated a Joint Ministerial Commission – that is, a regular meeting of Foreign Ministers and senior officials. There are also regular bilateral Senior Officials Meetings, and various working groups bringing together officials from the corresponding ministries to consider mutual interests and resolve outstanding issues.

Thailand and New Zealand continue to look for new areas of cooperation, for mutual benefit. New Zealand has recently agreed to make up to 170 places available to students from ASEAN countries to study at New Zealand universities. There have been discussions on joint approaches to disaster risk management. There has recently been increased direct contact between the scientific research, innovation and creative economy communities from both countries – to explore opportunities for working together.

Thailand and New Zealand also participate fully in regional fora. Both are active and committed members of APEC. New Zealand became a Dialogue Partner to ASEAN, of which Thailand was a founding member, not long after its foundation. New Zealand has signed the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation with ASEAN, and New Zealand and Australia together recently concluded an agreement establishing an ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand Free Trade Area. New Zealand now fully participates in the East Asia Summit, the ASEAN Regional Forum and also as recently as 2011 became a member of the Asia – Europe Meeting (and interestingly

New Zealand and Australia may be accepted within the Asia group – so long as the European Community accepts Russia on their side – but that’s yet to be agreed upon).

But in all these joint involvements, and their wider participation in the various United Nations bodies and other international groupings, both Thailand and New Zealand show their commitment to very similar values: democracy, peaceful development and upholding the interests of those who need particular assistance.

### *Strengths and Weaknesses*

Though Thailand and New Zealand can and are doing so much together, and are also constantly looking for new areas for cooperation – it is important to focus our joint efforts in strategic areas; in ways that will make a real difference to each other and to our respective locales. The changing security and social environment in the South Pacific has changed New Zealand’s position among the smaller island nations. New Zealand (and Australia for that matter) seems to be increasingly seen by the smaller island nations as interfering or imposing solutions which may or may not suit those countries. New Zealand’s policy on Fiji over the past six years is perhaps an obvious example. New Zealand’s need to uphold democratic standards through applying specific sanctions has contributed to a souring of New Zealand – Fiji relations. In that environment, the Fijian economy has suffered, creating serious difficulties for the people. Also, a New Zealander appointed as Chief of Police in Tonga, through his particular approach to the position, which I’m sure was very fair and professional as is very characteristic of the Kiwi way, but inadvertently has caused tension and even constitutional problems.

Also, on the Thai side, Thailand’s efforts to encourage economic development in its near neighbours may sometimes be perceived as an attempt to create a regional hegemony or to exploit the smaller nation’s resources, which are not Thailand’s intentions at all. It’s perhaps the weakness of being the more developed nation at the hub of a ring of lesser developed nations.

But each of these neighbouring nations has its own pride and self-respect: the neighbours of Thailand as well as the south Pacific neighbours of New Zealand. This can create a hindrance to effective development assistance. Thus, Thailand and New Zealand could, in partnership with each other, contribute to the economic development of their respective neighborhoods: Thailand offering its expertise in coral reef and mangrove management, among other things, to the South Pacific Island nations; and New Zealand offering, for example training and technology in geothermal power generation or gas electric generation. Thereby both New Zealand and Thailand can together contribute to the overall development of their respective regions – for the benefit of all.

Certainly, for both Thailand and New Zealand, the extensive use of hard power, such as military action, would be in most instances beyond our capabilities, and also

counterproductive for all concerned. New Zealand and Thailand have an excellent opportunity to learn to use 'smart power' in partnership with each other. This sort of strategy is also quite appropriate for the national psyches of both countries. Thailand's culture favours sustainable and respectful actions; New Zealand also has a strong ethic towards friendliness, a willingness to help caring for others and the environment. These qualities both assist to enhance the image of each nation on the international scene. Moreover, the needs of this globalised age increasingly calls for greater connectivity between and among countries, leading to greater inter-dependencies, or as some term it 'complex interdependencies' (Nye & Keohane)

Thailand and New Zealand have already been using 'smart power' – individually, on their own. During the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, Thailand abolished slavery over a 10 - 20 year period, gradually introducing a wage-based labour system, thereby successfully avoiding protest, resistance, conflict or bloodshed. Thailand maintained her independence during the period of colonization of Indo-China by European powers. When under intense pressure, His Majesty the Late King Rama V established friendly relations with the then Imperial Russia, which discouraged both the British and the French from encroaching onto Thai territory. Thus the King defended His country without firing a single shot. And in this century, over a 30 – 40 year period (1950s- 1980s), Thailand successfully eradicated the cultivation of opium from within its territories by developing markets for substitution crops, and other improvements in the lives of those communities that were previously involved in cultivating opium poppies.

New Zealand has successfully avoided ongoing intense social conflict by making the Treaty of Waitangi inherent in almost everything government does. Maori iwi are involved in decision-making at many levels, which enables them to make their perspectives known without having to raise large protests. Yes, protest action does occur from time to time in relation to various issues, but over-all I think serious resistance is largely averted through the smarter approach by government – which is largely a partnership approach. New Zealand also takes very much a partnership approach in its relations with many of the South Pacific Island nations, particularly those with which it has constitutional links and responsibilities, such as the Cook Islands and Niue. New Zealand has quite a special relationship and often a particular history with many of the South Pacific small island nations.

Furthermore, in economic development an active partnership can allow each partner to contribute towards assisting the other partner to overcome some of the weaknesses inherent in their respective position, and to contribute to the development the other partner's strengths. New Zealand is very strong on innovation and research: seeking ways to make the best use of limited resources. New Zealand has well developed expertise in agricultural technologies and is turning towards biotechnologies, food product development and sophisticated marketing. However, sometimes New Zealand experiences difficulties through itself being a small market,

and a small producer at considerable distance from its export markets and the major population centres of the world. Notwithstanding that New Zealand has developed distinctive brand names, such as Fonterra, Kiwifruit and so on, which have established themselves in many marketplaces overseas.

On the other hand, Thailand has many talented researchers and creative designers, a strong agricultural sector (as one of the world's major rice producers, for example). However, Thailand is strategically located at the hub of mainland south-east Asia, and exercises a strong leadership role in ASEAN. But Thailand is sometimes inhibited by lack of work-force training, weak branding and weak marketing. But Thailand has well developed skills in fostering community development, small local-based technologies, family planning and public health and medical services.

### *A new era of partnership*

A focus on 'smart power' in the Thai – New Zealand partnership in the future could lead to better outcomes on many fronts. Additional benefits will accrue from the greater connectivity resulting from the involvement of an additional partner, as both Thailand and New Zealand seek to contribute to the improvement of their respective neighbourhoods. Each country's specialist knowledge of its own neighbourhood will be key factors in the success of a combined approach. Suitable solutions could be found, leading to lasting tri-lateral partnerships and sustainable economic, social and political development.

A strategic 'smart power' partnership between New Zealand and Thailand can offer a new brand for diplomacy. Its operation at a regional level can also contribute to the wider global scene through the example created, and also by establishing channels of communication and connectivity which will influence the behaviour of larger countries. It will also balance the influence which larger powers may exert or seek to exert in either south-east Asia (USA) or the South Pacific (China), contributing to reducing tensions or misunderstandings which may otherwise develop. A focus on community and economic development will assist all partners to overcome the adverse effects of the globalised world, and enhance marketing of export products in international markets. Such roles for both New Zealand and Thailand can also enhance the recognition which each country receives by other international partners.

Thailand has long favoured a win-win approach towards relations with its neighbours. New Zealand also actively promotes peaceful development. Combining our two strengths will help to fill in the gaps: it will create added synergy.

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*Some resources of interest:*

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