

## **Do Morals Matter? Presidents and Foreign Policy from Franklin D. Roosevelt to Trump**

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**Book Review:** "Do Morals Matter? Presidents and Foreign Policy from FDR to Trump"

Joseph Nye's book, titled "Do Morals Matter? Presidents and Foreign Policy from FDR to Trump" explores the role of morality and ethical considerations in shaping international relations and decision-making processes, especially in by evaluating the intersection of ethics in the US foreign policy. Joseph Nye is a prominent figure in discipline of International Relations, known for co-founding the theory of neoliberalism, also as the proponent of the concept of soft power.

The book has been divided into *nine chapters* and in first chapter, Nye elaborates upon three significant concepts: American exceptionalism, Wilsonian liberalism, and the liberal international order after 1945. Nevertheless, Nye ignores the factors, particularly national interest of the US as a great power which led to the establishment of liberal international order. While the second chapter appears to be theoretical in nature where Nye conceptualizes the morality and its link with the politics by referring the views of multiple scholars. In this chapter, he also gives a framework to evaluate the morality in the foreign policy initiatives of the US. The proposed tripartite framework focuses on three dimensional reasoning such as: intentions, means, and consequences. The indicators used to evaluate the intentions comprises of moral vision and prudence, while the use of force and liberalism are represented by means. Lastly, the consequences are measured by the fiduciary cosmopolitan, and education. Nye, through this scorecard, assessed and categorized all of these concepts (decisions taken by presidents) as poor, good or mixed. By employing this framework, he assess the ethical dimensions of the foreign policy decisions of the fourteen US presidents, considering the leaders' intentions, means to achieve their goals and the outcomes or end result of their actions. It is highly likely that Nye drew inspiration from Max Webber's essay, "Politics as a Vocation", in which he differentiated between the ethics of conviction (moral beliefs regardless of consequences) and ethics of responsibility (pragmatic decisions considering consequences).

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So ostensibly, Nye's framework closely mirrors Weber's dichotomy of morality, yet his tripartite framework is comparatively broader and extensive that depicts the dilemma of deontological and consequentialist approaches in decision making process. Despite being an inclusive framework, it remains inherently subjective in nature and depends upon the individuals' interpretations of ethicality and certainly, the chances of political or cultural biases cannot be ruled out in this regard. In addition, he also expounds three mental maps, essential for formulating foreign policy, realism, liberalism and cosmopolitanism.

The subsequent chapters spanning from 3 to 8 predominantly focus on the moral analysis of each president's foreign policy since the end of World War II, along with pertinent examples. Chapter 3 titled, "The Founders" evaluates the foreign policy approaches of Roosevelt, Truman, and Eisenhower. Chapter 4 "The Vietnam Era" appraises the foreign policy decisions of Kennedy, Johnson and Nixon's. Chapter 5, under the title, "Post-Vietnam Retrenchment" assesses the policies of Ford and Carter. Chapter 6 titled, "The End of the Cold War" discusses the role of Regan and H. W. Bush. Chapter 7, entitled, "The Unipolar Moment" explores the decisions of Clinton and George W. Bush. Whereas, Chapter 8, "Twenty-First Century Power Shifts" highlights the role of presidencies of Obama and Trump in the backdrop of China's ascendancy and US policy initiatives. As per the evaluative framework, Nye gives the high grades to the four out of fourteen presidents including Roosevelt, Truman, and Eisenhower, along with George H. W. Bush. In contrast, the remaining ten presidents receive either middle or lower grades. On the basis of this scorecard, President Donald Trump receives the lowest grades for the reason of disrupting the functioning of the liberal order by criticizing the liberal institutions and withdrawing from the trans-pacific partnership and Paris Agreement. The last chapter, "Foreign Policy and Future Choices," Nye generates a critical debate on the US foreign policy choices since 1945, its context and challenges that lie ahead for shaping a moral policy for future. Nye further emphasizes that values play implicit and explicit role in shaping international order, because its legitimacy is rooted in ethical principles. Furthermore, Nye anticipates two great challenges for the US moral foreign policy in future, the rise of China and the increasing role of technology in economy, politics and ecology.

In sum, the book explores an inexorable link between the morality and formulation of foreign policy. Notwithstanding, it appears that Nye overlooks some important factors, other than leaders, which influence foreign policy, such as structural challenges, small group dynamics, organizational process and bureaucratic politics, which directly or indirectly constraint the choices of leaders. Moreover, this write up also reflects a subtle effort to reinforce the narrative of American moralism or exceptionalism. Regardless of these points, the most interesting aspect of the book is to revive and acknowledge the role of morality in foreign policy in contemporary times. This book is a great addition to the existing body of literature, especially in the age of so called multi-polarity and the emerging realist order, and that is compelling and worthwhile to read. Hence, the work of Nye is useful for the students, scholars,

public intellectuals, diplomats and philosophers, especially for those who are interested in US foreign policy and understanding the relations between politics and ethics.