

## CHANGING NATURE OF POWER

**The End of Power: From Boardrooms to Battlefields and Churches to States, Why Being in Charge Isn't What It Used to Be**

By Moises Naim

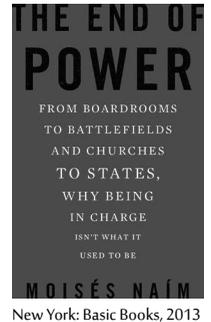
Reviewed by Dr. Joel R. Hillison, Colonel (USA Retired), Faculty Instructor, Department of Distance Education, US Army War College

Over the past sixty years, the US military has gotten into the habit of planning in an unconstrained environment, whether in developing budgetary requirements or planning for contingencies. This luxury is no longer feasible. As Winston Churchill is purported to have said, “Now that we are out of money we have to think.” It is in this context that Moises Naim’s, *The End of Power*, should be considered. Moises Naim is an eminent scholar at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and former editor of *Foreign Policy*. His recent book is a thought-provoking and insightful examination of the changing nature of power in today’s world.

As the title suggests, *The End of Power* suggests that traditional notions (and levers) of power are outdated: power isn’t what it used to be. As the extensive literature on globalization has pointed out, power is becoming more diffuse and accessible. In the complex and volatile world today, brute force is often ineffective or counterproductive. Traditional icons in the exercise of power, from presidents to popes, are increasingly constrained in their ability to translate power into desired outcomes. As Robert Zoellick mentioned in his *Wall Street Journal* review of this book, “seemingly powerful actors in societies have a harder time getting things done.”

Naim begins with a discussion of power, how to conceptualize it, use it, and keep it. He does a nice job summarizing the Weberian conception of power and how bigger became better with regards to the exercise of power. Max Weber, a famous German social scientist, suggested states were those entities that maintained a monopoly on the legitimate use of force within a prescribed boundary. He also advocated stronger, hierarchical bureaucracies as the mechanisms for states to exert authority and power. Naim explains how this Weberian structure, so successful after World War I, has begun to crumble. Even as the concentration of power is increasing in some sectors, the ability to use it to achieve a desired outcome and the probability of retaining it is more volatile and uncertain than ever.

Perhaps the most interesting portion of the book is the typology Naim establishes to categorize how power has transformed with globalization and other recent changes. This typology discusses a tripartite revolution against the conventional notions and effectiveness of power: more, mobility, and mentality. The “more” component expounds upon the growth in actors, ideas, and world population. All of these factors complicate the possession and exercise of control by more traditional actors, such as states. In Weber’s world, barriers to entry and the



320 pages

\$27.99

efficiencies of scale reduced the number of potential actors in critical sectors such as governance and industry. In today's world, those barriers have been reduced and the same structures that provided economies of scale have often hindered the ability to adapt quickly to changing situations. The "mobility" revolution refers to the expansion of options. Not only do people and things have greater ability to traverse the globe, so does information. This revolution has contributed to the reduction of the barriers to entry discussed above and has allowed a greater number and diversity of the actors to interact on a local, regional or global level. Finally, Naim discusses the "mentality" revolution. This development, closely related to the first two, discusses how rapidly ideas and norms can proliferate, changing expectations and traditional social contracts. Again, the revolution is antithetical to the hierarchical structures of power touted by Weber.

Naim's argument fits nicely with a much older debate captured by Jeffrey Issac in his classic, "Beyond the Three Faces of Power: A Realist Critique." In that article, a distinction was made between the "power to" and the "power over." The three "M" revolutions have increased the ability of everyone, including nonstate actors, to exert power in ways that were unimaginable in the past (power to). Inversely, these same revolutions have decreased the ability of traditional power brokers, such as states and armies, to exercise or sustain power over other actors (power over). In addition, power has to be considered within the social structures within which humans interact. Thus, the ability to understand and explain is as important as the ability to do something about the physical phenomenon. This context coincides with Naim's call for a "framework to help make sense of the changes taking place."

Overall, this book is well-written and readable. Though much of what is described is well-known, Naim ties it together in an original and thought-provoking manner. For those interested in the role of land-power, this book provides some exceptional insights in conceptualizing the roles and functions of the US Army and Marine Corps. If power is so dispersed and the problems more complex, how should the Army define its role? Certainly, the military must retain the ability to dominate other state-based military threats to ensure the nation's survival and to promote the vital interests of the country. However, what type of force structure is needed to give our national leaders the flexibility they need to respond to the VUCA international system in a resource constrained environment? If you accept Naim's conclusions, perhaps the Army's fight to maintain end strength is not a realistic or affordable approach given the "more, mobility, and mentality" revolutions.

This book is also worth reading for foreign policy enthusiasts and senior political and military leaders who are struggling to develop effective policies and strategies during times of fiscal constraint. As the traditional sources and structures of power decay, senior leaders, policymakers, and strategists have to adapt. Leaders have to be more comfortable with a lack of direct control. Success will reside in the ability to monitor and shape ideas associated with the mentality revolution from the lowest to the very highest levels. Hypocrisy and mistakes will be quickly identified and disseminated by various actors. While the military should retain those capabilities where it maintains a comparative advantage, such as strategic mobility, it must look for more alternative

solutions to the problems at hand. Knowing the limitations of military power might be just as important as knowing its capabilities.

## **Maximalist: America in the World from Truman to Obama** by Stephen Sestanovich

Reviewed by Colonel Michael J. Daniels, student, US Army War College

The recent spate of writing decrying the decline of American power and influence centers on issues of domestic decay and turmoil, with the view that the United States has somehow lost its way in the world. Some authors argue these domestic political, economic, and social challenges have hamstrung the current administration in pursuing the kind of aggressive, engaged foreign policy needed in this volatile time. Stephan Sestanovich, author of *Maximalist*, shows the current challenges of the Obama administration are not new, but part of a cycle that can be traced back to the post-World War II Truman administration.

Sestanovich is a former US diplomat, who served under both Presidents Reagan and Clinton. He is currently a professor of international relations at Columbia, as well as a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations. Sestanovich has written a highly-readable and thorough history of US foreign policy since 1947. The book does not offer much in the way of new research or detail. However, the author succeeded in repackaging previous works and incorporating a great many anecdotes to retell this story with a slightly new twist. It is a worthy addition to US foreign policy scholarship, and should be read by any serious student of diplomatic history, or for anyone in a position to advise on or craft future foreign policy.

The book expands on the author's earlier thesis, regarding the "maximalist" tradition in US foreign policy, one advanced in a Spring 2005 article in *The National Interest*. Sestanovich, describes foreign policy and diplomacy in a continuum cycling between periods of maximalism and retrenchment. One criticism of the book is the author never defines these two terms, which are so central to his argument. The reader quickly summarizes that maximalism equals overreach, with retrenchment the "do less" corollary that follows when America must pick up the pieces. The author details the approach administrations have taken cycling between these two extremes: the maximalist Truman followed by a retrenching Eisenhower; who is then followed by maximalist Kennedy/Johnson administrations; then by a long period of retrenchment under presidents Nixon, Ford and Carter; the maximalism of Reagan; a pause in the cycle under presidents George H.W. Bush and Clinton; the maximalism of George W. Bush; and finally this current period of retrenchment under President Obama.

A few unanswered questions linger below the surface of a linear story long on narrative but short on analysis. My central criticism is the cycle is described as far too simplistic. Can any administration be categorized as purely maximalist or retrenching? The author concedes most administrations made decisions and set policies that ran counter to the general direction of their foreign policy. These decisions were almost always influenced by external events, beyond the influences of



**Maximalist**

AMERICA IN THE WORLD  
FROM TRUMAN TO OBAMA

Stephen Sestanovich

New York: Alfred A. Knopf,  
2014

416 pages

\$28.95