

Tribute in Honor of Joe Nye

Liz Sherwood-Randall

Joseph S. Nye had a luminous mind. He was brilliant and charismatic, with a sonorous voice and a clear, logical speaking style that captivated listeners, including his rapt students. In Gov 40, the Harvard College introductory course in International Relations that he taught in the late 1970s, we were assigned to read his brand new book with Robert Keohane, Power and Interdependence. This seminal tome – along with others to come – shaped our understanding of and approach to relations among nations. His intellectual influence proved to be immense and enduring.

At the Kennedy School of Government, Joe and his compatriots Graham Allison, Ash Carter, and Al Carnesale were a formidable team whose collective brainpower spawned landmark work on nuclear deterrence, strategic stability, arms control, and countering WMD proliferation in the 1980s and early 1990s. Their creative capacity powered the Center for Science and International Affairs (now the Belfer Center) and made it a magnet for talent from across the nation and around the world.

Joe was a trailblazer in opening doors for young women and giving us opportunities to earn our places in worlds that had previously been nearly exclusively male. He mentored me as an undergraduate and first advised me to apply for a Rhodes Scholarship. Along with many of my female colleagues and friends across multiple generations, we are forever in his debt.

His professional journey validated the possibility of moving back and forth between academia and public service. We worked together during the period in which he served as Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs on Secretary of Defense Bill Perry's staff. Joe spearheaded the strengthening of key alliances and partnerships, especially in Asia, and he was particularly proud of the work he did with the Japanese. He offered sage advice during that time, describing how it was important to know when one felt "sated" by a job and therefore ready to move on. This concept helped him maintain the balance he sought throughout his career.

Joe continued to open doors, inviting me to join the Aspen Strategy Group in the late 1990s and providing outstanding leadership alongside his great partner Brent Scowcroft for many years. Joe had the ability to sum up complex and sometimes contentious discussions among the participants in a way that acknowledged divergent viewpoints, situated them within a broader frame, and enabled this notably bipartisan group to formulate constructive recommendations on what to do about exigent national security threats and challenges.

Joe's marriage to his beloved Molly and their wonderful family were clearly a major source of strength and joy in his life. He relished being in the wilderness; at Aspen, he captained hikes up to Independence Pass and would always be far ahead of panting younger colleagues! These human dimensions were also important examples of how to live a full and balanced life. Over the last decade, he offered poignant insights about how to successfully navigate new chapters while the river of life rushes onward.

Joe Nye set the gold standard as a patriot, public servant, scholar, husband, father, mentor, and friend. His 88 years on this earth were generative and impactful – and his memory will be an ongoing source of inspiration.