

A Christian Perspective on Power

We believe:

- The Bible tells us that national power can affect humanity for good or ill and that God desires power to be used for justice, especially for the poor and the marginalized. (Isaiah 1:10-17 and 58:6-10, Jeremiah 9:23-24, Amos 5:21-24, Micah 4:1-4, Matthew 25:37-46, Luke 4:16-21)
- Since true security comes from creating allies rather than fighting enemies, we must strengthen our participation in the international community.
- Dualist conceptions of the world as cleanly divided between good/evil, order/chaos, democracy/terrorism, and those for us/those against us inevitably lead us to demonize our competitors, skew our analyses and policies, and betray our monotheistic faith by placing the power of evil on a par with God.
- There are no immortal nations or empires. God, not America, is the beginning and end of all things.
- The U.S. has strayed from its strong tradition of respecting human rights and cooperating with allies.
- Trusting that God is sovereign, we must act with both confidence and humility, constantly striving to keep our power in service to morality and humanity.
- Christians and all people of good will must challenge theologies and ideologies that implicitly or explicitly support the view that the U.S. is morally superior and that silence dissent in the name of security and maintaining American “power.”
- We need to be more deliberate and courageous in bearing witness to the failure of that “national security” script and in articulating another script that will indeed make us safe and joyous.

The nature of national power:

National power consists of hard power (police, military forces and weapons, economic power) and soft power (attractive popular culture, science, technology, education, entertainment, moral influence). Governments can choose to deploy hard power, using it to control, destroy, or support other nations or communities. The exercise of hard power brings no guarantee of success. Successful military campaigns lead to insurrections and guerrilla warfare as often as they lead to acceptance of defeat and readiness to emulate conquerors.

Soft power has more to do with how nations live and what they value. In the past, soft power has earned the U.S. affection from those who admired liberty and democracy and fear from those who found our popular culture too coarse and too attractive to their children. Our moral role in World War II, the generosity of our post-war occupation, our kindness toward our prisoners—a tradition George Washington began—combined with our international support for human rights earned nearly universal respect from those who shared our views and those who wished to share them, while leaving our totalitarian rivals laughing at what they called our naiveté. U.S. moral influence constituted our greatest advantage against the Soviet Union and its clients. Unfortunately, our treatment of Afghans, Iraqis, and other captives, our suspension of *Habeas Corpus*, our secret “extraordinary renditions” of suspects to places where they will be tortured, have lost us that moral influence. The U.S. has become a country that regards such

moral behavior as naive. By recognizing the precarious ambiguity in our employment of hard and soft power, and returning to the strong moral tradition of its past, the U.S. can more closely model the uses of power God demands.

For a fuller exploration of this topic, please see the essay entitled “What is Power?” on the www.CLJP.org website.