

Soft Power, Hard Power, and Our Image Abroad

Tim Quirk

This paper was written for Dr. Tures.

The terms “soft power” and “hard power” were coined by Joseph S. Nye, Jr. and have been used in understanding the methods by which nation-states can use the power they have available to them. As far as power between nations is concerned, “power is nothing more than the ability to affect others to get what you want” (Coutu). Whereas hard power is understood to include military and economic force, soft power is the ability of a country’s culture, values, and policies to influence another country. In the recent past, the Bush Administration focused its policies on the use of hard power while ignoring soft power. The focus on hard power alone hurt our image abroad, and in turn made it harder for other nations to accept the policies of our government. That is to say, that the more a country’s leaders or policies are favored by other nations, the more likely they are to work with the first nation in a collaborative manner. In foreign relations, both soft power and hard power are needed to work effectively with other governments. To be more successful, our nation needs to place more resources into developing the strength of our soft power. Our nation should place an emphasis on the use of soft power, and use hard power only when other diplomatic means have been exhausted.

Owing to its more abstract nature, the use of soft power is not as easily understood in comparison with that of hard power. However, “the major elements of a country’s soft power include its culture (when it is pleasing to others), its values (when they are attractive and consistently practiced), and its policies (when they are seen as inclusive and legitimate)” (Nye). Soft power is harder for an administration to use, because the use of soft power cannot be directly overseen by the government. It can however, be directly promoted by the government. For example, Nye cites “public diplomacy, broadcasting, exchange programs, development assistance, disaster relief, and military-to-military contacts” as specific instruments of soft power that can be developed by the government to improve relations with any nation. The government has the power to indirectly effect soft power when it cuts funding to the Fulbright program or similar exchange programs because it lessens the soft power of a nation – by directly affecting the ability of one nation to share its ideas and culture with another. There are also types of soft power that the government has no control over, such as movies produced by Hollywood, or articles written by individuals expressing their personal views. All of these work together to shape the amount of soft power one nation has with another. Unfortunately, soft power can be used by anyone, for any purpose.

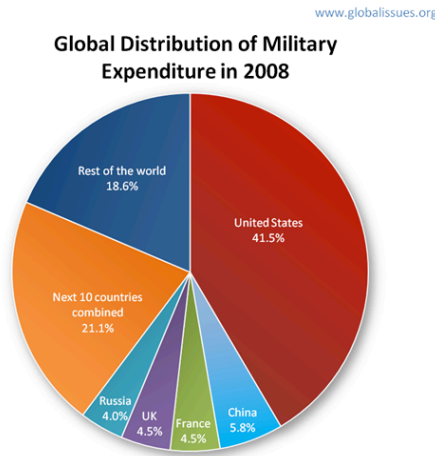
Soft power can be used against us, just as much as it can be used to promote our causes. Terrorists themselves use our soft power against us, citing our cultural differences and our moral volatility. “Soft power is highly diffuse and empowers a wider diversity of individuals and groups – including potential terrorists – to play more significant roles in international relations” (Tow). However, according to the US House of Representatives report for the Committee on Foreign Affairs, the “mainstream of foreign citizens, through, the vast weight of polling data provided by our expert witnesses supports the school claiming that disappointment with the U.S. policies, rather than anti-Americanism, is the cause of today’s record lows in international approval.” It is safe to say then, that it is not our culture that is offensive to foreign nations, but it is the policies that an administration promotes. Policies can be changed, and often are from administration to administration. This means that soft power is still a perfectly acceptable means of relating to, and improving relations with other nations. Tow, who said that terrorists can benefit from our use of soft power, also goes on to say that “soft power can also work against such strategies [of terrorists] if sustained and patient international cooperation is nurtured as a means of supporting the continued viability of civil societies and advancing the well being of the diverse social factions within them.” Soft power then must be seen as the powerful instrument that it is, when it is applied over a longer period of time. Soft power requires time, because a nation’s culture and values are something that takes time to develop and change. While it may be a long term strategy that does not mean that it should be ignored by those in power at the moment.

Hard power on the other hand is the “ability to coerce others to do what you want and get the outcomes you want. Hard power uses carrots and sticks to get others to do what they would not otherwise do” (Creehan and Rahman). The main components of hard power are the military and economic power of a nation. When a nation uses hard power it either uses its military, the threat of its military, economic sanctions, or the threat of economic sanctions to get a nation to go against it will, and comply with the stronger nations policy. In terms of military power the U.S. is generally considered to be the strongest by far. Table 1 was taken from Henry H. Sun’s article on International Political Marketing: a case study of United States Soft Power and Public Diplomacy. It is clear that the U.S. has been outspending other leading world powers by about ten times as much on military hard power.

Table 1. Comparison of soft power and hard power investment (in hundreds of millions)

	Public Diplomacy	National Defense	Year
USA	11.2	3479	2002
France	10.5	336	2001
England	10.0	384	2002
Germany	2.18	275	2001
Japan	2.1	403	2001

We are spending basically the same number on soft power as both France and England. China has also been mentioned as a contender to surpass the U.S. militarily, but as you can see below the U.S. outspends China by at least seven times on military expenditures. Chart 1 was published by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute Yearbook 2009.



Source: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute Yearbook 2009

As both Table 1 and Chart 1 show, over time the U.S. has, and still continues to far outspend other nations in military expenditures. The U.S. has been heavily focused on hard power and has not done all that it can to live up to the soft power potential that it has. There is a time and a place for hard power, and at times it is unavoidable. Soft power “did not work in either North Korea or Afghanistan.’ Although the United States is softening its line on North Korea, ‘it had no choice but to use hard power in Afghanistan,’ where Nye believes ‘its use was both just and ethical’” (Ricketts). But hard power should be a last resort, because when hard power is used in the place of soft power U.S. foreign relations suffer. This was the case with the war in Iraq and the “War on Terrorism.” When the U.S. acted unilaterally, and went to war without the consent of the United Nations, “politically, the United States forfeited its reputation as an icon for democracy and justice, even among its closest allies. Ethically, as a recent report from the International Commission of Jurists sets out, it has undermined its moral authority by having flouted the internationally accepted rules of war” (Zalman and Clarke). Had the U.S. waited, and worked harder on getting U.N. support showing a willingness to work multilaterally hard power would have been a much more acceptable method. However, ignoring soft power and jumping straight for hard power weakens all soft power efforts, and consecutively hurts the U.S. image abroad.

What then is the appropriate action to be taken? How does one measure the amount of soft power versus the amount of hard power that should be used in any given situation? The best strategy would involve a combination of soft power and hard power, working together in order to optimize the effects of both. Optimizing the use of both powers has come to be known as “smart power.” However, figuring out the level of soft power and hard power to use in combination is the challenge. Suggestions for a healthy combination of hard power and soft power include:

Figuring out how to combine the resources of both hard and soft power into smart-power strategies requires what I call ‘contextual intelligence’ in my book *The Powers to Lead*. In foreign policy, contextual intelligence is the intuitive diagnostic skill that helps policymakers align tactics with objectives to create smart strategies (Nye, *Get Smart*).

“Contextual intelligence” involves understanding the situation. Not only should a policymaker do their best to create useful policies, but they need to understand how those policies will be received by all parties involved. A perfect example of the use of smart power is when Teddy Roosevelt sent the “Great White Fleet, the new American navy, on a tour around the world, he wanted both to display the country’s new military power and to advertise America as a force for good” (Coutu). Essentially the hard power tool of the Navy was used as a symbol for good, which allowed it to be a soft power symbol. This is a simple, yet wonderful example of smart power.

To better understand the concepts it is best to put them in the context of two differing administrations, one who focused on hard power and the other who relies much more heavily on soft power. In the context of international relations it would seem that soft power would work much better in rallying other countries to your cause. If that is the case it would also seem that the use of soft power would provide a much more favorable image of a country’s policies and leaders.

The George W. Bush administration relied heavily on hard power, whereas the Obama Administration relies much more on soft power. It was foolish of the Bush Administration to assume that “during and after the Iraq War, that the U.S. was strong enough to do as it wished with or without domestic or international approval, that it did not need allies, was a folly as foreign policy and an abuse of executive power at home” (Ricketts). The U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs also reported in June of 2008 that it was the combination of “such arrogant rhetoric with the unilateral use of military force, and a refusal to respect international norms on torture and rendition, and the result is the ‘perfect storm’ that has brought down both President Bush’s and America’s international reputation.”

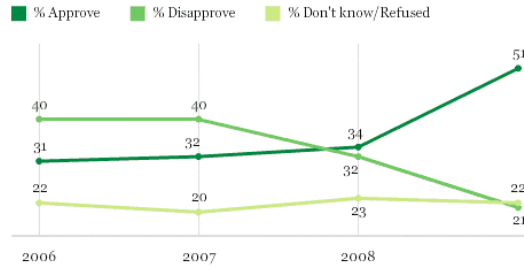
It was the policies of the Bush Administration that harmed our image abroad. When a country has an unfavorable image abroad, it is likely to be unsuccessful in gaining the needed support for its foreign policies. That is because foreign leaders are generally unwilling to support policies that are not favored by their people. According to Paul Burstain, a sociologist and political scientist, “public policy is influenced by public opinion, often very strongly, according to most recent studies, implying that the democratic process is working as it’s supposed to.” No leader then would be likely to support programs or policies that his or her constituents did not support; because he or she needs the constituents support to stay in office. The Brookings Institute, in a report they released on February 28, 2010 said, “America’s positive image abroad should facilitate greater cooperation as the world’s leaders find it easier to work with a United States that is more popular with their people” (Graham and Indyk).

Global perceptions the world held of the U.S. changed drastically since President Obama took office in 2009. Both President Obama and Vice-President Biden agree that “a strong rejection of the unilateralism and reliance on ‘hard power’ of President George W. Bush” is necessary to improve our foreign relations (Lobe). Some examples of Obama fostering soft power that were given include: closing the Guantanamo Bay detention facility, outlawing detainee torture, reinforcing the commitment of the U.S. to the power of the Geneva Convention, and changing the rhetoric of the War on Terrorism. Obama wants to make sure Muslims understand that the U.S. is not at war with Islam, “the nation is at war with Al-Qaeda, Obama says, but not with terrorism, which, as he understands it is a tactic, not an enemy” (Baker). It is his change in rhetoric that is the biggest step Obama takes in distinguishing himself from President Bush, which makes a significant difference. A median of 51% of the world approves of the performance of current U.S. leadership, as compared with a median of 34% in 2008. Furthermore, the Gallup report goes on to state that there have been “significant improvements in sentiment toward the U.S. leadership in all four major global regions, with the largest year-over-year increase in approval measured in Europe.”

Together with the policy changes and the change in rhetoric that Obama has made so far, he has greatly improved the image of the United States. He has brought U.S. approval ratings back to what they were before G.W. Bush came into office in 2001. It is Obama’s use of soft power that brings about this improvement. Worldwide, people also believe that Obama will make the right choice when it comes to policy decisions that will affect the rest of the world (as supported by the Pew Research Poll). The soft power policies that Obama focuses on lend themselves to being adopted or supported abroad, because of the way that people feel toward Obama as a leader. Now, not only does the United States need to continue to develop the use of soft power, but it needs to invest in soft power resources on a much larger scale than it does currently. Investments of this type would greatly aid U.S. foreign relations, and help to promote the success of U.S. policies internationally.

Do you approve or disapprove of the job performance of the leadership of the United States?

Global medians



GALLUP

Will Do Right Thing in World Affairs

	Bush Obama		Diff
	2008	2009	
% confident	%	%	
U.S.	37	74	+37
Canada*	28	88	+60
Britain	16	86	+70
France	13	91	+78
Germany	14	93	+79
Spain	8	72	+64
Poland	41	62	+21
Russia	22	37	+15
Turkey	2	33	+31
Egypt	11	42	+31
Jordan	7	31	+24
Lebanon	33	46	+13
Palest. ter.*	8	23	+15
Israel*	57	56	-1
China	30	62	+32
India	55	77	+22
Indonesia	23	71	+48
Japan	25	85	+60
Pakistan	7	13	+6
S. Korea	30	81	+51
Argentina	7	61	+54
Brazil	17	76	+59
Mexico	16	55	+39
Kenya*	72	94	+22
Nigeria	55	88	+33

*Bush confidence from 2007.

Samples in Brazil, China, India and Pakistan are disproportionately urban. See the Methods section for more information.

Question 21a.

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