

SOFT POWER

& Hard Power

Contemporary Issues and Debates



- Most recently a **third vision of power resources** has emerged.
- In this view the key to foreign-policy success today lies with the **ability of a state to shape the values and ideals that guide global policy-making efforts.**
- Unlike the “hard” forms of military and economic power, this type of power is “**soft.**”

JOSEPH NYE coined the term “soft power” to describe a nation’s ability to attract and persuade. Whereas hard power—the ability to coerce—grows out of a country’s military or economic might, soft power arises from the attractiveness of its culture, political ideals, and policies.

Hard power remains crucial in a world of states trying to guard their independence and of non-state groups willing to turn to violence. But as the Bush administration maps out its foreign policy, Nye emphasizes the importance of nurturing our soft power. It is soft power that will help prevent terrorists from recruiting supporters from among the moderate majority. And it is soft power that will help the United States deal with critical global issues that require multilateral cooperation. America needs to move in a new direction. Isn’t it time that we listened to the guidance of one of our foremost foreign policy experts and put his ideas into action?



Nye's definition of *soft power* as “**the ability to get what you want** through attraction rather than coercion or payments. It arises from the **attractiveness** of a country's culture, political ideals, and policies. ... Seductive is always more effective than coercion” (Nye x).

Soft power is not weakness. It is a form of power, and the failure to incorporate it in our national strategy is a serious mistake.



- When our policies are seen as legitimate in the eyes of others, our soft power is enhanced.
- Soft power relies on the manipulation of values, information, and symbols rather than the employment of force.



- When you can get others to **admire** your ideals and to want what you want, **you do not have to spend as much on sticks and carrots** to move them in your direction.
- **Seduction is always more effective than coercion**, and many values like democracy, human rights, and individual opportunities are deeply seductive.
- As General Wesley Clark put it, soft power "gave us an influence far beyond the hard edge of traditional balance-of-power politics."



- It is not easily manipulated by policy makers but provides an all encompassing context and reference point within which decisions are made.
- **Pros:** Supporters of this view cite the global appeal of democracy as evidence of America's possession of soft power.
- **Cons:** Cynics point to the global reach of American consumer culture as evidence that soft power is little more than an instrument of economic imperialism spread by globalization.



- But attraction can turn to repulsion if we act in an arrogant manner and destroy the real message of our deeper values.
- The United States may be **more powerful than any other polity since the Roman Empire**, but like Rome, America is **neither invincible nor invulnerable**. Rome did not succumb to the rise of another empire, but to the onslaught of waves of barbarians. **Modern high-tech terrorists are the new barbarians.**
- As the world wends its way deeper into a struggle with terrorism, it becomes increasingly apparent that many factors lie outside American control.

- “Some of our leaders **do not understand the crucial importance of soft power** in our reordered post-September 11 world.
- As former House Speaker Newt Gingrich observed about the Bush administration's approach in Iraq,
- "The real key is not how many **enemy** do I kill. **The real key is how many allies do I grow.** And that is a very important metric that they just don't get.”

Hard Power, Soft Power

- Power is the ability to produce the outcomes you want. When someone does something he would otherwise not do but for force or inducement, that's hard power: the use of sticks and carrots.
- **Soft power** is the ability to secure those outcomes through attraction rather than coercion. It is the ability to shape what others want. Key to this debate is the ability of soft power to replace economic and military power as an instrument of foreign policy.
- **Hard** and **soft power** sometimes reinforce and sometimes substitute for each other. If you can produce the right outcomes by attracting others to want what you want, you can afford to spend less on carrots and sticks.
- **Hard and soft power can also limit each other.** That may explain why some of the unilateralists in the Pentagon now seem to neglect soft power. Unfortunately, that neglect may have dangerous consequences for the successful prosecution of both the war on terrorism and a conflict with Iraq.

SOFT POWER

Soft power can rest on the attractiveness of one's culture, political ideals, and policies, or on one's ability to manipulate other countries' political agendas. But many people confuse the resources that can generate soft power with the essence of soft power itself. The distinguished historian Niall Ferguson describes soft power as "nontraditional forces such as cultural and commercial goods" and then dismisses it on the grounds "that it's, well, soft." Of course, Coke and Big Macs do not necessarily encourage people in the Islamic world to love the United States. And Hollywood films that make the United States attractive in China or Latin America may have the opposite effect and actually diminish U.S. soft power in Saudi Arabia or Pakistan. Ferguson concludes that real power depends on "having credibility and legitimacy." Exactly! "Credibility and legitimacy" are what soft power is all about.



- The **attractiveness** of the United States rests on **resources such as its culture** (sometimes), its **political values of democracy and human rights** (when it lives up to them), and its **policies** (when they are framed with some humility and awareness of others' interests).
- **Soft power was crucial to the U.S. victory in the Cold War.**
- America has long had a great deal of soft power.
- The **Soviet Union was still attractive in many parts of Western Europe after World War II**, but it squandered its soft power with **repressive policies** at home and the **invasions of Hungary and Czechoslovakia.**

Hard Power, Soft Power

- Some hard-line skeptics in the Bush administration might say **that whatever the merits of soft power, it has little role to play in the current war on terrorism.**
- **Osama bin Laden** and his followers are repelled, not attracted, by U.S. culture, values, and policies.
- **Military power was essential** in defeating the Taliban regime in Afghanistan; soft power will never convert fanatics. **True, but the skeptics mistake half the answer for the whole answer.**

Hard Power, Soft Power

- The strength of U.S. soft power depends in part on the breadth of U.S. coalitions. For example, a multinational force and administration in Iraq may be less efficient than a U.S. force, but what the United States loses in efficiency, it more than gains in legitimacy and in the protection of its soft power.
- U.S. economic policies not directly linked to the war on terrorism also affect soft power.
- The United States can reduce such appeal and enhance its soft power by aligning its policies with the aspirations of ordinary citizens in poor countries.

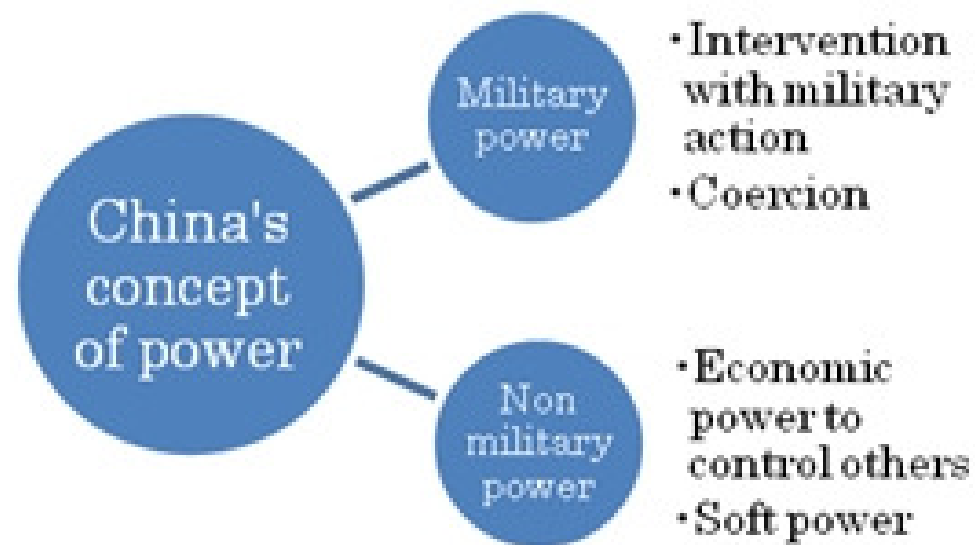
The end of the cold war produced yet another debate over power. It was acknowledged that the United States was now the only remaining superpower and that the world was militarily unipolar. From an economic point of view, however, the world appeared to be multipolar. As the ASIAN FINANCIAL CRISIS gripped that part of the world in the late 1990s, America's economic strength appeared to be on the rise, only to be called into question again by globalization, which seemed to rob all states of economic power in the traditional sense. Global markets rather than states seemed to be the new centers of power.

The SEPTEMBER 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon have set off a new power debate. At issue is what combination of power resources are needed to win a global and unprecedented war against TERRORISM. Military power was used to defeat the Taliban in AFGHANISTAN but failed to capture OSAMA BIN LADEN, and terrorist attacks attributed to his organization continue. Military force has been unleashed to depose Saddam Hussein in IRAQ as a first demonstration of preemptive action. Economic power is held by some to be necessary to rebuild

Afghanistan so that terrorist groups will not reemerge and to develop other societies so that the appeal of terrorists will be lessened. Others argue that now more than ever soft power is important. What is needed is the ability to attract people around the world to American values and culture rather than repel them from it. Democracy, the rule of law, respect for civil rights and liberties, and tolerance are held to have universal appeal and give the United States a strong natural advantage in defeating terrorism.

Hard Power, **Soft Power**

- Nearly five centuries ago, **Niccolo Machiavelli** advised princes in Italy that it was **more important to be feared than to be loved.**
- **In today's world, it is best to be both.**
- To defeat terrorism, the United States must learn to **combine soft and hard power more effectively.**



Smart Power

‘smart power’ – a combination of soft and hard power. Ability to use it properly: attractive national economic model or effective peace keeping operations conducted by state’s army that at the end contributes positively to the international image of the state that provides such policies.

Hard Power – Text analysis

History now / **Backgrounder**

Russia and the west

Does Nato still have the stomach to stand up to Putin?

Nato's response to the Russian leader's actions in Crimea has been muted. But, 25 years after the end of the Cold War, could the crisis in Ukraine reinvigorate the alliance? **Chris Bowlby** investigates

In the fraught debate about the west's response to Russia's recent actions in Crimea, Nato's voice has been limited. There may be no direct reason for its involvement – Ukraine, the state at the centre of the crisis, is not a member. Yet many might have expected the organisation to react more visibly to a new security threat emerging from Moscow. And some Nato members, notably the Baltic states, feel directly threatened by Russian president Vladimir Putin's ambitions.

Nato's commander in Europe, General Philip Breedlove, did warn about the build-up of Russian forces in particular areas, saying: "Russia is acting much more like an adversary than a partner." But what the crisis has exposed is continued uncertainty about Nato's role and priorities – a debate that emerged in the post-Cold War period, but has roots too in the organisation's creation.

of the Second World War, it was also about preventing the resurgence of German power, and keeping the US committed to European security. As Nato's first secretary general, Lord Ismay, described it, the organisation's purpose was to "keep the Russians out, the Americans in and the Germans down".

The US commitment was "remarkable", argued the historian Tony Judt in his book *Postwar*. Many Americans had been dubious about their country's involvement in "entangling European alliances". "As late as 1947," Judt adds, "few would have predicted that the United States would commit itself to a European military alliance."

The US wanted Europeans to pay more for their own security. And that meant taking a highly controversial step in the mid-1950s. West Germany, booming economically, was allowed to rearm and join Nato.

Nato developed in subsequent decades as the primary focus of western strategy in



Canadian soldiers of the Nato-led peacekeeping force in Afghanistan patrol the streets of Kabul, January 2004



American president Harry Truman

ORGANISATION'S CREATION

The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation was born in the midst of another crisis over Moscow's foreign policy, in the late 1940s. A Soviet-backed coup had brought communism to power in Czechoslovakia in 1948. And Moscow was orchestrating the blockade of Allied-controlled West Berlin. The Soviet Union was also close to acquiring its own nuclear weapons.

In response, in April 1949 a new group of allies from western Europe and North America signed the North Atlantic Treaty, declaring that "an armed attack against one or more of them... shall be considered an attack against them all".

The treaty was not only a response to an incipient Soviet threat. So soon after the end

of the primary focus of its existence by deterring Soviet aggression; it fought no wars. But that relatively settled world came to an abrupt end with the collapse of communist power in the late 1980s. Nato could celebrate victory, yet had to decide what, if any, role it could play in a world of far more complex security challenges.

There were, says Christopher Coker of the London School of Economics, several "dreams of what Nato should be after the Cold War". One Anglo-Saxon version had Nato as a "globalisation organisation" which could bring peace in the Balkans, resist terrorism in Afghanistan, and promote the Arab Spring with its involvement in Libya.

Nato military and peacekeeping deployments at the end of the war in former

American president Harry Truman gives a speech at the signing of the North Atlantic Treaty, 4 April 1949

A Ukrainian American protests against Russian foreign policy, March 2014





“Nato’s original purpose was to ‘keep the Russians out, the Americans in and the Germans down’”

to commit sufficient cash and armed forces to their defence?

The American historian James Sheehan has studied in *The Monopoly of Violence* how, following the Second World War, “in most of Europe, the overwhelming majority of people came to view violence, both domestic and international, as something to be feared and avoided, not applauded or excused”.

Germany, for example, Europe’s new economic super power, remains highly ambivalent about the deployment of its own armed forces. EU members have also struggled to agree on the establishment of a defence arm that might replace some of Nato’s historic role. The Americans, meanwhile, are less focused on European security as their attention turns towards Asia and the Pacific. “The Americans don’t talk the language of globalisation now,” says Christopher Coker. “They talk entirely the language of geography.”



REX/ORBIS/GETTY

A supply plane delivers food and other staples to West Berlin during the Soviet blockade of 1948. Nato was partly created in response to the rising power of the USSR

Yugoslavia in 1995, and in 1999 during the Kosovo crisis, did have some effect. But as Nato combat forces withdraw from Afghanistan this year, and Libya remains unstable after earlier Nato intervention, that dream, says Professor Coker, "has gone".

There was also a dream of Nato helping to create a European security system. Nato has expanded eastwards, with new members ranging from Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary to the Baltic States of Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia, which were until 1991 part of the Soviet Union.

The idea, adds Coker, was to have a

"positive dialogue with Russia from a position of strength". There was even talk of Russia itself applying for membership – though Vladimir Putin was said, by the then secretary general George Robertson, to have left a meeting in a huff when told he would have to go through the same application procedure as any other country.

It is now those newest Nato members – recently under Soviet domination – who want the organisation to return to its oldest role, primarily focused on protection against Russian threat. But an equally old Nato question remains: are Europeans prepared

and avoided, not applauded or excused".

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Even if the political will is still there, there is also the question of what kind of military commitment is most appropriate as warfare itself changes. The massing of Russia's troops around territories it is trying to intimidate has an old-fashioned look. Future combat will be shaped more and more by the age of the drone or cyber warfare. In 2008 Nato established a new centre of cyber-defence in Estonia, one of the new Baltic Nato members most vulnerable to Russian aggression.

It is possible, concludes Professor Coker, that some kind of new Cold War will give Nato renewed purpose too. But the Ukraine crisis has further exposed how uncertain that purpose still is. **EH**

Chris Bowlby is a presenter on BBC radio, specialising in history

DISCOVER MORE

BOOKS

- ▶ **The Monopoly of Violence** by James Sheehan (Faber & Faber, 2008)
- ▶ **Postwar** by Tony Judt (Vintage, 2010)

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- Hastedt, Glenn P. *Encyclopedia of American foreign policy*. Infobase Publishing, 2009.
- Nye Jr, Joseph S. "The velvet hegemon: how soft power can help defeat terrorism." *Foreign Policy* 136 (2003): 74-75.
- Nye, Joseph S. *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*. New York: Public Affairs, 2004.