

Dealing With Today's Asymmetric Threat to U.S. and Global Security

Symposium Two: Soft Power

Executive Summary

The world today is threatened by a host of state and non-state actors who asymmetrically challenge the national security and “national will” of countries around the world, particularly those aligned with the West.

CACI International Inc is co-sponsoring a three-part symposium series to discuss these asymmetric threats to U.S. and global security and contribute to the development of a new national security strategy.

Symposium One, co-sponsored with the National Defense University, defined and characterized the asymmetrical threat problem. Symposium Two, co-sponsored with the U.S. Naval Institute (USNI) focused on the role of soft power in U.S. national security and the capabilities of U.S. institutions to utilize soft power instruments in meeting American national security goals. Symposium Three, also co-sponsored with USNI, will address how soft power can be combined with traditional military “hard” power.

This paper presents the results and recommendations of Symposium Two.

Government leaders in the United States have, for some time, reached a general consensus that there are limits on the efficacy of military force alone in meeting current and future asymmetrical threats. The collective and coordinated strengths of a broad range of government institutions, the private sector, and the influence of American culture are needed to effectively meet increasingly asymmetrical challenges and threats.

The current foreign policy dialogue is focusing on what is commonly referred to as “soft power.” The concept has an important role to play in an integrated national security strategy.

While Congress has initiated steps to strengthen the soft power capabilities of federal government departments and agencies, more is needed if the United States is to move forward in creating a meaningful and practical security framework in an increasingly complex and interconnected world.

Professor Joseph Nye of Harvard University created the term “soft power,” which he described as “the ability to shape the preferences of others” and “getting others to want the outcomes you want.” Although the phrase was coined in 1990, the concept behind soft power has been evolving for some time. During the Cold War era, the United States actively used a rich portfolio of soft power tools and established organizations to promote democratic values and ideals. Examples included cultural tours of foreign capitals, Voice of America, and the Peace Corps.

When the Cold War ended, the need for these tools seemed to diminish and many of these soft power initiatives were reduced or eliminated. In the 1990s, a new “war of ideas” emerged, along with a new set of security threats. These threats came from sources with varying capabilities and agendas that could not be easily deterred solely through hard power (military) means. In the meantime, the U.S. had not done enough to communicate and extend the ideals that promote peaceful and stable societies. American influence was in decline worldwide, and international opinion (exacerbated by internally directed media criticism) of the U.S. steadily decreased, even in allied nations. It is now clear that the United States must invest significant intellectual and financial capital in programs to reverse these trends.

The United States must develop a truly integrated national security strategy that synchronizes both hard and soft power appropriate for each situation, and that adjusts as the particular threat evolves.

The U.S. has found itself at a “strategic inflection point” where it must reassess its institutions, processes, and resources to defeat violent, extremist threats and to promote freedom, development, and social justice around the world.

Existing soft power initiatives and agencies, particularly those engaged in development and strategic communications, must be reinvigorated through increased funding, human resources, and prioritization. Concurrently, the U.S. government must establish goals, objectives, and metrics for soft power initiatives.

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The U.S. government, recognizing this need, has taken steps to address these issues. However, to be most effective, the government's renovation of soft power must be part of a broader-scoped national security model. One way to achieve this can be by enacting legislation similar to the Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act (1986). This would coordinate, integrate, and synchronize soft power responsibilities and resources among government agencies; centralize operational authority; and streamline the operational chain of command in providing national direction on diplomacy, development, and defense. Another approach would be to consider an even broader-scoped reorganization through a review and realignment, or restructuring, of the U.S. government's national security infrastructure as currently embodied in the National Security Act of 1947.

A large-scale reorganization will require, as envisioned here, significant financial and human resources. Even the Defense Department, which in 2008 received \$16 in military programs for every \$1 invested in diplomacy, has acknowledged a need for dramatic spending and staffing increases in diplomacy, strategic communications, foreign assistance, civic action, and economic reconstruction and development. Suggestions on how to provide these additional resources include setting a top-line figure for national security spending focusing on overall requirements rather than Defense Department benchmarks. At the same time, a soft power budget could be coordinated through the Office of Management and Budget and the National Security Council that would adhere to budget guidelines and the President's national security priorities.

The next generation of public diplomacy will be engaging in the most important ideological challenge of modern times. To proactively promote abroad the values of democracy, and to revitalize America's international image and prestige, the U.S. government must engage in a variety of soft power initiatives. These initiatives must focus on improving individual welfare and civil society, enhancing the rule of law and order, and developing economic opportunities around the world. These efforts must also be carried out in cooperation with academia, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), international institutions (governmental and non-governmental), and the private sector.



A group of young Afghan school girls displays USAID writing tablets and soccer balls. Photo courtesy of USAID.

There are several key areas in which the United States can effectively improve its soft power initiatives.

By providing improved medical care, international health diplomacy can improve international opinion of the U.S., regain trust and moral authority, and even deny terrorists and extremists safe harbor, while engendering some of the best American values.

A reinvigorated and proactive strategic communications program is needed to better disseminate the democratic and cultural values of liberty and individual freedoms. Organizations with these responsibilities need to be modernized and empowered, and must take advantage of leading technologies to be successful. U.S. embassies should move away from being semi-fortified bureaucratic facilities to become cultural outreach centers, engaging the people of their host nations. The United States needs improved educational initiatives to counter intolerant ideologies (religious and cultural) that are often used to justify violence. It must also find ways to promote the success of these overseas activities by building strong, broad-based support at home. Furthermore, Americans need to be better informed about their government's ongoing positive efforts to support the spread of democracy. Improved education in American civics at all academic (and especially grade school) levels is seen as necessary in achieving such outcomes.

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By helping other nations establish a robust and dynamic legal framework, initiatives aimed at promoting the rule of law can promote better governance, foster economic development, and enable dispute resolution, thereby preserving stability. A current example is the Defense Department's new focus on giving stability operations the same priority as combat operations. The law can also be used to structure the reallocation of hard and soft power assets as necessary to defeat an ever-changing and evolving threat. Again, a Goldwater-Nichols-like act would be a prime example.

U.S. businesses have made an indelible mark around the world, from the global and around-the-clock presence of the American media to the worldwide demand for American brands. Their role in American soft power has been extensive, and the federal government should continue to promote an integrated and strong U.S. international commercial presence. A greater weight should be placed on exporting American goods and services, while liberalizing trade regimes and creating transparent and level playing fields for healthy global competition. This includes relaxing hard-power-related export restrictions. Many American companies also engage in social welfare programs in the countries in which they operate, and they can be made more effective as part of a civic-centered legal framework and national security strategy. Therefore, increased support of and partnerships with the private sector should be an important part of a new national soft power strategy.

Furthermore, the U.S. government can better maximize the effectiveness of soft power instruments and efforts through increased partnerships with NGOs. By providing humanitarian and development assistance in areas typically inaccessible to government agencies, NGOs are often able to access potential extremist areas before the government can establish or strengthen diplomatic, developmental, or military presence, including intelligence. These relationships should include supporting private foundations that support American democracy and cultural values with programs to improve social and economic welfare in developing countries.

Finally, the United States must work with foreign governments and international institutions to strengthen existing partnerships or build new ones that enhance U.S. capabilities to combat and contain the forces of global extremism, terrorist violence, and other similar hostile asymmetric threats. This includes leveraging American commercial institutions, such as the U.S. Export/Import Bank and the Overseas Private Investment Corporation, to promote strong international commercial partnership, while fostering a sound fiscal regime at the international level.

This mix is now commonly referred to as "smart power." Symposium Three will address how smart power should be structured and applied for offensive and defensive purposes in a highly net-centric world.



Inauguration of the 44th President of the United States, Barack Obama. Image courtesy of www.whitehouse.gov.

President Barack Obama's election has gathered the world's attention, and presents a unique opportunity for the United States to reassert its leadership in confronting the rapidly evolving and multi-dimensional asymmetric threats to global peace and security. The effectiveness of the U.S. national security strategy for the future depends on the nation's capacity to anticipate and assess these threats, and to integrate both soft and hard power – smart power – swiftly and adaptively to create a highly successful response.