

Soft Power & Foreign Policy in 21st-Century International Affairs

By Kent E. CALDER

Nearly two decades ago, just as the Cold War was drawing to a close in Europe, Joseph Nye coined the concept of “soft power.” It attracted many intellectuals, as the idea seemed to cut so sharply and idealistically against cynical, over-stated, yet remarkably persistent realist conceptions of influence in public affairs. Machiavelli, writing in *“The Prince”* four centuries earlier, after all, had counseled that “it is better to be feared than to be loved.” Nye responded with prescience, as the Soviet Union was collapsing, and as democratic movements were surging around the world: “In today’s world, it is better to be both.”

Nye, a former senior Pentagon official, National Intelligence Council director, and State Department arms-control negotiator, as well as Harvard University professor, has never been naive about the importance of military resources – hard power – in international affairs. I do not recall, in the 30 years that I have known Nye, his ever depreciating the importance of extended nuclear deterrence or forward deployment to America’s credibility abroad, or to stability in global affairs. Yet he also notes in *“Soft Power,”* his most extensive work on this subject, that “It is possible to get many desired outcomes *without* having much tangible power over others,” and conversely that “Those best endowed with power resources often don’t get the outcomes that they want.”

Nye stresses that there are multiple chessboards in international affairs, with military, economic, and transnational affairs (dealing with problems such as international crime, terrorism, climate change, and pandemics) being the major arenas of interaction. Converting power resources into realized power requires both strategies and leadership that go far beyond the military, particularly in the second and third arenas, he contends. Hard-power advocates, he concludes, are “one-dimensional players in a three-dimensional game.”

Nye’s ideas have been vigorously debated in the two decades since he first advanced the soft-power concept, albeit with most critics failing to see the distinction he makes among the three very distinct, yet interrelated arenas of international affairs. Some have parodied soft power as being about cultural fads, like drinking Coke and wearing blue jeans, and questioned its relationship to influence on issues of major significance. Criticism of the idea tends to be at its height right after dramatic acts of violence or aggression, such as “9/11”, or the 2008 Russian intervention in Georgia. Such events tend to focus public attention on the military dimensions of power and dilute consciousness of the deeper social origins of even those abrupt and violent occurrences.

Nye’s fundamental arguments, unlike the objections of his critics, tend to be subtle and prudential. They do not deny that coercion and various kinds of inducements can have influence in international affairs. They emphasize, however, that cooptation –

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Japanese-language version of author Calder's book titled *“Pacific Alliance: Reviving U.S.-Japan Relations”*

using attraction and legitimacy as tools to influence others – makes it possible to get many desired outcomes without much heavyweight arm-twisting. That leaves room, in Nye’s conceptual universe, for smaller, less militarily powerful, and even less affluent nations, as well as NGOs and even determined individuals who effectively embody global aspirations, to have meaningful roles in shaping the international future.

On Many Issues Soft Power Makes a Special Difference

All this has major implications, I believe, for important dimensions of foreign policy worldwide, in the era of historic global transition that is now dawning. The traditional political-military chessboard will remain, and reassurance against idiosyncratic threats from pariah nations like North Korea and Iran will be vital. Yet in dealing with many economic and transnational problems, soft power – the ability to influence through attraction rather than coercion – will be tremendously important. Complex multilateral cooperation oriented toward attaining global objectives, much of it across traditional cultural and political boundaries, will be increasingly central in world affairs. And soft power will be a key vehicle for eliciting such cooperation.

To understand the growing salience of soft power in foreign affairs, it is useful to illustrate with some substantively important

cases. Let us start with two concrete security concerns that have grown more pressing since 9/11: contingency-access agreements for deployment of antiterrorist forces; and the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI). The former, illustrated by the Sahel Initiative between the United States and several North African nations, provides legal standing for prepositioned equipment and military forces, on a contingency basis, that are deployed in counterterrorist activities. The PSI is another multilateral effort, in its case designed to prevent the international transfer of materials, including components, related to weapons of mass destruction. Both of these undertakings include nations worldwide, large and small, of different cultures and political persuasions, many of whom are by no means the targets of terrorist activities themselves. They cooperate not out of coercion, or in most cases due to material inducement, but due to the legitimacy of the shared antiterrorist cause – substantially due to the soft power, in short, that the proponents of these initiatives wield.

The global struggle against drugs and organized crime – which like counter-terrorism also has a substantial hard-security dimension – is likewise an area where the exercise of soft power is substantively important. Since the struggle is global – even more so than with respect to terror – and the transnational coordination process is complex, coercion of other governments is of limited utility, and can produce negative side effects. Inducements, given the global scope, are expensive. Attraction to the cause due to its resonance with universal human values – soft power – has to carry much of the load, although there may at times need to be support from the other tools, particularly against narco-states. This soft-power effort draws in businesses, secular NGOs, churches, and other elements of civil society, as well as governments.

Climate change is another issue of increasing importance to human security, as former US Vice President and Nobel laureate Al Gore, US President Barack Obama, and a succession of Japanese and European leaders have pointed out. Climate change is also a question on which the exercise of soft power, and the related mobilization of civil society, is crucial. Complex government regulations are involved, in many countries, as well as the creation of global standards. As with drugs, organized crime, and even terrorism, coercion and inducements alone are insufficient to producing concrete, viable international outcomes. Appeals to global legitimacy, and mobilization of international networks – in both the government and private sectors – are inevitably critical to success.

How Soft Power Exerts its Influence

How then does soft power concretely manifest itself in the world, and how does it support diplomacy? Those are difficult but essential questions to ask. Power, like weather and love, is a con-

cept that everyone depends on, and talks about, as Nye notes, but power is difficult to measure, or even to define. Most essentially, soft power manifests itself in a culture and values with universalistic dimensions, and in an open, interactive approach to foreign policy, which takes a partner nation's world view and values as a legitimate point of departure for international dialogue.

The exercise of soft power, as defined above, has three distinct consequences that enhance a nation's foreign-policy capabilities in the world in which we now live. First of all, soft power enhances a nation's, or a leader's, legitimacy with mass media, political elites, and the general public. "If a leader represents values that others want to follow," as Nye points out, "it costs less to lead." The ability to inspire the dreams and desires of others by appealing to shared values can be an important source of international influence, as has often been true in trans-Atlantic relations, and periodically in trans-Pacific relations as well.

Soft power, by affirming commonality of values and interests, also helps to elicit information about partner nations' aspirations, desires, and capabilities. Nations linked by soft power, after all, see each other as partners, and thus tend to be more open in expressing their circumstances and aspirations. In the complex and highly interdependent world in which we live, huge amounts of information about our partners are critically important, and thanks to rapid improvements in both information technology and our research institutions, we have means of storing, processing, and analyzing it.

Soft power also can assist foreign policy, finally, by helping countries, as well as individuals, to build transnational networks. These have grown rapidly in importance over the past two decades. As Anne-Marie Slaughter, currently director of Policy Planning in the US State Department, put it in a recent issue of *Foreign Affairs*, "We live in a networked world." War, in the relationship between artillery spotters and support aircraft, is networked. Diplomacy, in relations among embassies and government agencies, is networked. Business, in dealings between corporations, is networked. And media, in relations among journalists and with news sources, is networked. In the 21st-century world, Slaughter contends, a key measure of power is connectedness, with its importance often reaching far beyond the state into civil society. One of the key reasons the East German leadership found it so difficult to control its people's aspirations in the late 1980s, and why the Iranian mullahs have parallel difficulties today, one might extrapolate, is due to the substantial, however informal, transnational connections of their peoples with international society.

Soft power can thus invigorate the foreign policy of any free society in at least three general ways – by providing legitimacy for its initiatives, by helping to elicit a more realistic view of its partners in the international system, and by fostering transnational

networks that assist it in promoting its foreign-policy goals. How can a nation concretely maximize its advantages along each of these dimensions? Much in any soft-power strategy is country-specific, but global best practices do provide us with some broadly applicable insights.

First of all, soft-power strategies based on legitimacy need to appeal to commonly held international values. Human rights is among the most potent of these, as is respect for democratic procedures such as free elections. Over the past three decades or so, both of these norms have grown to be quite potent and universal, as evidenced by the outcry against rigged elections in the Philippines (1986), the Ukraine (2005), and Iran (2009); as well as outrage over the detention of Kim Dae Jung in the 1980s, and Aung San Suu Kyi more recently. The sanctity of particular national customs, such as a tradition of eating whale meat, tends to be less universally accepted, however, and the global legitimacy of particularistic traditional claims may be declining.

The efficacy of soft power as a means of learning more about other societies appears greatest when the countries in question are open, democratic, and have well-developed channels for exchanging information with one another. Concretely, any advanced democratic nation with well-developed universities and other research institutions can be successful in this regard, with their legitimacy enhanced by hosting major conferences like Davos and the Shangri La Dialogue. The emergence of a global information society means that nations need to put major effort into the development of local research institutions, including both research universities and think tanks, that are capable of both monitoring global information flows and contributing substantially to them. Some relatively small nations, such as Singapore, Switzerland, and Norway, are models in this regard, emulating older liberal powers such as Britain and the United States.

“Information-gathering” soft power naturally has a governmental dimension, but state information and intelligence agencies are less fundamental, in the global information age, than their private-sector counterparts. Great global universities are obviously one key element of that, which has arguably grown more important over the past generation. Other interesting adaptations, highly functional for both formulating a democratic foreign policy and pursuing national interests, are the political-party research institutes, funded in a nonpartisan way by government, which have been created in Germany. Their branches in Washington, D.C., such as the Friedrich Ebert Foundation run by the Social Democratic Party and the Robert Neumann Foundation run by the Christian Democrats, are efficient at gathering accurate information about American politics, and conveying it effectively into the German policy process.

The third and perhaps most important form of “soft-power” support for foreign policy lies in the creation of transnational networks. Networks can, in a world of sudden developments and interactive policymaking, be crucially important to national influence. Yet they are born, and sustained, far from the policy

process itself. Indeed, many of the most enduring networks – and the most ultimately influential in foreign-policy making – are born and fostered through old-school ties and other similar types of association, years before actual policy interaction. Henry Kissinger’s summer seminars at Harvard University in the early 1960s, involving such diverse personalities as Israel’s Yigal Allon and Japan’s Yasuhiro Nakasone, were an early manifestation of a transnational phenomenon that has grown progressively more important in recent years.

There are many ways of fostering and sustaining meaningful transnational foreign-policy networks. Developing and supporting globally respected universities appears to be one of the best. Institutions such as Cambridge, Harvard, Johns Hopkins, Oxford, and Princeton universities draw government officials and public intellectuals from throughout the world into detached scholarly environments from which they emerge, with personal ties, to play central roles in international affairs. The fact of their longstanding association allows them to interact much more informally, frankly, and often more effectively than would otherwise be the case.

The Pivotal Role That Japan Can Play

Economic strength, technical expertise, and unique historical experience give Japan unusual capabilities of special global relevance in the realm of soft power, which are only beginning to be realized. As is well-known, Japan is the second largest economic power on earth, producing a 10th of global GDP, and by far the largest capital exporter on earth, when both public and private flows are taken into consideration. Its energy-efficiency technology, critical in addressing global warming, is state of the art.

Japan also has a unique history that potentially gives it special legitimacy in addressing certain global problems to which soft power is particularly applicable. It was the first non-Western industrial nation, blazing a trail that much of the rest of Asia, in particular, has since followed. Its intermediate standing, between East and West, and between North and South, gives it prospective influence as a global mediator, leveraged also by its prominent role in international development assistance. Japan remains the largest donor to Asian developing nations, as well as to many countries in Africa and Central Asia, even though its overall ODA budget has declined in recent years. Distinguished Japanese citizens of the world, such as Yasushi Akashi and Sadako Ogata, have also played key leadership roles in international development organizations.

Japan was likewise a pioneer in its aggressive domestic response to two global energy shocks during the 1970s. Today, it provides the executive director of the International Energy Agency (IEA), in the person of Nobuo Tanaka. Japan is also, tragically, the one unique nation that has suffered nuclear devastation in war, so bears special witness to the world of nuclear-proliferation dangers. It is thus of special significance and promise for the future that Yukiya Amano of Japan has been selected as the next executive director of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), suc-

ceeding Mohammed El-Baradei.

While Japan has unusual historical qualifications that accord it special legitimacy in the arena of soft power, and also special economic and technical capabilities, Japan also bears historical burdens that complicate its soft-power role. There are, of course, bitter early 20th-century experiences of war and colonialism that still complicate its relations with Northeast Asian neighbors. More importantly, from a long-term perspective, Japan's long isolation in world affairs has engendered parochial international affairs attitudes within much of its public that constrain Japanese leaders in their generally enlightened efforts to play a persuasive global soft-power role.

The rising international importance of soft power, as transnational issues from terrorism to global warming grow more salient, has particular implications for US-Japan relations that illustrate the concept's practical utility. The implications are especially substantial between Tokyo and Washington both due to the unique challenges that the US-Japan partnership now faces, and also due to the special advantages that soft power can bring to that partnership on the global stage. Soft power can thus both help to neutralize emerging problems, and also help the two nations capitalize on emerging opportunities.

The US-Japan partnership, as I point out in my recent book, *"Pacific Alliance"* (Yale University Press, 2009), is challenged in unprecedented ways by globalization, regional transformation, and ongoing changes in the domestic politics of both nations. Globalization is accelerating the rise of China and India, both in Japan's neighborhood, provoking shifts in the regional balance of power within Asia, and inciting parallel shifts in attention both in Washington and Tokyo. These are compounded by similar demographic changes in the composition of US Asian-American communities, where Chinese-Americans now outnumber their Japanese-American counterparts five to one. Meanwhile, changing domestic political currents in Japan itself are calling into question what some Japanese see as the hierarchical character of bilateral relations with Washington, and questioning the distribution of burdens and responsibilities within the US-Japan alliance.

In Conclusion

As suggested above, the arena of soft power – increasingly central in international affairs, and highly evaluated in the current Obama administration – is one in which Japan can contribute substantially, with important global implications. Combating global warming and nuclear proliferation, while supporting the struggles



Afghan President Hamid Karzai (center) and Sadako Ogata (right), president of Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), tour Kabul International Airport's new terminal building constructed with Japanese government funding.

against terrorism, drug trafficking and international crime, are just a few of the possibilities. The importance of such efforts, fortunately, appears to be broadly accepted, on a nonpartisan basis, within Japan itself. That is a critically important political consideration today, in the era of domestic political transition that may be impending. Tokyo's global objectives – stability and sustainable prosperity in international affairs – are also broadly consistent with the goals of the broader global community, which should make a soft-power strategy promising.

A proactive Japanese soft-power role can help to strengthen the US-Japan relationship, now threatened by a quiet crisis, even while also contributing to the international community. It can do so by eliciting positive Japanese contributions that the bulk of American opinion, as well as the Obama administration itself, will both appreciate. On the Japanese side, such a proactive role – and the likely American support for it – can also help to relieve building frustration within Japan about what many see, especially on the Left, as the hierarchical, unequal character of the US-Japan alliance. A broadening of that alliance to include discussions of global nonmilitary cooperation as a legitimate and valued form of dialogue, in which Japan has a truly equal role, could contribute much both to the health of the alliance and to international peace and prosperity more generally.

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