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GENERIC BRIEF: Soft Power - bad

By Vance Trefethen

**This brief can be used against any arguments that claim to increase United States’ “soft power” or world influence exercised by means other than military power.**

SOFT POWER THEORY – WRONG

The very concept of soft power is ethnocentric and condescending - it assumes American culture is superior, which is the root cause of many world problems

Dr. Ying Fan 2008. (senior lecturer in marketing at Brunel University, West London, Place Branding and Public Diplomacy) May 2008 SOFT POWER: POWER OF ATTRACTION OR CONFUSION? <http://bura.brunel.ac.uk/bitstream/2438/1594/3/FullText.pdf>

Nye’s notion of soft power is largely ethnocentric and condescending as it is based on false assumptions of that American culture is superior and should be liked and adopted by other nations and that western values and culture that will continue to define the rules of the world (The Guardian, 2004). Western core values of democracy, liberty and consumerism, no matter how attractive or even admirable at first sight, may not necessarily be suitable (Hunter, 2006) or achievable in other countries. To many people around the world, the US self-perception of the superiority of American way of life is very much the root cause of troubles in the world.

Soft power is a bogus theory proven wrong by historical experience

Prof. Ilha Niaz 2010. **(**Assistant Professor of History at the Quaid-i-Azam University in Islamabad) 10 Jan 2010 “The mirage of soft power in a globalized world” <http://archives.dawn.com/archives/67345>

One thing that soft power is a testament to is the ability of the human race to delude itself. It is remarkable that a hypothesis as intellectually bogus and empirically fragile should be projected as a legitimate new way of looking at old problems. The soft power world view is substantially invalidated by historical experience, events and trends of the contemporary era (1990-present) and future possibilities arising from historical experience and the dynamics of contemporary issues. Historically, a country`s soft power is a consequence of it having, or having had at some time in the past, great amount of hard power. The global penetration of the English language, for instance, is part of the British imperial legacy, which includes the birth and rise of the United States of America, and the resultant dynamism of the North Atlantic economy.

Soft Power theory was refuted during its first year of existence

**[“Nye” in this context is the expert on “soft power” theory Prof. Joseph Nye]**

Abe Greenwald 2010. ( policy adviser and online editor with the Foreign Policy Initiative in Washington) July/Aug 2010 “THE SOFT-POWER FALLACY” <http://www.think-israel.org/greenwald.softpowerfallacy.html>

Like Francis Fukuyama's essay "The End of History," soft-power theory was a creative and appealing attempt to make sense of America's global purpose. Unlike Fukuyama's theory, however, which the new global order seemed to support for nearly a decade, Nye's was basically refuted by world events in its very first year. In the summer of 1990, a massive contingent of Saddam Hussein's forces invaded Kuwait and effectively annexed it as a province of Iraq. Although months earlier Nye had asserted that "geography, population, and raw materials are becoming somewhat less important," the fact is that Saddam invaded Kuwait because of its geographic proximity, insubstantial military, and plentiful oil reserves. Despite Nye's claim that "the definition of power is losing its emphasis on military force," months of concerted international pressure, including the passage of a UN resolution, failed to persuade Saddam to withdraw. In the end, only overwhelming American military power succeeded in liberating Kuwait.

Soft power theories are stretched so far that they mean almost nothing

Dr. Ying Fan 2008. (senior lecturer in marketing at Brunel University, West London, Place Branding and Public Diplomacy) May 2008 SOFT POWER: POWER OF ATTRACTION OR CONFUSION? (parentheses and ellipses in original) <http://bura.brunel.ac.uk/bitstream/2438/1594/3/FullText.pdf>

With more examples added Nye seems to miss the point as to what soft power exactly is as the concept has been so stretched that the term comes to mean almost everything and therefore almost nothing (Hoagland, 2004). In all these examples given by Nye resources, sources (cause) and impact (effect) are mixed up. It is important to note sources and resources are not power per se but potential for power. The owners of these resources have to convert them into power.

Nye’s theories are flawed: Soft power is impossible to use in any organised fashion. It confuses individual emotional ties with diplomatic influence

Dr. Ying Fan 2008. (senior lecturer in marketing at Brunel University, West London, Place Branding and Public Diplomacy) , “Soft power: Powerof attraction or confusion?” May 2008 <http://www.palgrave-journals.com/pb/journal/v4/n2/full/pb20084a.html>

Despite its popularity, soft power remains power of confusion. This paper examines the concept, with a special focus on the nature and sources of soft power. Nye's notion of soft power is largely ethnocentric and based on the assumption that there is a link between attractiveness and the ability to influence others in international relations. This poses two problems: First, a country has many different actors. Some of them like the attraction and others do not. Whether the attraction will lead to the ability to influence the policy of the target country depends on which groups in that country find it attractive and how much control they have on policy making. Secondly, policy making at the state level is far more complicated than at the personal level, and has different dynamics that emphasise the rational considerations. This leaves little room for emotional elements, thus significantly reducing the effect of soft power. Given the nature of soft power being uncontrollable and unpredictable, it would be impossible to wield soft power in any organised and coordinated fashion, as Nye suggested. Furthermore, the relationship between two countries is shaped by many complex factors. It is ultimately decided by the geopolitics and strategic interests of nations, in which soft power may play only a limited role.

Soft power is confusing: Prof. Nye doesn’t give a simple definition, and the concepts are not clearly applicable to nations

Dr. Ying Fan 2008. (senior lecturer in marketing at Brunel University, West London, Place Branding and Public Diplomacy) May 2008 SOFT POWER: POWER OF ATTRACTION OR CONFUSION? (parentheses and ellipses in original) <http://bura.brunel.ac.uk/bitstream/2438/1594/3/FullText.pdf>

Soft power, on the other hand, is a rather confusing concept. Nye does not give a simple definition. Instead, he describes soft power variously as (Nye, 2004a):  
- ...the ability to shape the preferences of others (p5).  
- ...the ability to attract, and attraction often leads to acquiescence (p6)  
- ... the ability to get others to want the outcome you want because of your cultural or ideological appeal (p11)  
- A country may obtain the outcomes it wants in world politics because other countries –admiring values, emulating its example, aspiring to its level of prosperity and openness –want to follow it (p5)  
- A country may obtain the outcomes it wants in world politics because other countries –admiring values, emulating its example, aspiring to its level of prosperity and openness –want to follow it (p5)  
- …a key element of leadership. The power to attract –to get others to want what you want, to frame the issues, to set the agenda (Nye, 2004b).  
A person is said to have power due to having one of the following attributes or a combination of them: status, authority, reputation, money, knowledge and beauty (Davies, 1991). Individuals such as Nelson Mandela or Mother Teresa have soft power because of their reputation. However, a nation is far more complicated than a person. It is unclear how attraction or attractiveness leads to power or influence in the context of a nation.

SOFT POWER SOLVENCY FAILURES

Islam appeals to people who don’t want a “McWorld”. We shouldn’t assume other people want American culture

Dr. Payam Akhavan 2012. (Professor of International Law at McGill University, first Legal Advisor to the Prosecutor’s Office of the International Criminal Tribunals at The Hague) 7 June 2012 “A Candid Discussion with Payam Akhavan” <http://foreignpolicyblogs.com/2012/06/07/candid-discussion-payam-akhavan/>

We should also bear in mind that the appeal of Islam is also partially a response to the cultural excesses of what Professor Barber calls “McWorld”. As people struggle to come to terms with modernity, they must determine how to define themselves culturally, how to maintain spiritual and communal values that were long forgotten in most Western cultures. People do not sacrifice their lives for freedom merely so they can enjoy consumer capitalism and the cultural and spiritual wasteland that it leads to. There shouldn’t be an assumption that just because Muslim people want freedom, that they also want to import wholesale American culture, that they have no civilization and culture of their own, or that such heritage cannot be adapted to the modern world.

Soft power is utterly meaningless in today’s world due to multiple big problems it cannot solve

Prof. Ilha Niaz 2010. **(**Assistant Professor of History at the Quaid-i-Azam University in Islamabad) 10 Jan 2010 “The mirage of soft power in a globalized world” <http://archives.dawn.com/archives/67345>

Large parts of the world, including South Asia, are experiencing administrative breakdown and gross socioeconomic inequities. Other parts of the world are likely to spend the next generation coping with the fallout of US imperial misadventures in Afghanistan and Iraq. On an overpopulated, resource-starved, economically imbalanced, and environmentally degraded planet, soft power will be utterly meaningless. Those powers that possess the requisite ruthlessness, military capability, material superiority, effective administration and political will, are likely to prevail. Those powers that are deficient on these and other indices of hard power are likely to perish or be marginalised.

Presidents Jimmy Carter and Obama both tried “soft power” and both failed: Our adversaries view it as a sign of weakness

Dr. James Carafano 2011. ( PhD; leading expert in defense affairs, intelligence, military operations and strategy, and homeland security at The Heritage Foundation; former Assistant Professor at the U.S. Military Academy in West Point, N.Y. and fleet professor at the U.S. Naval War College) 30 Jan 2011 More Carter Redux in the Middle East <http://blog.heritage.org/2011/01/30/more-carter-redux-in-the-middle-east/>

From the outset of the Obama presidency and the emergence of the Obama Doctrine, the similarities between this Administration and that of Jimmy Carter have been striking. Like Obama, Carter trumpeted soft power and international institutions as the means to solve the most perplexing foreign policy problems. The programs of both Presidents hinged on the cooperation of adversaries who interpreted the U.S. initiatives as signs of weakness, and in the second half of their presidencies, both faced the prospect of sharp reversals.

Soft power cannot be exploited in any coherent way

Dr. Ying Fan 2008. (senior lecturer in marketing at Brunel University, West London, Place Branding and Public Diplomacy) May 2008 SOFT POWER: POWER OF ATTRACTION OR CONFUSION? <http://bura.brunel.ac.uk/bitstream/2438/1594/3/FullText.pdf>

As soft power rests on attraction, the "power" lies not in the hand of the party who possesses it, but in the response and reaction of the party who receives it. Because of this unique nature of soft power, a nation‟s soft power over another nation is not a factor that can be exploited purposely in any coherent way (Blechman, 2005). Next, given the nature of the concept – intangible, uncontrollable and unpredictable, it would be impossible to wield soft power in an organised and coordinated fashion as Nye (2005) suggested.

Great nations cannot survive on soft power alone

Prof. Paul Kennedy 2008. (professor of history and director of international security studies at Yale University) Soft power is on the up. But it can always be outmuscled, THE GUARDIAN (British newspaper) 18 Nov 2008 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2008/nov/18/usa-obama-economy-military>

The sweeping election of Obama has generated extraordinary goodwill; who, apart from the most purblind, has not been excited? But such positivity must be tempered by the realisation that he comes into office during one of the most difficult and troubled periods in modern history; that he is to run a country far less dominant, relatively, than at the time of Wilson, Truman and Kennedy; and that, while his international attractiveness is strong, great nations cannot survive on soft power alone.

Not successful in all contexts. Though he advocates for Soft Power, Prof. Joseph Nye admits in 2010 that the success of Soft Power depends on particular contexts and does not always produce the desired outcomes.

Prof. Joseph Nye 2010. (Harvard professor, advocate for and originator of the term “soft power”) 4 Mar 2010 testimony before the US House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs, <http://belfercenter.ksg.harvard.edu/files/Testimony-of-Joseph-S-Nye-mar-04-2010.pdf>

Sometimes skeptics complain that soft power and attraction do not always produce the outcomes we seek. That is true. Soft power is unlikely to get Kim Jong Il to give up his nuclear weapons, and President Obama’s popularity did not divert the Dutch government from its plan to withdraw troops from Afghanistan. Particular events like this have multiple causes, but this is true of all types of power, not just soft power. The conversion of power resources into preferred outcomes always depends upon particular contexts.

Soft Power doesn’t matter without Hard Power

Prof. Ilha Niaz 2010. (Assistant Professor of History at the Quaid-i-Azam University in Islamabad) 10 Jan 2010 “The mirage of soft power in a globalized world” <http://archives.dawn.com/archives/67345>

With US hard power in decline following a decade of imperial misadventures, flawed domestic policies and strategic overextension, there is little doubt that Washington`s ability to influence the global village is also going to decrease. But that doesn`t mean that people will stop wearing jeans or listening to rap music or eating at Pizza Hut. Soft power just doesn`t matter strategically or diplomatically unless backed by hard power.

AFF CAN’T ACHIEVE SOFT POWER

Soft Power = communication, foreign aid, economic reconstruction, and talking to the people

**Analysis: If these aren't in the AFF plan mandates, then they aren't generating soft power**

Anne-Katrin Arnold 2009. (consultant to the World Bank Communication for Governance & Accountability Program; also a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg School for Communication) Aug 2009, "Soft Power: Talking to the People" <http://blogs.worldbank.org/publicsphere/soft-power-talking-people> (italics and parentheses in original)

At the core of soft power are strategic communication, foreign aid, civic action, empowerment, and economic reconstruction and development. In essence (and simplified) it's about working with the people in country A to make them support country B and demand from government A to work with government B. It involves *talking to the people*: engaging foreign publics, winning public opinion.

One policy not enough – we need multiple factors to regain soft power

**Analysis: If these other factors aren’t in the AFF plan, then Soft Power advantages don’t happen**

Dr. Richard Bush 2009. (PhD, Columbia Univ.; former Director for Minority Liaison, U.S. House Committee on International Relations; Director of Center for Northeast Asian Policy Studies, “On the Eve of Obama's Inauguration: American Soft Power in Asia” Jan 2009 <http://www.brookings.edu/opinions/2009/01_asia_bush.aspx?emc=lm&m=221447&l=56&v=20759>

Nor will it be easy or quick to restore the United States to a position where Asian countries will be inclined to accept U.S. proposals on major issues out of respect for what America is and what it has done. When, for example, will Asian economic leaders listen to—much less take—American advice on financial liberalization after the sub-prime mortgage scandal, the credit freeze, and the government takeover of American financial institutions? How long after Abu Ghraib will it be before the Chinese government takes seriously the entreaties of U.S. diplomats that it end torture? Creating influence through attraction is not going to be easy for a while. It will take time to regain the legitimacy to lead through soft power, which is the best way to lead. The United States therefore needs to consider what should be done to restore its soft power. Whether we want to do so is another question that bears on the question of domestic support. I would argue that our stakes in the stability and prosperity of the global system are still too great for us to not play a role in future agenda-setting, whatever other countries do. Some of the steps for rebuilding soft power have nothing to do with Asia, since the creation of our soft-power deficit was the result of policies outside the region. As Ashley Tellis says, it has to do with redefining the U.S. role in the world. It has to do with rebuilding our national strength and competitiveness, particularly economic. It has to do with reaffirming our core values in a meaningful way, particular those that were called into question by the conduct of the war in Iraq. It includes having a “decent respect for the opinions of mankind,” that is, accepting that the views of other states will set limits on U.S. action even as we seek to shape those views in an active way. In that regard, two capabilities of the U.S. government are badly in need of renovation. The first is classical diplomacy, instead of the current mode of “stating positions and then restating positions.” The second is public diplomacy, instead of “a pedestrian propaganda mill that is neither effective nor credible.” With respect to Asia, rebuilding our soft power first of all means showing up. On the one hand, senior officials up to and including the president should make every effort to attend those meetings in Asia that their counterparts attend.

DISADVANTAGES - Soft Power is Bad

1. Soft Power Turn: Attempting to increase soft power results in reduced US respect abroad

Dr. Ying Fan 2008. (senior lecturer in marketing at Brunel University, West London, Place Branding and Public Diplomacy) May 2008 SOFT POWER: POWER OF ATTRACTION OR CONFUSION? <http://bura.brunel.ac.uk/bitstream/2438/1594/3/FullText.pdf>

Nye believes that anti-Americanism led to the decline of American‟s soft power. But in fact the opposite is true. Anti-Americanism is not just the result of the US foreign policies but a response to the ubiquity of its culture. The "over-success" of American’s soft power has brewed resentment and increased anti-Americanism. This is evidenced by the fact that even in European countries – American’s traditional allies – a majority of people regard the spread of American culture as a bad thing (The Pew Research Centre, 2002). Because of this confusion over cause and effect, the solution offered by Nye to enhance US soft power is in fact a part of the cause of the problem.

2. Soft Power emphasis enables our enemies

Link: Foreign policy retreat. Soft Power empowers our enemies to undermine US interests

Dr. James Carafano 2009. PhD (leading expert in defense affairs, intelligence, military operations and strategy, and homeland security at The Heritage Foundation; former Assistant Professor at the U.S. Military Academy in West Point, N.Y. and fleet professor at the U.S. Naval War College) 26 Oct 2009, "Why 1978 was a very bad year," (brackets added; parentheses in original) [http://www.washingtonexaminer.com/james-carafano-why-1978-was-a-very-bad-year/article/33422](http://www.google.com/url?q=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.washingtonexaminer.com%2Fjames-carafano-why-1978-was-a-very-bad-year%2Farticle%2F33422&sa=D&sntz=1&usg=AFQjCNHrAZfMX_cY3Wqfr1ebpl0CToYSPw" \t "_blank)

In fact, Obama has already outdone President Carter, winning a Nobel Prize before rather than after he has done anything. Of course, this merely places additional pressure on the administration to continue relying on the tools (arms control agreements, the United Nations and such) lauded by the Nobel judges. Sadly, warning signs that others will use the administration's "soft power uber alles [above all]" strategy to undermine U.S. interests are already cropping up.  
**»** The Russians are demanding more and more at the strategic-arms negotiating table, while giving their U.S. counterparts less and less.  
**»** Iran and North Korea are running out the clock, sending diplomats into the umpteenth round of talks while their scientists toil feverishly advancing their nuclear and missile programs.  
**»** In Latin America, socialist dictators continue to outmaneuver the White House.  
Meanwhile, new al Qaeda-related or -inspired plots appear to be popping up every day. Three in the United States were thwarted last month. A Boston-based plot was thwarted just last week. Turkey uncovered another network the week before that. In Afghanistan, the Taliban is on the march. And the year is not over yet. The rhetoric of soft power is inspiring and ever hopeful. But unless the nation seems firmly committed to backing that soft power with some hard muscle, those with no love of America will interpret the rhetoric as the vapid mooings of a nation in retreat.

Impact: Threatens stability of international order

Mark Silverberg 2009. (attorney with a Masters Degree in Political Science and International Relations from the University of Manitoba, Canada. A former member of the Canadian Justice Department, He has lectured extensively on subjects of counterterrorism, jihadism, homeland security issues and intelligence matters) 1 Apr 2009 "Dealing with the Devil" <http://www.americanthinker.com/articles/2009/04/obamas_faustian_bargain.html>

The assumption that the Obama administration’s diplomatic initiative to our enemies will enhance America’s image in the world and increase our security is becoming more questionable with each passing day. What we have learned is that dialogue and accommodation with messianic, apocalyptic Islamic regimes like Iran are not only pointless, but threaten the stability of the international order.

3. Backlash and Backfire

Soft power can make enemies, breeds resentment and bitterness

Dr. Ying Fan 2008. (senior lecturer in marketing at Brunel University, West London, Place Branding and Public Diplomacy) May 2008 SOFT POWER: POWER OF ATTRACTION OR CONFUSION? <http://bura.brunel.ac.uk/bitstream/2438/1594/3/FullText.pdf>

Power has always given rise to the dichotomy of attraction and repulsion, whether soft or hard (Opelz, 2004). Soft power too can breed resentment and bitterness. Even Nye (2004b) himself admits that no country likes to feel manipulated, even by soft power. Power is power, no matter if it is soft or hard, there is no difference in terms of its utility: influencing people‟s mind and behaviour to achieve one‟s objectives. Soft power is still power and it can still make enemies (Joffe, 2006a).

Backfire: Soft power may be counterproductive

Dr. Ying Fan 2008. (senior lecturer in marketing at Brunel University, West London, Place Branding and Public Diplomacy) May 2008 SOFT POWER: POWER OF ATTRACTION OR CONFUSION? (parentheses and ellipses in original) <http://bura.brunel.ac.uk/bitstream/2438/1594/3/FullText.pdf>

Even Nye (2004a) has to admit, what soft power can influence is not the policymaking itself but only the “environment for policy”. Soft power may be counterproductive because societies react differently to American culture, the working of which are extremely complex, not least because of the diversity, as Fehrenbach and Poiger point out, in the “processes by which societies adopt, adapt, and reject American culture” (Opelz, 2004).

Backlash: Excess soft power breeds resentment and rage

Dr. Ying Fan 2008. (senior lecturer in marketing at Brunel University, West London, Place Branding and Public Diplomacy) May 2008 SOFT POWER: POWER OF ATTRACTION OR CONFUSION? (parentheses and ellipses in original) <http://bura.brunel.ac.uk/bitstream/2438/1594/3/FullText.pdf>

In a context dominated by hard power considerations soft power is meaningless (Blechman, 2004). The dark side of soft power is largely ignored by Nye. Excessive power, either hard or soft, may not be a good thing. In the affairs of nations, too much hard power ends up breeding not submission but resistance. Likewise, big soft power does not bend hearts; it twists minds in resentment and rage (Joffe, 2006b).