

# Public Diplomacy and Soft Power

By  
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Soft power is the ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes one wants through attraction rather than coercion or payment. A country's soft power rests on its resources of culture, values, and policies. A smart power strategy combines hard and soft power resources. Public diplomacy has a long history as a means of promoting a country's soft power and was essential in winning the cold war. The current struggle against transnational terrorism is a struggle to win hearts and minds, and the current overreliance on hard power alone is not the path to success. Public diplomacy is an important tool in the arsenal of smart power, but smart public diplomacy requires an understanding of the roles of credibility, self-criticism, and civil society in generating soft power.

*Keywords:* power; soft power; hard power; smart power; public diplomacy

**P**ower is the ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes you want. One can affect others' behavior in three main ways: threats of coercion ("sticks"), inducements and payments ("carrots"), and attraction that makes others want what you want. A country may obtain the outcomes it wants in world politics because other countries want to follow it, admiring its values, emulating its example, and/or aspiring to its level of prosperity and openness. In this sense, it is important to set the agenda and

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attract others in world politics, and not only to force them to change through the threat or use of military or economic weapons. This soft power—getting others to want the outcomes that you want—co-opts people rather than coerces them.<sup>1</sup>

Soft power rests on the ability to shape the preferences of others. At the personal level, we all know the power of attraction and seduction. Political leaders have long understood the power that comes from setting the agenda and determining the framework of a debate. Soft power is a staple of daily democratic politics. The ability to establish preferences tends to be associated with intangible assets such as an attractive personality, culture, political values and institutions, and policies that are seen as legitimate or having moral authority. If I can get you to want to do what I want, then I do not have to force you to do what you do *not* want.

Soft power is not merely influence, though it is one source of influence. Influence can also rest on the hard power of threats or payments. And soft power is more than just persuasion or the ability to move people by argument, though that is an important part of it. It is also the ability to entice and attract. In behavioral terms, soft power is attractive power. In terms of resources, soft power resources are the assets that produce such attraction. Whether a particular asset is an attractive soft power resource can be measured through polls or focus groups. Whether that attraction in turn produces desired policy outcomes has to be judged in each particular case. But the gap between power measured as resources and power judged by the outcomes of behavior is not unique to soft power. It occurs with all forms of power. Before the fall of France in 1940, for example, Britain and France had more tanks than Germany, but that advantage in military power resources did not accurately predict the outcome of the battle.

This distinction between power measured in behavioral outcomes and power measured in terms of resources is important for understanding the relationship between soft power and public diplomacy. In international politics, the resources that produce soft power arise in large part from the values an organization or country expresses in its culture, in the examples it sets by its internal practices and policies, and in the way it handles its relations with others. Public diplomacy is an instrument that governments use to mobilize these resources to communicate with and attract the publics of other countries, rather than merely their governments. Public diplomacy tries to attract by drawing attention to these potential resources through broadcasting, subsidizing cultural exports, arranging exchanges, and so forth. But if the content of a country's culture, values, and policies are not attractive, public diplomacy that "broadcasts" them cannot produce soft power. It may produce just the opposite. Exporting Hollywood films full of nudity and violence to conservative Muslim countries may produce repulsion rather than soft power. And Voice of America (VOA) broadcasts that extol the virtues of government policies that are seen by others as arrogant will be dismissed as mere propaganda and not produce the soft power of attraction.

Governments sometimes find it difficult to control and employ soft power, but that does not diminish its importance. It was a former French foreign minister who observed that Americans are powerful because they can "inspire the dreams and desires of others, thanks to the mastery of global images through film and

television and because, for these same reasons, large numbers of students from other countries come to the United States to finish their studies” (Vedrine and Moisi 2001, 3).

Soft power is an important reality. Those self-styled realists who deny the importance of soft power are like people who do not understand the power of seduction. They succumb to the “concrete fallacy” that espouses that something is not a power resource unless you can drop it on a city or on your foot.<sup>2</sup> During a meeting with President John F. Kennedy, senior statesman John J. McCloy exploded in anger about paying attention to popularity and attraction in world politics: “‘world opinion?’ I don’t believe in world opinion. The only thing that matters is power.” But as Arthur Schlesinger noted, “like Woodrow Wilson and Franklin Roosevelt, Kennedy understood that the ability to attract others and move opinion was an element of power” (McCloy and Schlesinger, as quoted in Haefele 2001, 66). The German editor Josef Joffe once argued that America’s soft power was even larger than its economic and military assets. “U.S. culture, low-brow or high, radiates outward with an intensity last seen in the days of the Roman Empire—but with a novel twist. Rome’s and Soviet Russia’s cultural sway stopped exactly at their military borders. America’s soft power, though, rules over an empire on which the sun never sets” (Joffe 2001, 43). But cultural soft power can be undercut by policies that are seen as illegitimate. In recent years, particularly after the invasion of Iraq, American soft power has declined. For example, a 2007 BBC opinion poll reported that across twenty-five countries, half of those polled said the United States played a mainly negative role in the world (*New York Times* 2007).

## The Development of Public Diplomacy

The soft power of a country rests primarily on three resources: its culture (in places where it is attractive to others), its political values (when it lives up to them at home and abroad), and its foreign policies (when they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority). Culture is the set of practices that create meaning for a society, and it has many manifestations. It is common to distinguish between high culture such as literature, art, and education, which appeals to elites; and popular culture, which focuses on mass entertainment. After its defeat in the Franco-Prussian War, the French government sought to repair the nation’s shattered prestige by promoting its language and literature through the Alliance Française created in 1883. “The projection of French culture abroad thus became a significant component of French diplomacy” (Pells 1997, 31). Italy, Germany, and others soon followed suit. World War I saw a rapid acceleration of efforts to deploy soft power, as most of those governments established offices to propagandize their cause. The United States not only established its own office but was a central target of other countries. During the early years before American entry into the war, Britain and Germany competed to create favorable images in American public opinion.

The United States was a relative latecomer to the idea of using information and culture for the purposes of diplomacy. In 1917, President Woodrow Wilson established a Committee on Public Information directed by his friend, the newspaperman George Creel. In Creel's words, his task was "a vast enterprise in salesmanship, the world's greatest adventure in advertising" (Rosenberg 1982, 79). Creel insisted that his office's activities did not constitute propaganda and were merely educational and informative. But the facts belied his denials. Among other things, Creel organized tours, churned out pamphlets on "the Gospel of Americanism," established a government-run news service, made sure that motion picture producers received wartime allotments of scarce materials, and saw to it that the films portrayed America in a positive light. The office aroused suspicions sufficient enough that it was abolished shortly after the return of peace.

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The advent of radio in the 1920s led many governments into the arena of foreign-language broadcasting, and in the 1930s, communists and fascists competed to promote favorable images to foreign publics. In addition to its foreign-language radio broadcasts, Nazi Germany perfected the propaganda film. As Britain's Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden realized about the new communications in 1937, "It is perfectly true, of course, that good cultural propaganda cannot remedy the damage done by a bad foreign policy, but it is no exaggeration to say that even the best of diplomatic policies may fail if it neglects the task of interpretation and persuasion which modern conditions impose" (as quoted in Wagnleitner 1994, 50).

By the late 1930s, the Roosevelt administration was convinced that "America's security depended on its ability to speak to and to win the support of people in other countries" (Pells 1997, 33). President Roosevelt was particularly concerned about German propaganda in Latin America. In 1938, the State Department established a Division of Cultural Relations, and supplemented it two years later with an Office of Inter-American Affairs that, under Nelson Rockefeller, actively promoted

information about America and its culture to Latin America. In 1939, Germany beamed seven hours of programming a week to Latin America, and the United States about twelve. By 1941, the United States broadcast around the clock.

After America's entry into the war, the government's cultural offensive became global in scope. In 1942, Roosevelt created an Office of Wartime Information (OWI) to deal in presumably accurate information, while an intelligence organization, the Office of Strategic Service, included among its functions the dissemination of disinformation. The OWI even worked to shape Hollywood into an effective propaganda tool, suggesting additions and deletions to many films and denying licenses to others. And Hollywood executives were happy to cooperate out of a mixture of patriotism and self-interest. Well before the cold war, "American corporate and advertising executives, as well as the heads of Hollywood studios, were selling not only their products but also America's culture and values, the secrets of its success, to the rest of the world" (Pells 1997, xiii). Wartime soft power resources were created partly by the government and in part independently. What became known as the Voice of America grew rapidly during World War II. Modeled after the BBC, by 1943 it had twenty-three transmitters delivering news in twenty-seven languages.

With the growth of the Soviet threat in the cold war, public diplomacy continued to expand, but so did a debate about the extent to which it should be a captive purveyor of government information or an independent representative of American culture. Special radios were added such as Radio Liberty and Radio Free Europe, which used exiles to broadcast to the Eastern bloc. More generally, as the cold war developed, there was a division between those who favored the slow media of cultural diplomacy—art, books, exchanges—which had a "trickle down effect," and those who favored the fast information media of radio, movies, and newsreels, which promised more immediate and visible "bang for the buck." Although the tension has never fully been resolved to this day, public diplomacy of both sorts helped to erode faith in communism behind the Iron Curtain.<sup>3</sup> When the Berlin Wall finally went down in 1989, it collapsed under the assault of hammers and bulldozers, not an artillery barrage.

With the end of the cold war, Americans were more interested in budget savings than in investments in soft power. From 1963 to 1993, the federal budget grew fifteen-fold, but the United States Information Agency (USIA) budget grew only six and a half times larger. The USIA had more than 12,000 employees at its peak in the mid-1960s but only 9,000 in 1994 and 6,715 on the eve of its takeover by the U.S. State Department (U.S. Department of State n.d.). Soft power seemed expendable. Between 1989 and 1999, the budget of the USIA, adjusted for inflation, decreased 10 percent. While government-funded radio broadcasts reached half the Soviet population every week and between 70 and 80 percent of the populace of Eastern Europe during the cold war, at the beginning of the new century, a mere 2 percent of Arabs heard the VOA (Blinken 2003, 287). Resources for the USIA mission in Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim nation, were cut in half. From 1995 to 2001, academic and cultural exchanges dropped from forty-five thousand to twenty-nine thousand annually, while many

accessible downtown cultural centers and libraries were closed (Johnson and Dale 2003, 4). In comparison, the BBC World Service had half again as many weekly listeners around the globe as did the VOA. Public diplomacy had become so identified with fighting the cold war that few Americans noticed that with an information revolution occurring, soft power was becoming more rather than less important. Government policies reflected popular attitudes. For example, the percentage of foreign affairs articles on the front page of U.S. newspapers dropped by nearly half (Hiatt 2007). Only after September 2001 did Americans begin to rediscover the importance of investing in the instruments of soft power.

## Public Diplomacy in an Information Age

Promoting positive images of one's country is not new, but the conditions for projecting soft power have transformed dramatically in recent years. For one thing, nearly half the countries in the world are now democracies. The competitive cold war model has become less relevant as a guide for public diplomacy. While there is still a need to provide accurate information to populations in countries like Burma or Syria, where the government controls information, there is a new need to garner favorable public opinion in countries like Mexico and Turkey, where parliaments can now affect decision making. For example, when the United States sought support for the Iraq war, such as Mexico's vote in the UN or Turkey's permission for American troops to cross its territory, the decline of American soft power created a disabling rather than an enabling environment for its policies. Shaping public opinion becomes even more important where authoritarian governments have been replaced. Public support was not so important when the United States successfully sought the use of bases in authoritarian countries, but it turned out to be crucial under the new democratic conditions in Mexico and Turkey. Even when foreign leaders are friendly, their leeway may be limited if their publics and parliaments have a negative image of the United States. In such circumstances, diplomacy aimed at public opinion can become as important to outcomes as the traditional classified diplomatic communications among leaders.

Information is power, and today a much larger part of the world's population has access to that power. Long gone are the days when "small teams of American foreign service officers drove Jeeps to the hinterlands of Latin America and other remote regions of the world to show reel-to-reel movies to isolated audiences" (Ross 2003, 252). Technological advances have led to a dramatic reduction in the cost of processing and transmitting information. The result is an explosion of information, and that has produced a "paradox of plenty" (Simon 1998, 30-33). Plenty of information leads to scarcity of attention. When people are overwhelmed with the volume of information confronting them, it is hard to know what to focus on. Attention rather than information becomes the scarce resource, and those who can distinguish valuable information from background clutter gain

power. Editors and cue-givers become more in demand, and this is a source of power for those who can tell us where to focus our attention.

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Among editors and cue-givers, credibility is the crucial resource and an important source of soft power. Reputation becomes even more important than in the past, and political struggles occur over the creation and destruction of credibility. Governments compete for credibility not only with other governments but with a broad range of alternatives including news media, corporations, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), intergovernmental organizations, and networks of scientific communities.

Politics has become a contest of competitive credibility. The world of traditional power politics is typically about whose military or economy wins. Politics in an information age “may ultimately be about whose story wins” (Arquilla and Ronfeldt 1999). Governments compete with each other and with other organizations to enhance their own credibility and weaken that of their opponents. Witness the struggle between Serbia and NATO to frame the interpretation of events in Kosovo in 1999 and the events in Serbia a year later. Prior to the demonstrations that led to the overthrow of Slobodan Milosevic in October 2000, 45 percent of Serb adults were tuned to Radio Free Europe and VOA. In contrast, only 31 percent listened to the state-controlled radio station, Radio Belgrade (Kaufman 2003). Moreover, the domestic alternative radio station, B92, provided access to Western news, and when the government tried to shut it down, it continued to provide such news on the Internet.

Reputation has always mattered in world politics, but the role of credibility becomes an even more important power resource because of the “paradox of plenty.” Information that appears to be propaganda may not only be scorned, but it may also turn out to be counterproductive if it undermines a country’s reputation for credibility. Exaggerated claims about Saddam Hussein’s weapons of mass destruction and ties to Al Qaeda may have helped mobilize domestic support for

the Iraq war, but the subsequent disclosure of the exaggeration dealt a costly blow to American credibility. Similarly, the treatment of prisoners at Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo in a manner inconsistent with American values led to perceptions of hypocrisy that could not be reversed by broadcasting pictures of Muslims living well in America. In fact, the slick production values of the new American satellite television station Alhurra did not make it competitive in the Middle East, where it was widely regarded as an instrument of government propaganda. Under the new conditions of the information age, more than ever, the soft sell may prove more effective than the hard sell. Without underlying national credibility, the instruments of public diplomacy cannot translate cultural resources into the soft power of attraction. The effectiveness of public diplomacy is measured by minds changed (as shown in interviews or polls), not dollars spent or slick production packages.

## The Dimensions of Current Public Diplomacy

In 1963, Edward R. Murrow, the noted broadcaster who was director of the USIA in the Kennedy administration, defined public diplomacy as interactions not only with foreign governments but primarily with nongovernmental individuals and organizations, and often presenting a variety of private views in addition to government views (as cited in Leonard 2002). Skeptics who treat the term *public diplomacy* as a mere euphemism for propaganda miss the point. Simple propaganda often lacks credibility and thus is counterproductive as public diplomacy. Good public diplomacy has to go beyond propaganda. Nor is public diplomacy merely public relations campaigns. Conveying information and selling a positive image is part of it, but public diplomacy also involves building long-term relationships that create an enabling environment for government policies.

The mix of direct government information with long-term cultural relationships varies with three dimensions of public diplomacy, and all three are important (Leonard 2002). The first and most immediate dimension is daily communications, which involves explaining the context of domestic and foreign policy decisions. After making decisions, government officials in modern democracies usually devote a good deal of attention to what and how to tell the press. But they generally focus on the domestic press. The foreign press has to be an important target for the first stage of public diplomacy. The first stage must also involve preparation for dealing with crises. A rapid response capability means that false charges or misleading information can be answered immediately. For example, when Al Jazeera broadcast Osama bin Laden's first videotape on October 7, 2001, U.S. officials initially sought to prevent both Al Jazeera and American networks from broadcasting further messages from bin Laden. But in the modern information age, such action is not only as frustrating as stopping the tide, but it runs counter to the value of openness that America wants to symbolize. A better response would be to prepare to flood Al Jazeera and other networks with American voices to counter bin Laden's hate speech. While Al Jazeera and other



foreign networks are hardly free of bias, they also need content. As their Washington bureau chief invited, "Please come talk to us, exploit us" (as quoted in Blinken 2003).

The second dimension is strategic communication, which develops a set of simple themes much as a political or advertising campaign does. The campaign plans symbolic events and communications over the course of the next year to reinforce central themes or to advance a particular government policy. Special themes focus on particular policy initiatives. For example, when the Reagan administration decided to implement NATO's two-track decision of deploying missiles while negotiating to remove existing Soviet intermediate-range missiles, the Soviet Union responded with a concerted campaign to influence European opinion and make the deployment impossible. The United States's themes stressed the multilateral nature of the NATO decision, encouraged European governments to take the lead when possible, and used nongovernmental American participants effectively to counter Soviet arguments. Even though polls in Germany showed residual concerns about the policy, they also showed that the German public was pro-American by a two-thirds majority. As former secretary of state George Schultz later concluded, "I don't think we could have pulled it off if it hadn't been for a very active program of public diplomacy. Because the Soviets were very active all through 1983 . . . with peace movements and all kinds of efforts to dissuade our friends in Europe from deploying" (as quoted in Tuch 1990).

The third dimension of public diplomacy is the development of lasting relationships with key individuals over many years through scholarships, exchanges, training, seminars, conferences, and access to media channels. Over time, about seven hundred thousand people, including two hundred heads of governments, have participated in American cultural and academic exchanges, and these exchanges helped to educate world leaders like Anwar Sadat, Helmut Schmidt, and Margaret Thatcher. Other countries have similar programs. For example, Japan has developed an interesting exchange program bringing six thousand young foreigners from forty countries each year to teach their languages in Japanese schools, with an alumni association to maintain the bonds of friendship that develop.<sup>4</sup>

Each of these three dimensions of public diplomacy plays an important role in helping to create an attractive image of a country that can improve its prospects for obtaining its desired outcomes. But even the best advertising cannot sell an unpopular product. Policies that appear as narrowly self-serving or arrogantly presented are likely to prohibit rather than produce soft power. At best, long-standing friendly relationships may lead others to be slightly more tolerant in their responses. Sometimes friends will give you the benefit of the doubt or forgive more willingly. This is what is meant by an enabling or a disabling environment for policy.

A communications strategy cannot work if it cuts against the grain of policy. Actions speak louder than words, and public diplomacy that appears to be mere window dressing for hard power projection is unlikely to succeed. In 2003, former speaker of the House of Representatives Newt Gingrich attacked the State

Department for failing to sell America's policy (Gingrich 2003). But selling requires paying attention to your markets, and on that dimension, the fault did not rest with the State Department. For example, Gingrich complained about America's removal from the UN Human Rights Commission in 2001. But that was in retaliation for America's failure to pay its UN dues (a policy that originated in the U.S. Congress) and the unilateral policies of the new Bush administration (that often originated in other executive departments despite the warnings of the State Department). As Republican Senator Charles Hagel noted, after 9/11 many people in Washington were suddenly talking about the need for renewed public diplomacy to "get our message out." But, he pointed out, "Madison Avenue-style packaging cannot market a contradictory or confusing message. We need to reassess the fundamentals of our diplomatic approach. . . . Policy and diplomacy must match, or marketing becomes a confusing and transparent barrage of mixed messages" (Hagel 2003).

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Effective public diplomacy is a two-way street that involves listening as well as talking. We need to understand better what is going on in the minds of others and what values we share. That is why exchanges are often more effective than mere broadcasting. By definition, soft power means getting others to want the same outcomes you want, and that requires an understanding of how they are hearing your messages and adapting them accordingly. It is crucial to understand the target audience. Yet research on foreign public opinion is woefully underfunded.

Preaching at foreigners is not the best way to convert them. Too often, political leaders think that the problem is simply that others lack information, and that if they simply knew what we know, they would see things our way. But all information goes through cultural filters, and declamatory statements are rarely heard as intended. Telling is far less influential than actions and symbols that show as well as tell. That is why the Bush administration initiatives on increasing development assistance or combating HIV/AIDS were potentially important before they vanished under the burdens of Iraq. It is interesting that provision of Tsunami relief to Indonesia in 2004 helped to reverse in part the precipitous slide in America's standing in Indonesian polls that began after the Iraq war.

Broadcasting is important but needs to be supplemented by effective “narrowcasting” via the Internet. While the Internet reaches only the elites in many parts of the world where most people are too poor to own a telephone (much less a computer), its flexibility and low cost allows for the targeting of messages to particular groups. It also provides a way to transfer information to countries where the government blocks traditional media. And the Internet can be used interactively and in combination with exchanges. Face-to-face communications remain the most effective, but they can be supplemented and reinforced by the Internet. For example, a combination of personal visits and Internet resources can create both virtual and real networks of young people who want to learn about each other’s cultures. Or the United States might learn a lesson from Japan and pay young foreigners to spend a year teaching their language and culture in American schools. The alumni of these programs could then form associations that would remain connected over the Internet.

Some countries accomplish almost all of their public diplomacy through actions rather than broadcasting. Norway is a good example. It has only 5 million people, lacks an international language or transnational culture, is not a central location or hub of organizations or multinational corporate brands, and is not a member of the European Union. Nonetheless, it has developed a voice and presence out of proportion to its modest size and resources “through a ruthless prioritization of its target audiences and its concentration on a single message—Norway as a force for peace in the world” (Leonard 2002, 53). The relevant activities include conflict mediation in the Middle East, Sri Lanka, and Colombia, as well as its large aid budget and its frequent participation in peace-keeping missions. Of course, not all Norwegian actions are consistent in their message. The domestic politics of whaling sometimes strikes a discordant note among environmentalists, but overall, Norway shows how a small country can exploit a diplomatic niche that enhances its image and role.

Not only do actions need to reinforce words, it is important to remember that the same words and images that are most successful in communicating to a domestic audience may have negative effects on a foreign audience. When President Bush used the term *axis of evil* to refer to Iraq, Iran, and North Korea in his 2002 State of the Union address, it was well received domestically. However, foreigners reacted against lumping together disparate diplomatic situations under a moralistic label. Similarly, while declaring a “war on terrorism” helped mobilize public and congressional support after 9/11, many foreign publics believed that the United States was making cooperative efforts against terrorism more difficult, particularly when the idea of a war of indefinite duration could be used to incarcerate prisoners at Guantanamo without full legal rights. In 2006, the British Foreign Office prohibited its diplomats from using the phrase because they believed that it played into Al Qaeda’s narrative of global jihad (Nye 2007).

Even when policy and communications are “in sync,” wielding soft power resources in an information age is difficult. For one thing, as mentioned earlier, government communications are only a small fraction of the total communications among societies in an age that is awash in information. Hollywood movies that

offend religious fundamentalists in other countries or activities by American missionaries that appear to devalue Islam will always be outside the control of government. Some skeptics have concluded that Americans should accept the inevitable and let market forces take care of the presentation of the country's culture and image to foreigners. Why pour money into VOA when CNN, MSNBC, or Fox can do the work for free? But such a conclusion is too facile. Market forces portray only the profitable mass dimensions of American culture, thus reinforcing foreign images of a one-dimensional country.

Developing long-term relationships is not always profitable in the short term, and thus leaving it simply to the market may lead to underinvestment. While higher education may pay for itself, and nonprofit organizations can help, many exchange programs would shrink without government support. Private companies must respond to market forces to stay in business. If there is no market for broadcasting in Serbo-Croatian or Pashtu, companies will not broadcast in those languages. And sometimes private companies will cave in to political pressures from foreign governments if that is better for profits—witness the way Rupert Murdoch dropped the BBC and its critical messages from his satellite television broadcasts to China in the 1990s.

At the same time, postmodern publics are generally skeptical of authority, and governments are often mistrusted. Thus, it often behooves governments to keep in the background and to work with private actors. Some NGOs enjoy more trust than governments do, and though they are difficult to control, they can be useful channels of communication. American foundations and NGOs played important roles in the consolidation of democracy in Eastern Europe after the end of the cold war. Similarly, for countries like Britain and the United States, which enjoy significant immigrant populations, such diasporas can provide culturally sensitive and linguistically skilled connections. Building relationships between political parties in different countries was pioneered by Germany, where the major parties have foundations for foreign contacts that are partly supported by government funds. During the Reagan administration, the United States followed suit when it established the National Endowment for Democracy, which provided funds for the National Democratic Institute and the International Republican Institute, as well as trade unions and chambers of commerce, to promote democracy and civil society overseas.

American companies can also play an important role. Their representatives and brands directly touch the lives of far more people than government representatives do. Some public-spirited businesspeople have suggested that companies develop and share sensitivity and communications training for corporate representatives before they are sent abroad. Companies can also take the lead in sponsoring specific public diplomacy projects such as “a technology company working with Sesame Workshop and a Lebanese broadcaster to co-produce an English language children’s program centered on technology, an area of American achievement that is universally admired” (Reinhard 2003, 30).

Another benefit to indirect public diplomacy is that it is often able to take more risks in presenting a range of views. It is sometimes domestically difficult

for the government to support presentation of views that are critical of its own policies. Yet such criticism is often the most effective way of establishing credibility. Part of America's soft power grows out of the openness of its society and polity and the fact that a free press, Congress, and courts can criticize and correct policies. When the government instruments avoid such criticism, they not only diminish their own credibility but also fail to capitalize on an important source of attraction for foreign elites (even when they are fiercely critical of government policies). In fact, some observers have suggested that the United States would get a better return on its investment if it turned Alhurra into an international C-SPAN that broadcasts seminars, town meetings, and congressional debates.

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The military can sometimes play an important role in the generation of soft power. In addition to the aura of power that is generated by its hard power capabilities, the military has a broad range of officer exchanges, joint training, and assistance programs with other countries in peacetime. The Pentagon's international military and educational training programs include sessions on democracy and human rights along with military training. In wartime, military psychological operations ("psyops") are an important way to influence foreign behavior. An enemy outpost, for example, can be destroyed by a cruise missile or captured by ground forces, or enemy soldiers can be convinced to desert and leave the post undefended. Such psyops often involve deception and disinformation that is effective in war but counterproductive in peace. The dangers of a military role in public diplomacy arise when it tries to apply wartime tactics in ambiguous situations. This is particularly tempting in the current ill-defined war on terrorism that blurs the distinction between normal civilian activities and traditional war. The net result of such efforts is to undercut rather than create soft power.

Finally, it is a mistake to see public diplomacy simply in adversarial terms. Sometimes there is a competition of "my information versus your information," but often there can be gains for both sides. German public diplomacy during the

TABLE 1  
SOFT POWER SOURCES, REFEREES, AND RECEIVERS

Sources of Soft Power	Referees for Credibility or Legitimacy	Receivers of Soft Power
Foreign policies	Governments, media, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), intergovernmental organizations (IGOs)	Foreign governments and publics
Domestic values and policies	Media, NGOs, IGOs	Foreign governments and publics
High culture	Governments, NGOs, IGOs	Foreign governments and publics
Pop culture	Media, markets	Foreign publics

cold war is a good example. In contrast to French public diplomacy, which sought to demonstrate independence from the United States, a key theme of German public diplomacy was to portray itself as a reliable ally in American eyes. Thus, German and American policy information goals were mutually reinforcing. Political leaders may share mutual and similar objectives—for example, the promotion of democracy and human rights. In such circumstances, there can be joint gains from coordination of public diplomacy programs. Cooperative public diplomacy can also help take the edge off suspicions of narrow national motives.

In addition, there are times when cooperation, including enhancement of the public image of multilateral institutions like NATO or the UN, can make it easier for governments to use such instruments to handle difficult tasks like peacekeeping, promoting democracy, or countering terrorism. For example, during the cold war, American public diplomacy in Czechoslovakia was reinforced by the association of the United States with international conventions that fostered human rights. In 1975, the multilateral Helsinki Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) legitimized discussion of human rights behind the Iron Curtain and had consequences that were unforeseen by those who signed its Final Act. As former CIA director Robert Gates concluded, despite initial American resistance, “the Soviets desperately wanted the CSCE, they got it, and it laid the foundations for the end of their empire” (as quoted in Thomas 2003, 257).

## Conclusions

Power in a global information age, more than ever, will include a soft dimension of attraction as well as the hard dimensions of coercion and inducement. The ability to combine hard and soft power effectively is “smart power.” The United

States managed to deploy smart power throughout much of the cold war. It has been less successful in melding soft and hard power in the period since 9/11. The current struggle against transnational terrorism is a struggle over winning hearts and minds, and the current overreliance on hard power alone is not the path to success. Public diplomacy is an important tool in the arsenal of smart power, but smart public diplomacy requires an understanding of the role of credibility, self-criticism, and the role of civil society in generating soft power. Public diplomacy that degenerates into propaganda not only fails to convince, but can undercut soft power.

## Notes

1. I first introduced this concept in *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* (Nye 1990). It builds on what Peter Bachrach and Morton Baratz (1963) called the “second face of power.” I developed the concept more fully in *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (Nye 2004).

2. The term is from Steven Lukes (2005).

3. See Yale Richmond (2003). Also, see Nye (2004, chap. 2).

4. See David McConnell (forthcoming).

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