

Nov 04, 2016 by [Lawrence Pintak](#)

Winning Smart Power ^[1]

Joe Nye reminds us that soft power is the power to get others to want what we want. By that definition, soft power advocates haven't done so well. Ironically, they have failed to use soft power to get others to want what they want – that is, more soft power.

It's easy to beat up on the current administration for failing to understand and deploy "soft power" and public diplomacy in their toolkit of foreign policy. Bush, Cheney and the gang prefer coercion, i.e. hard power.

But the previous Democratic campaigns have not done such a good job either. During the Kerry campaign there was pressure on the candidate to give a diplomacy/soft power speech. It would describe the 'third leg' of a triad of effective foreign policy instruments. Guess what? He never gave the speech. Whatever his campaign's reasoning, it demonstrated how little the Democratic candidate for president thought of the subject. Maybe he didn't want what we wanted.

Now, four years later, it is patently obvious to all that the administration's hapless mix of coercion and diplomacy has been a disaster. By using far too much of the former and far too little of the latter it has seriously compromised America's national interest. Washington lacks an effective combination of hard and soft power to make smart power. Instead of a smart power policy, we have a policy of 'stupid power'. Bush barely uses traditional or public diplomacy at all, and uses coercive power badly.

The disastrous consequences of "stupid power" have created an attentive public ripe for a serious conversation about the proper mix of convincing and coercing. But the amount of ink (or bits and bytes) devoted to developing a 'smart power' agenda is modest relative to talk about force structures, troop strength and intelligence reform. It is ironic that those most interested in seeing a better balance between hard and soft power have not been particularly adept at using soft power. They have failed to make a consistent and tough-minded public argument linking America's national security and soft power, and tying the "why" with the "how".

Between now and November 2008 believers in smart power will need to make a much more effective case for soft power if they hope to restore America's standing in the world. (For more discussion of 'smart power' check out <http://smartpowerblog.org>).
