

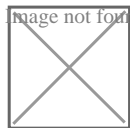
Nov 04, 2016 by **Rob Asghar**

American PD: Mission Still Not Accomplished ^[1]

If we consider public diplomacy in the narrower sense, as one government's efforts to speak to the public of another nation, President Bush's visit to Iraq this weekend would be a, well, "fitting" symbol of the state of American PD. He narrowly ducked rage that was aimed at him by a new manner of shoe bomber, one equipped with both ninja skill and ferocity.

So as the leader of the world's sole superpower attempted one simple soft-power victory lap amidst the hard-power effort that defines his tenure, the lasting image is even more ironic than that from his "Mission Accomplished" aircraft carrier photo op.

The issue should not simply be framed, for ourselves or for posterity, as whether the President "has done the right thing" in Iraq. The issue is whether he did the right thing in the right way with the right stakeholders – and that is where PD comes to the fore. Passions run high among many supporters of the President who insist that history will vindicate his decision-making. This approach is rigid paternalism in action – which can sometimes work well within a family, but more often will result in years of therapy and/or alienation. The farcical shoe incident reminds us of a grown child's sudden eruption up at a nauseatingly tense Thanksgiving family meal.



Forget for a moment such issues as the horribly bad manners of the Iraqi shoe-tossing journalist, or whether the American Secret Service needs to stand ready to intercept enemy footwear, or whether an American President is within his rights to retaliate with his own wing-tips. The shoes represent one of the most unfortunate souvenirs we can take from a conflict that may well cost the United States some \$3 trillion once it's all over.

There is always the risk that current problems will compel an incoming Obama administration to oversteer in the opposite direction, especially given that the President-Elect seems to have a far more PD-inclined temperament. There is also the probability that continued insults against the United States will convince American hardliners anew of the need to ignore soft-power and turn up the hard power. But for the moment, we have a reminder that the proper balancing act of hard and soft power is far from accomplished for the world's greatest power.
