

Europe, U.S. Must Rebalance Soft, Hard Power

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Current efforts to mend fences across the Atlantic suggest that rehabilitation of trans-Atlantic relations is just as important and difficult as stabilizing Iraq. The international system simply does not work very well when the United States and Europe are at loggerheads.

Now, as the atmosphere of the relationship improves, the United States and Europe would be well advised to look seriously at creating a new framework to make future cooperation more relevant to their common security interests.

Mastering 21st century security challenges obviously will require the effective use of military power to deal with tyrants like Saddam Hussein and terrorists like Osama bin Laden. It is good news that U.S.-European military cooperation has quietly expanded to global levels, with NATO taking on missions in Afghanistan and Iraq. But most of the struggle against terrorism and instability will require deployment of soft power as effectively as the United States used its hard power in Iraq.

Soft power is a nation's ability to influence events based on cultural attraction, ideology and international institutions, about which Joe Nye, a Harvard professor who was a high-ranking defense official during President Bill Clinton's administration, has written so eloquently. Soft power can help legitimize hard power. Hard power is essential to win wars, and often to give credibility to strategic choices, but soft power is vital to win and preserve the peace.

Today, Europe is too quick to shun military might (of which it has little) and too dependent on soft power (with which it is well endowed). Europe's hard power deficit undermines the gravitas of its diplomacy, particularly in dealing with its superpower U.S. ally.

The other part of the problem is that U.S. soft power policy approaches are all too often the neglected stepchild in American responses to global challenges. Until recently, post-World War II U.S. foreign policy had been designed to capitalize on America's abundant soft power, including the perception of the United States as a benign force in the international system. This meant the United States decided to cooperate with its allies rather than dominate them, that Washington made its position of strength less offensive to friends and allies by taking the lead in creating and operating multilateral organizations.

President Bush's administration has called into question this foundation for successful U.S. international leadership. The administration's unilateralist inclinations have shifted the balance between the hard and soft power instruments of American foreign policy.

Some Americans see this as evidence of decisive leadership. However, when the United States fails to bring its considerable soft power into play to support its actions, would-be followers become reluctant or even resistant, as happened in the trans-Atlantic crisis over Iraq. Public opinion studies already have shown how seriously this approach undermined global perceptions of the United States as a benign international actor.

The soft power deficit in U.S. foreign policy has put more focus on the EU's soft power capability. Some Europeans are tempted to shape the EU's soft power into a new pole for a

multipolar international system, designed to counterbalance the hard-power-heavy pole of the United States.

This temptation, like the U.S. unilateral temptation, threatens trans-Atlantic cooperation and therefore international stability. François Heisbourg, director of the Fondation pour la Recherche Stratégique think tank, has argued persuasively that his government should avoid the divisive rhetoric of multipolarity and pursue a multilateral agenda of cooperation with the United States and others.

In fact, if Europeans would move away from the multipolar temptation and the United States would rein in its unilateralist instincts, the recent U.S.-European divide could be bridged in a soft power multilateral solution. They could demonstrate their commitment to such a constructive direction by preparing a new Atlantic Community Treaty, to be signed by all NATO and EU members, creating a soft power framework of cooperation to complement NATO and the EU's work in the hard power arena. Such a structure would be ideally suited for dealing with the complex issues raised by globalization and the post-Sept. 11 terrorist and security challenges.

The treaty would create a new Euro-Atlantic organization to facilitate soft power cooperation. Regular consultations would take place among all members and candidates of NATO and the EU, following patterns already established in both organizations.

To consolidate Europe's institutional architecture, all items currently on the U.S.-EU agenda could be transferred to the new forum. The new body would not replace NATO or the European Union, but the broader framework of an Atlantic Community Treaty Organization would help shed new light on problems and provide additional options for shaping international coalitions.

To advance such a soft power alliance, Europe must show a greater willingness to blend its impressive soft power capabilities with hard power to provide coherent answers to tomorrow's challenges. And the United States must build a better balance between soft and hard power instruments in its foreign and security policy tool kit. In the long run, the effective marriage of U.S. and European soft and hard power capabilities would help prevent some problems from becoming military challenges, and enhance the ability of the world community to deal with post-conflict scenarios in ways that promote stability.

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