Dr. Terry Simmons on Soft Power, Hard Power and Smart Power

War or Peace: The Obama Doctrine and Soft Power in American Foreign Policy

Abstract:
Barack Obama was elected President of the United States in 2008 as the Bush administration expired after two terms consumed by the Bush Doctrine. Obama promised an end to the war in Iraq, to close Guantanamo Bay, and to begin a new soft-power American foreign policy approach of “talking to our enemies.” This approach, advocated by soft power diplomacy proponents such as Harvard Professor Joseph Nye Jr. introduced a war-weary nation to a new era of demilitarized American foreign policy objectives. In sharp contrast to the hard power advocates of the Bush Neo-cons post 9/11, the Obama Doctrine appeared to be antithetical to the proponents of the Global War on Terror (GWOT). It would give “peace a chance.”

This paper will examine the sharp contrast between these two competing foreign policy applications and focus on divergent and convergent points in the applications of these approaches. It also takes a critical look at where the two foreign policy philosophies have become complimentary and compatible within kinetic applications in the concurrent battle spaces of Iraq and Afghanistan and now the present engagement between the United States and the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq, the new Caliphate of Caliph Ibrahim, aka Abu Bakr al Baghdadi of Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI).

KEY CONCEPTS-KEY WORDS
Soft power-approaching foreign affairs through diplomacy
Hard power-emphasis on realism and kinetic actions
GWOT-Global War on Terror as the major component of the Bush Doctrine
DIME-Diplomacy, Information, Military and Economics” -national power is not limited to military power alone-whole of government approach
Obama Doctrine-Obama’s soft power demilitarization of American foreign policy approach
Drones-UAV warfare against violent jihads in terrorism hotspots
Realpolitik- The realist combination of both soft and hard power as a “carrots and sticks “approach to American foreign policy
After the attacks of September 11, 2001, a new era of American fighting doctrine appeared. Gone were the traditional battle space deployments of the Cold War era. Special Operations forces largely replaced frontal assaults with large forces. Special operators with new technologies replaced large armies with large weapons systems. After the United States was attacked by a violent NGO in New York and Washington causing mass destruction, terrorism and asymmetrical warfare perpetrated by a non-traditional enemy named al Qaeda, targets were painted by lasers, airstrikes took out strategic and tactical targets with smart bombs and other precision weaponry. Drones targeted al Qaeda leadership for decapitation. Afghanistan was defeated in six weeks in a counter-strike strategy. Al Qaeda and its supporting Taliban were replaced by the Northern Alliance Hamid Karzai government in Kabul. Iraq came next and Saddam Hussein was similarly dispatched with superior American forces very quickly.

When Iraqi insurgency subsequently challenged American blitzkrieg success, the war turned into a protracted struggle of asymmetric guerilla engagement. American battlefield losses quickly mounted and initial American successes eroded. Confidence in the world faded, domestic support waned, and political discord ushered in a fresh face from the democratic left.

Barack Obama was an academic, a constitutional lawyer at the Harvard Law Review. Not only was he inexperienced in military affairs and American foreign policy, he was a firm believer in due process and diplomacy as the first choice in the conduct of American foreign policy affairs. He ran for the presidency of the United States on a liberal democratic platform of introducing change in the way the United States was conducting its international political affairs. This represented a direct repudiation of Neo-Con politics and the over-reliance of the United States on the traditional American military establishment. He capitalized on the combination
of mounting American losses on the battlefield, economic stress of concurrent wars on the American economy and the general disillusionment of the American public with continuing disappointment in engagement in the Middle East itself. After the American public realized it had been deceived by the Bush administration regarding unfound weapons of mass destruction (WMD) all confidence in Bush policies evaporated.

Professor Joseph Nye, Jr. is University Distinguished Professor and former Dean of the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. He has served as Deputy Undersecretary of State for Security Assistance, Science, and Technology and chaired the National Security Group on nonproliferation of Nuclear Weapons. Along with his many distinguished positions in and out of academia and government, he has become known as the ‘father of soft power,’” in political theory circles (Nye 2011).

Dr. Nye, along with longtime collaborator Professor Robert Keohane of the Woodrow Wilson School of Princeton University, have pursued a shared philosophy that the United States has severely neglected the implementation of soft power, also referred to as diplomacy, in the execution of American foreign policy. Their collaborative case study illustrating this argument can be found throughout their combined works but is very clearly demonstrated in a 2011 publication titled The Future of Power (Nye 2011, 215-236). Their argument that the hegemony that the United States has enjoyed, especially in the military sphere since World War 2, has caused the foreign policy establishment’s application of soft power to atrophy. With the dominating advocacy of the Bush Doctrine research question: a fuller and more comprehensively effective foreign policy opportunity was squandered.
Germaine to the working hypothesis of this paper, that dichotomy continues to exist in the first and current Obama administrations and the current Obama Doctrine, fostering the thematic question for this National Security J-260 course: Obama War or Peace?

Barack Obama ended the war in Iraq. Now he has the Islamic State, or IS, to deal with. He tried to exit continued American conflict in the Greater Middle East but now is fully entangled on the battlefield to curtail the military and political advancement of the terrorist group Islamic State of the Levant (ISIL). He has been accused of encouraging the emergence of this situation due to his failure to leave residual American forces in Iraq upon the American military exit in 2011. The debate has become, like American presidents in the past such as Ronald Reagan, is the United Nations being manipulated by a terrorist organization hoping to continue a “bleed America” strategy to further drain American fiscal resources as well as perpetuate the psychological pressure of ensured continued American battle fatigue (Simmons 2014)?

Who determines if soft power or hard power is more appropriate in any given political situation? Are they mutually exclusive? Are they problematic? Who should make the calls? The President of the United States must obviously make the ultimate set of decisions. He is guided by his cadre of advisors, of course. They are military and diplomatic employing a vast array of tools ranging from diplomacy to kinetic warfare.

**Bibliography**

