



Stop Getting Mad, America, Get Smart

by Joseph Nye and Richard Armitage

The world is dissatisfied with American leadership. Shocked and frightened after 9/11, we put forward an angry face to the globe, not one that reflected the more traditional American values of hope and optimism, tolerance and opportunity.

This fearful approach has hurt the United States' ability to bring allies to its cause, but it is not too late to change. The nation should embrace a smarter strategy that blends our "hard" and "soft" power – our ability to attract and persuade, as well as our ability to use economic and military might. Whether it is ending the crisis in Pakistan, winning the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, deterring Iran's and North Korea's nuclear ambitions, managing China's rise or improving the lives of those left behind by globalization, the United States needs a broader, more balanced approach.

Lest anyone think that this approach is weak or naive, remember that Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates used a major speech on Nov. 26 "to make the case for strengthening our capacity to use 'soft' power and for better integrating it with 'hard' power." We – one Republican, one Democrat – have devoted our lives to promoting American preeminence as a force for good in the world. But the United States cannot stay on top without strong and willing allies and partners. Over the past six years, too many people have confused sharing the burden with relinquishing power. In fact, when we let others help, we are extending U.S. influence, not diminishing it.

Since 9/11, the war on terrorism has shaped this isolating outlook, becoming the central focus of U.S. engagement with the world. The threat from terrorists with global reach is likely to be with us for decades. But unless they have weapons of mass destruction, groups such as al-Qaeda pose no existential threat to the United States – unlike our old foes Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union.

In fact, al-Qaeda and its ilk hope to defeat us by using our own strength against us. They hope that we will blunder, overreact and turn world opinion against us. This is a deliberately set trap, and one whose grave strategic consequences extend far beyond the costs this nation would suffer from any small-scale terrorist attack, no matter how individually tragic and collectively painful. We cannot return to a nearsighted pre-9/11 mindset that underestimated the al-Qaeda threat, but neither can we remain stuck in a narrow post-9/11 mindset that alienates much of the world.

More broadly, when our words do not match our actions, we demean our character and moral standing. We cannot lecture others about democracy while we back dictators. We cannot denounce torture and waterboarding in other countries

and condone it at home. We cannot allow Cuba's Guantanamo Bay or Iraq's Abu Ghraib to become the symbols of American power.

The United States has long been the big kid on the block, and it will probably remain so for years to come. But its staying power has a great deal to do with whether it is perceived as a bully or a friend. States and nonstate actors can better address today's challenges when they can draw in allies; those who alienate potential friends stand at greater risk.

The past six years have demonstrated that hard power alone cannot secure the nation's long-term goals. The U.S. military remains the best in the world, even after having been worn down from years of war. We will have to invest in people and materiel to maintain current levels of readiness; as a percentage of gross domestic product, U.S. defense spending is actually well below Cold War levels. But an extra dollar spent on hard power will not necessarily bring an extra dollar's worth of security.

After all, security threats are no longer simply military threats. China is building two coal-fired power plants each week. U.S. hard power will do little to curb this trend, but U.S.-developed technology can make Chinese coal cleaner, which helps the environment and opens new markets for American industry.

In a changing world, the United States should become a smarter power by once again investing in the global good – by providing things that people and governments want but cannot attain without U.S. leadership. By complementing U.S. military and economic strength with greater investments in soft power, Washington can build the framework to tackle tough global challenges. We call this smart power.

Smart power is not about getting the world to like us. It is about developing a strategy that balances our hard (coercive) power with our soft (attractive) power. During the Cold War, the United States deterred Soviet aggression through investments in hard power. But as Gates noted late last month, U.S. leaders also realized that "the nature of the conflict required us to develop key capabilities and institutions – many of them non-military." So the United States used its soft power to rebuild Europe and Japan and to establish the norms and institutions that became the core of the international order for the past half-century. The Cold War ended under a barrage of hammers on the Berlin Wall rather than a barrage of artillery across the Fulda Gap precisely because of this integrated approach.

Specifically, the United States should renew its focus on five critical areas:

1. We should reinvigorate the alliances, partnerships and institutions that allow us to address numerous hazards at

once without having to build a consensus from scratch to respond to every new challenge.

2. We should create a Cabinet-level voice for global development to help Washington develop a more unified and integrated aid program that aligns U.S. interests with the aspirations of people worldwide, starting with global health.
3. We should reinvest in public diplomacy within the government and establish a nonprofit institution outside of it to build people-to-people ties, including doubling the annual appropriation to the Fulbright program.
4. We should sustain our engagement with the global economy by negotiating a “free trade core” of countries in the World Trade Organization willing to move directly to free trade on a global basis, and expand the benefits of free trade to include those left behind at home and abroad.
5. We should take the lead in addressing climate change and energy insecurity by investing more in technology and innovation.

Leadership requires more than vision. It requires execution and accountability, two features in short supply in government today.

Throughout the Cold War, the United States projected an image of vast technical competence: We sent humans to the moon and helped eradicate smallpox. Later, the nation’s military victories in Kuwait in 1991 and Kosovo in 1999 demonstrated its towering technical proficiency. But today, the United States projects a very different image.

The country’s tragically inadequate response to Hurricane Katrina, difficulty in restoring basic services in Iraq, and inability to address looming domestic issues such as health care, immigration and the cost of entitlements have made it appear that the United States can no longer solve tough problems. Some people abroad have always questioned U.S. policy. Today, many are questioning our basic competence.

Smart power could start to change that, but it will not solve all of the nation’s problems. Its lasting value is that it may help persuade others to join the U.S. cause. Do not underestimate the importance of having Iran finally hear in stereophonic sound that it must desist from pursuing a nuclear weapons program; given the latest National Intelligence Estimate, it might have actually worked. And do not underestimate the goodwill that a sustained effort to eradicate disease could bring.

Consider the current crisis in Pakistan. The United States might be in a better position today had it not walked away from Pakistan in the 1990s and if, as the 9/11 Commission suggested, it had broadened its engagement beyond military cooperation with and support of Gen. Pervez Musharraf over the past six years. Instead, U.S. favorability ratings are below 20 percent in Pakistan. The U.S.-led war on terrorism is widely seen by Pakistanis as a war on Islam, and American support now tarnishes Pakistani leaders who share U.S. objectives.

And yet, for a brief period in late 2005 and early 2006, U.S. favorability ratings approached 50 percent in Pakistan.

Why? Because of the U.S. military’s effective and principled response to the October 2005 earthquake there, the largest and longest relief effort in U.S. military history. It showed Pakistanis U.S. commitment and friendship and provided an important source of smart power. It demonstrated, however briefly, that America’s standing in the world can indeed be restored.

Now, a year before the U.S. presidential elections, candidates from both parties can present a more optimistic vision that balances Americans’ desire for protection at home with wiser policies abroad. It would simply be the smart thing to do.

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