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Soft Power and Smart Power in Africa

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What is Soft Power? It is the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments. It arises from the attractiveness of a country's culture, political ideals, and policies. When our policies are seen as legitimate in the eyes of others, our soft power is enhanced. . . . But attraction can turn into repulsion if we act in an arrogant manner and destroy the real message of our deeper values.
— Joseph S. Nye, Jr.[\[1\]](#)

Unlike most regions of the world, Africans by and large view the United States as a positive force in the world. . . . Nonetheless, resentment remains on the continent.
— CSIS Commission on Smart Power[\[2\]](#)

Introduction

Compare recent polling data from the Pew Global Attitudes Survey and you will find "anti-Americanism is extensive, as it has been for the past five years." The once favorable "image of the United States has declined in most parts of the world" since 2002. A positive opinion of the United States is increasingly hard to find in Germany, Spain, and France. In the Muslim world, negative viewpoints run rampant. Only nine percent of Turks and fifteen percent of Pakistanis held a positive view of the United States in 2007. While numbers are generally better when the poll asked for opinions about Americans, the United States Government (USG) had clearly not made friends since the decision to invade Iraq.[\[3\]](#) It is reasonable then to wonder if the United States is pursuing policies and programs that have enhanced its world standing and improved upon what Joseph Nye calls 'soft power'? Many scholars, citizens, and statesmen, looking at the Iraq War, would state emphatically: 'NO, that power has been squandered!'

Strangely enough, one region of the world stands in stark contrast to Pew's numbers. Africans still view the United States in a positive light. In fact, nine of the eleven states with the most positive opinions of America were from sub-Saharan Africa.[\[4\]](#) Why are these numbers different? Has the United States pursued better programs on the African continent that bolstered them? Has America created greater 'soft power' reserves in Africa? More importantly, can these reserves continue?

In trying to answer some of these questions, this paper will explore the exercise of American soft power in Africa by analyzing four recent flagship programs of the USG as it engages Africa: the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) to bolster trade; the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) that seeks to curb this devastating disease; the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) which offers a new approach to development; and U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) as a new means for military engagement. The paper first explores the concept of soft

power—its relationship to hard power, changes that have increased its importance, critiques, and the burgeoning idea of smart power. Second, the paper asks why the opinion of the United States has floundered elsewhere but remains high in Africa. Third, each of the four showcase programs will be examined in terms of their contributions, good or bad, to U.S. soft power. Finally, we can understand that the United States is making a concerted effort to utilize soft power in Africa, but could still do more.

Power—Hard, Soft, and Smart

While former Harvard Dean Joseph Nye may have coined the term ‘soft power’ in his 1990 book *Bound to Lead*, the concept of power predates even Nye. More recently, he wrote, “Power is like the weather. Everyone depends on it and talks about it, but few understand it.”^[5] If we desire a less oblique definition, Ernest Wilson offered, “In international politics, having ‘power’ is the ability to influence another to act in ways in which that entity would not have otherwise acted.”^[6] Nye, agreeing with this definition, adds power leads to “obtaining the outcomes you want.”^[7] Furthermore, he outlines three ways the powerful can affect behavior of others—they can “coerce them with threats,” “induce them with payments,” or “attract and co-opt them.”^[8] Beyond the definitions, however, power is a matter of resources and context.

Power has historically been focused on “strength in war,” where resources such as population, land and mineral deposits, economic strength, political stability, and military might were of supreme importance.^[9] If a state had a strong navy, a well-trained army, and economic and demographic wherewithal, it would likely be able to compel, coerce, or bribe its neighbors into compliance with its objectives. Unfortunately, applying these resources could also encourage neighbors to balance against a powerful state. Resources of power could produce fear and opposition. As Nye observes, there was a “paradox that those most endowed with power do not always get the outcomes they want.”^[10] Power then, as Bertrand Russell said, is “the production of intended effects.”^[11]

To get intended effects, power must be observed in context. Power depends not only on resources, but also upon the relational interplay between the wielder, the target, and why.^[12] In some cases, certain resources are unable to be exercised towards a goal. In others, resources produce unintended effects. In yet others, the use of one resource may get the same outcome as another, but at a significantly higher price. This could be a higher price due to the inefficient choice of resource to expend or simply because a party the wielder wished to influence was less inclined to be influenced and fought back. As a result, it is important to look at the different types of power, and the different resources, that may be used to accomplish a state’s goals.

Nye separates power into two forms—hard and soft. “When someone does something he would otherwise not do but for force or inducement,” says Nye, “that’s hard power—the use of sticks and carrots.”^[13] Wilson adds that hard power, rooted in the neorealist tradition, “focus[es] on military intervention, coercive diplomacy, and economic sanctions to enforce national interests.”^[14] Hard power resources include aircraft carriers, bombers, and tank divisions as well as the economic might to crush another’s economy or control its markets. Hard power can also come from economic resources that translate into military might.^[15] In World War II, it was allied military and economic hard power that crushed the Axis. In American statecraft, as evidenced by high defense spending, the hammer of hard power is extremely well funded.^[16] The problem is, however, as the old adage goes, ‘if all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail.’

Unfortunately for hard power proponents, ongoing changes in the world are making hard power more difficult to exercise. According to Wilson, “longer-term secular trends . . . have provoked a demand for a new way to conceive of and exercise state power.”^[17] In 1990, Nye exposed five trends that have diffused power resources and made them “less fungible.”^[18] First, economic interdependence made it harder to use force because it jeopardizes economic growth and

financial interests.[19] Second, transnational actors—multinational corporations, non- and inter-governmental organizations, and even terrorist groups—are able to exercise power that was once the preserve of only states. Third, resurgent nationalism made it tougher to use military power. For example, small military outposts were able to manage the British Empire, but the United States found it difficult to subdue Somalia's clans or pacify Iraq, even with much greater force. Fourth, the spread of technology, especially nuclear weapons and weapons applied to asymmetrical tactics, has equalized parts of the battlefield. Fifth, changing political issues made force less applicable for solving today's dilemmas.[20] Having the strongest army will not solve world poverty, pollution, and pandemics! As Nye observes, "While military force remains the ultimate form of power in a self-help system, the use of force has become more costly for modern powers than it was in earlier centuries." [21]

In more recent writings, Nye expanded on these world changes. Today, he adds that the information revolution makes hard power less potent. "Information is power, and today a much larger part of the world's population has access to that power." Furthermore, the increased number of world democracies makes populations more difficult to influence. Despite overwhelming hard power, the United States could not persuade vocal Turkish citizens to support staging American troops for the invasion of Iraq or Mexico to rally to the cause in the UN. Nye finds "shaping public opinion becomes even more important where authoritarian governments have been replaced." [22] Wilson adds another factor reducing the salience of hard power—the "transformation from industrial to postindustrial economies, where power increasingly rests on a national capacity to create and manipulate knowledge and information." [23] Nonetheless, despite these changes, hard power's military and economic might are still important. But they are not the only important form of power. To build upon Nye's turn of phrase, it helps to hold all the "high cards," but states must also know how to play them. [24]

The changes limiting hard power lead us to Nye's other manifestation—soft power. Further refined since its inception in 1990, soft power is "getting others to want the outcomes you want" through co-option rather than coercion. [25] More than simply 'influence' or 'persuasion,' soft power is "the ability to entice and attract" others without having to use hard power threats or enticements. [26] It entails being able to set the agenda in order to shape the preferences of other actors. The ultimate benefit of soft power is it makes others more likely to cooperate because they want to, thus reducing the need for and cost of hard power's carrots and sticks. As Nye states so well, "If I can get you to *want* to do what I want, then I do not have to force you to do what you do *not* want to do." [27]

In order to build this attractive, indirect form of power, states rely on three resources: culture, political values, and foreign policies. Culture, the "values and practices that create meaning for a society," can come in the form of literature, art, and popular media and products. More important than the items however, are the values and interests they represent. [28] Coke and Nike are not simply drinks and shoes, but symbolize a greater society built on personal freedom. Political values, such as freedom of the press and the ability to criticize one's own government, also send a message abroad that can inspire attraction. [29] Foreign policy is an important soft power component as well. Well-designed policies can rally the world behind a cause and set an example others want to follow. These factors, however, can also detract from soft power. In the wrong context, the same forces that attract could turn others away.

What is more important, then, in addition to the factors above, is credibility and legitimacy. [30] To the Chinese, power comes from moral foundations. "The definition of power should not only take into account the ability of the power subject, but also the extent of acceptance in the power object." [31] If culture, political values, and foreign policy are seen by others to be in contrast to accepted norms, attraction can turn into repulsion. Attraction can also turn to repulsion if states have a significant disparity between what they say and what they do. [32] Legitimacy and credibility, then, form the foundation of soft power, and lacking them makes statecraft increasingly difficult. As the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) recently observed, having

“legitimacy can...reduce opposition to—and the costs of—using hard power.” CSIS added that it is better to bolster and maintain soft power, because “cooperation is always a matter of degree, and it is profoundly influenced by attraction.”^[33] There is no value in increasing repulsion through illegitimate acts.

What, then, are some of the tools to increase soft power beyond the legitimate application of policy and values? For Nye, they are “assets that produce such attraction.”^[34] Attractive tools can be as diverse as American movies, products, and pop culture to humanitarian aid, development assistance, and business ties. They include public diplomacy programs, such as “broadcasting, subsidizing cultural exports, and arranging exchanges.”^[35] Former UNICEF Executive Director Carol Bellamy stresses the importance of “citizen diplomacy.” Cultural and educational exchanges like the Fulbright Program and Peace Corps “play a more prominent role in shaping the U.S. relationship with the world.” She adds that even military training programs play a vital role in promoting soft power over what Edward Murrow called “the last three feet.”^[36] Furthermore, as China soft power researcher Joshua Kurlantzick writes, “soft power can be ‘high,’ targeted at elites, or ‘low,’ targeted at the broader public.”^[37] The New York Philharmonic’s recent visit to North Korea was a classic example directed at both. A former U.S. ambassador to South Korea called it a “16-inch broadside of soft power into the hearts and minds of the [North] Korean people.”^[38] Soft power has a vast tool kit.

Despite these tools, soft power still has its detractors. Even Nye admits “soft power resources are slower, more diffuse, and more cumbersome to wield than hard power resources.”^[39] Other critics add soft power is analytically vague, intangible, lacks a relational target, and it is hard to define if it is even having an effect. While results of an airstrike are obvious, “it may not be clear whether soft power has substantial influence on a particular policy outcome.”^[40] Some neorealist critics argue soft power may simply be the “halo of hard power” or the “gleam on the sword.”^[41] Hard power resources are more important for coping with interstate relations and geopolitical events. As Robert Kagan asserts, France, Germany, and the rest of Europe have been gravitating to the United States of late not simply due to soft power, but in “response to changing international circumstances.”^[42] As Joffe observed following Russia’s foray into Georgia, while the West “celebrated ‘soft power’...Putin went back to ‘hard power.’”^[43] Joffe also points out that soft power is hard to manage—instead of increasing attractiveness, it can also “twist minds with resentment and rage.”^[44] As Niall Ferguson derisively says, “the trouble with soft power is that it’s, well, soft.”^[45]

In light of these critiques, Nye and others have begun to look at the intersection between hard and soft power—a synergy that leads to smart power. “Power in the global information age,” Nye recently wrote, “will include a soft dimension of attraction as well as the hard dimensions of coercion and inducement.”^[46] To Wilson, smart power is “the capacity of an actor to combine elements of hard power and soft power in ways that are mutually reinforcing such that the actor’s purposes are advanced effectively and efficiently.” He finds that smart power is evermore necessary because world populations are savvier and better recognize raw applications of either hard or soft power. Furthermore, other actors like China with its growing “charm offensive,” are becoming more sophisticated in their use of power. Moreover, he finds the “un-smart” use of power over the last several years has led to a “smart power countermovement.” Smart power, having an understanding of oneself, the target, and the regional and global context, better utilizes military, economic, and soft tools to solve problems and guide the debate.^[47]

Recent projects by both CSIS and USC’s Annenberg School advocate the increased use of smart power in American foreign policy. CSIS observed that while the United States had significant soft and hard power instruments, three obstacles exist for smart power. First, the United States has over-relied on hard power because it is a tangible source of strength and easy to wield. Second, due to historical under funding, soft power tools have not been adequately developed. “Third, U.S. foreign policy institutions are fractured and compartmentalized.” As a result, the United States needs to significantly rethink how it will exercise smart power in the future.^[48] The Annenberg

study, which Wilson led, found similar shortcomings. As Wilson states, “one requires a firm familiarity of the full repertoire or inventory of the ‘*instruments of statecraft*.’ Smart Power means knowing the strengths and weaknesses of each instrument.”[\[49\]](#)

As we can see, while power is an ever-present part of international relations, changes in the world have changed how hard power is exercised. It now must be melded with soft forces, the power of attraction, to address the world’s problems. Smart power has not been exercised well by the United States, however, with significant impact on our standing in the world. We must next explore why this is the case—almost everywhere except Africa.

Opinion of the United States in Africa and the World

World public opinion numbers for the United States have suffered over the past several years, and even a political neophyte would understand why. Since a wide outpouring of sympathy after the 9/11 attacks, America used mainly hard power resources on the world stage, letting its soft power atrophy. As the Pew Center bluntly states, “global distrust of American leadership is reflected in increasing disapproval of the cornerstones of U.S. foreign policy.”[\[50\]](#) A great deal of this distrust is focused on President Bush, where more than two-thirds of respondents in 14 countries surveyed expressed “little or no confidence in him to do the right thing in world affairs.”[\[51\]](#) Worse yet, polls in Canada, the UK, and Mexico placed Bush on par with the leaders of Hezbollah, Iran, and North Korea as a threat to world stability.[\[52\]](#) Nonetheless, other factors beyond Bush have led to the decline in American soft power.

Key foreign policy decisions undercut U.S. influence. The first of these was the decision and process of how America went to war in Iraq. The U.S. went to war contrary to the wishes of many of its allies and in opposition to the UN Security Council. Nye observed “when the United States paid insufficient attention to issues of legitimacy and credibility in the way it went about its policy in Iraq, polls showed a dramatic drop in American soft power.”[\[53\]](#) A second area of concern has been America’s prosecution of the ‘Global War on Terrorism.’ Using an “ends justify the means” approach which permitted water boarding, rendition, and “denial of even the rudiments of due process at Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo,” the United States undermined its claim to the moral high ground.[\[54\]](#) These actions were in direct opposition to America’s traditional values of liberty, human rights, and rule of law. A third area, the environment, has been an increasing area of concern and most discontent has been focused on the U.S. pluralities or majorities in over 90 percent of countries polled in 2007 named America as the country that has most harmed the global environment.[\[55\]](#) Bellamy cites a “disconnect between U.S. actions and its messages,” where the United States refused to sign the Kyoto Protocol and other international environmental agreements.[\[56\]](#) CSIS adds that the United States also fails to “offer superior alternatives” in light of these rejections.[\[57\]](#) These issues led to a stark downturn in U.S. favorability.

While these issues have been widely attacked individually, they share three common flaws even more harmful to American soft power—unilateralism, arrogance, and illegitimacy. As *The Economist* found, “most foreigners...think that America’s foreign policy fails to take other countries interests into account.”[\[58\]](#) Bellamy observes a “tendency of President George W. Bush and others to talk in a way that appears arrogant to foreign audiences.”[\[59\]](#) There is no easier way to turn others against you than by arrogantly discounting or ignoring their concerns. Furthermore, these policies did not showcase American values but instead “export[ed] fear and anger.”[\[60\]](#) All of this undercut U.S. legitimacy, the key component of soft power.

In contrast to numbers worldwide, the United States is still seen in African eyes as a force for good in the world. While its activities in Iraq and Afghanistan are still not viewed highly, America appears less unilateral and less arrogant with its policies towards Africa. As CSIS points out, the United States made a “renewed commitment to Africa” and promoted its soft power there in recent years.[\[61\]](#) In response, “majorities in seven of the ten African nations surveyed [by Pew]

believe U.S. foreign policy does take into account the interest of countries like theirs.”[62] Instead of putting high priority on issues like the environment and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, as do many non-African countries, African populations place emphasis on issues like democracy, development, business, and HIV/AIDS.[63] These are areas where the United States had taken more widely accepted stands and may have resulted in higher levels of legitimacy for the United States.

While the status of the United States on the world stage had definitely taken a beating in recent years, it is evident that the United States has failed to exercise soft power by being unilateral and arrogant in its foreign policy dealings. This has resulted in a loss of legitimacy and soft power. However, Africa is different. We should next look how the four showcase programs—AGOA, PEPFAR, MCC, and AFRICOM—can help or hinder U.S. soft power in Africa.

The Four Showcase Programs

“The current U.S. administration,” says CSIS, “has launched an array of soft power initiatives in Africa that reflect a real commitment to alter the status quo.”[64] However, are they successful—and could they be improved? These four programs, the African Growth and Opportunity Act, the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, Millennium Challenge Accounts, and the military’s U.S. Africa Command should now be looked at in turn to assess their impact on American soft power on the continent.

The African Growth and Opportunity Act

The first showcase program is The African Growth and Opportunity Act, or AGOA, which started as “a modestly revolutionary Clinton Administration initiative that enabled previously heavily taxed exports to enter the United States tax-free.”[65] Championed by the Bush Administration and now on its fourth reauthorization, AGOA’s goal is to open the U.S. market to sub-Saharan African goods and facilitate trade improvement measures within African states. A unilateral U.S. trade initiative that has tripled two-way trade since 2001, participation does come with some strings attached.[66] Participating states must undertake political, economic, and social reforms that include efforts to reduce corruption, improve rule of law and political pluralism, reduce poverty, and improve workers rights. Failure to make progress toward these reforms could lead to removal from the program.[67] As of 2008, 40 African states have become eligible.

Since its inception, AGOA has not only allowed over 98 percent of exports from partner states to enter American markets tariff-free, but has also increased cooperation and coordination between the United States, American businesses, and partner states. The United States made a significant investment with African states for “trade capacity building” programs that provide technical assistance to facilitate AGOA-sponsored trade, knock down trade barriers, develop intra-African commerce, and increase the competitiveness of African firms. The United States also supported increased American business investment in Africa, increasing foreign direct investment by “52 percent from 2001, to \$3.8 billion,” and by providing billions of dollars in financing and risk insurance through the Overseas Private Investment Corporation. Finally, the United States has sponsored annual meetings with AGOA partners, labeled “The AGOA Forum,” that “institutionalizes a high-level dialogue...to foster closer economic ties between the United States and the region.”[68] AGOA has also had a significant impact on working populations in Africa. In Lesotho alone, Africa scholar Greg Mills finds “AGOA has helped create some 50,000 jobs” in the textile industry. For him, “the impact of AGOA cannot be measured by the flow of dollars and cents alone.”[69]

AGOA can also be seen as having an impact on American soft power in Africa. Support for economic development and trade—along with the membership requirements—says something significant about American values that Africans should be receptive to. As CSIS observes, “global

development...reinforces basic America values, [because it] contributes to peace, justice, and prosperity, and improves the way we are viewed around the world.”[70] Furthermore, American leadership sets the development agenda in Africa—agenda setting is a key soft power trait. Trade will be one of the best methods for improving upon Africa’s endemic poverty. As President Bush said to African aid advocate Bob Geldof, “an 1% increase in trade from Africa will mean more money than all the aid put together annually.”[71] In setting the trade agenda, the United States also made it a point to hear the opinions and interests of African states. AGOA Forums and bilateral trade discussions are viewed as a “partnership” where “sub-Saharan African countries have a critical role to play in AGOA implementation.”[72] All of these steps contribute to the legitimacy of the United States on the continent and have provided a boost to American soft power.

While AGOA is a positive force for soft power, other hypocritical parts of the global trade regime could reverse that trend. While AGOA has significantly increased trade since 2001, the vast majority of that trade comes from oil imports from just a few countries. Non-oil trade accounts for only \$3.2 billion of America’s \$44.2 billion in 2006 African imports.[73] Other markets, including agriculture, will need to be further expanded. Critics find that the West gives “lip service to free trade while maintaining tariff barriers and paying subsidies to their farmers.”[74] One skeptic, Democratic Congressman Donald Payne, finds “AGOA benefits to that sector have been miniscule” and “AGOA has not lived up to [its] promise.”[75] Without taking these criticisms into account, the soft power benefits of AGOA could easily turn negative.

Luckily, AGOA trade and investment is thus far seen as a boon for soft power. As Walter Russell Mead finds, economic ties create “sticky power’, attracting other countries to the U.S. system and then trapping them in it.”[76] Over time, increases in private business investment will only help the situation. As CSIS notes, “vast deposits of soft power reside in the private sector.”[77] As the first of four programs examined, AGOA strikes a positive note.

The President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief

The second program is The President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS relief, or PEPFAR. More than any program, PEPFAR has contributed to a positive view of the United States in Africa and led to an outpouring of support during President Bush’s February 2008 visit.[78] HIV/AIDS is an issue of significant importance in Africa and the United States has developed a program that leads the world.[79] In 2003, Bush led a bipartisan effort to create “the largest commitment ever by a single nation towards an international health initiative” by allocating \$18.8 billion to “combating HIV/AIDS around the world.”[80] Reauthorized in 2008, the program will now run through 2013 and authorize what could amount to \$48 billion to fight not only HIV/AIDS, but also tuberculosis and malaria—all of which are diseases that plague the African continent.[81]

With PEPFAR’s help, Africa is confronting the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Since 2003, the program has provided retroviral drugs to almost 1.4 million patients, provided testing and counseling to over 33 million, prevented 157,000 babies from being born with HIV, trained over 100,000 medical personnel, and supported distribution of almost 2 billion condoms.[82] This is a radical sea change from the only 50,000 people in Africa who received retrovirals in 2003. What is more radical, however, is PEPFAR’s process. Instead of being directive about how countries should tackle AIDS, the “success is rooted in support for country-owned strategies and national programs.” The U.S. is listening to African states and creating Partnership Compacts that allow them to maximize effectiveness.[83] Beyond the U.S.-based approach, however, the United States supports international programs as well. “The U.S. also contributes one-third of the money for the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria—which treats another 1.5 million.”[84] These initiatives have contributed to American soft power in Africa and worldwide.

As Mead writes, “the generosity of U.S. humanitarian assistance abroad enhances U.S. soft power.”^[85] Not only has the United States taken the lead on HIV/AIDS programs worldwide, it set the agenda for how to combat the disease. Other G8 nations followed the U.S. lead in 2007 by setting a goal to treat five million infected people and prevent 24 million new infections.^[86] Nye points out that the U.S. gains greatly when it promotes public goods like preventing HIV/AIDS, saying they gain “from the goods themselves, and from the way that being a major provider legitimizes and increases its soft power.”^[87] Soft power and legitimacy are also increased because the United States has worked closely with international partners and African states. Most importantly, however, actions have spoken louder than words. As Nye finds, “that’s why initiatives such as the Bush administration’s push to increase development assistance or combat HIV/AIDS are so important.”

As a result of how successful PEPFAR has been for U.S. soft power, it is difficult to find detractors. *The Wall Street Journal* claims that supporters have even said the HIV/AIDS initiative is “America’s greatest foreign-policy achievement since the Marshall Plan.”^[88] It is key to America’s highly favorable ratings in Africa. For the soft power guru Nye, “it is also a wise investment in U.S. soft power.”^[89]

Millennium Challenge Corporation

The Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) is the next soft power project strongly benefiting Africa. “Established in January 2004, MCC is based on the principle that aid is most effective when it reinforces good governance, economic freedom and investments in people.”^[90] The program offers large amounts of aid, \$5 billion dollars per year—or “a 50 percent increase in official development assistance”—through compacts with poor countries that make progress towards stringent governance standards.^[91] Since its inception, MCC has been an active force in Africa, where 11 of 18 national compacts have been signed totaling \$4.5 billion in aid.^[92]

The Millennium Challenge is a bold departure from the aid programs of the past. First, MCC requires that for a country to be eligible, they must score above the median level in a series of indicators in three broad categories: “ruling justly,” “encouraging economic freedom,” and “investing in people.” Furthermore, “they must score above the median in the anti-corruption indicator.”^[93] Indicators, such as protection of civil liberties, government effectiveness, primary education expenditure, and business start-up times come from organizations such as the World Bank, Freedom House, and UNESCO.^[94] Countries that score well on the indicators are permitted to design a Millennium Challenge compact for a sizable aid grant. Countries can also be eligible for smaller “threshold” compact grants to help them improve their scores. The compacts, however, are unique. Rather than the United States dictating the project for the grant, “recipient governments...have the responsibility for developing proposals in line with their own development priorities.”^[95] Ownership and competition, the program expects, will lead all participants to improve their indicator scores. *The Economist* finds that this “fosters initiative rather than dependency.”^[96]

MCC is a positive stroke for American soft power. As Nye finds,

The Bush administration deserves credit for its efforts to align the United States with the long-term aspirations of poor people in Africa...through its Millennium Challenge initiative.... Success in implementing these programs will represent a significant investment in American soft power.^[97]

In this program, America showcases its values. With a significant increase in aid, it shows that the development of Africa is important. “Development is a theme that aligns America with the world’s less fortunate and cements international partnerships.”^[98] With MCC’s eligibility requirements, it also shows Africans that good governance, democratization, and human rights are just as important. As Mead observes, “democracy and human rights have global appeal; when the

United States is seen as supporting these values, U.S. soft power grows.”^[99] Furthermore, by letting African governments take the lead on developing their own compacts and programs, the United States shows that it is listening to the voices of others. This builds legitimacy for not only the program, but for the United States as well. MCC is another, strong soft power program for Africa.

Millennium Challenge, however, could also turn negative. First, with credibility being a key to soft power, failure to live up to promises could have negative effects. In the first years of MCC, funding requests were cut short by the U.S. Congress, which could imperil some compacts.^[100] Second, the United States must avoid letting MCC being used for other political purposes. The legislation allows termination of MCC compacts if countries act “contrary to [American] national security interests.”^[101] Instead of being viewed as American generosity, soft power could take a significant blow if MCC is used for diplomatic arm-twisting. Nonetheless, even with these risks, MCC is a third successful program building American soft power in Africa.

U.S. African Command

While the other three cases have proven to be positive programs for American soft power in Africa, the creation of U.S. Africa Command proves much harder to judge. It is harder, in part, because it tries to put hard power tools in a soft power package. Thus, the results have been more mixed.

After decades of marginalization, the Department of Defense announced in early 2007 the creation of a unified command focusing strictly on Africa. As CSIS Africa Director Stephen Morrison wrote, “the decision to create AFRICOM grew out of recognition that Africa increasingly matters to core U.S. national interests.” He highlighted three key areas in addition to humanitarian factors that pushed Africa to the forefront—oil, terrorism and ungoverned spaces, and China’s increased influence.^[102] AFRICOM was intended to be a new kind of military command, integrating traditional security functions with humanitarian aid and development. In the words of Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Theresa Whelan, its staff, which includes personnel from non-military organizations like State and USAID, was to focus on “promoting greater security ties between the United States and Africa, providing new opportunities to enhance our bi-lateral military relationships, and strengthen the capacities of Africa’s regional and sub-regional organizations.”^[103] Some activities would be applications of hard power to confront terrorism or provide security. Other programs, however, such as military training and education programs, ship visits, and humanitarian projects, would build soft power. As Nye observes, “the military can sometimes play an important role in the generation of soft power...[with its] broad range of officer exchanges, joint training, and assistance programs with other countries in peacetime.”^[104] The military, however, did not send out a soft power message.

The Department of Defense and AFRICOM failed to generate soft power because their “belated and clumsy outreach generated suspicion about the military’s true motives...”^[105] The command was originally sold to African leaders and populations as an entity that would “help development, health, education, democracy, and economic growth.” Its military roles were downplayed. Furthermore, the United States started to search for a country on the continent to host the headquarters before adequately explaining how the command will help the situation in Africa. As retired Kenyan General Daniel Opande said, “very little was really known by the majority of people or countries in Africa who were supposed to know before such a move was made.”^[106] There was a greater fear that the United States was militarizing aid to Africa and planning to move American troops to the continent. Part of this stems from diminished American soft power and credibility as a result of the Iraq War. Many African countries saw an imperialist streak in America’s decision to invade Iraq and feared imperialistic intentions in Africa. In South Africa, Minister of Defense Mosiuoa Lekota felt that AFRICOM’s true purpose was to fight the Global War on Terror. “The AFRICOM initiative has raised a lot of interest and an lot of attention,” he said, “because . . . Africa has to avoid the presence of foreign forces on its soil.”^[107] As a

result, South Africa, along with other African countries became vocal opponents of the headquarters. Closer to home the strategy also failed, where Geldof “thought it was an inappropriate and knee-jerk U.S. militaristic response to clumsy Chinese mercantilism.”^[108] AFRICOM’s initial attempts at public diplomacy and bolstering its soft power were failing. As Nye points out, “a communications strategy cannot work if it cuts against the grain of policy. Actions speak louder than words, and public diplomacy that appears to be mere window dressing for hard power projection is unlikely to succeed.”^[109]

AFRICOM has made efforts, however, to turn itself around and meld the hard and soft into smarter power. Defense Secretary Robert Gates concedes, “I think in some respects we probably didn’t do as good a job as we should have when we rolled out AFRICOM.” He reversed AFRICOM’s initially arrogant approach, saying “I don’t think we should push African governments to a place they don’t really want to go in terms of relationships.”^[110] The command has, in its latest mission statement, clarified its message and increased its credibility by focusing less on humanitarian missions and more on security. Moreover, it has matched words with actions through tangible programs that benefit African governments and populations. Over the last six months, a naval operation called the African Partnership Station, led by the USS Fort McHenry, has been operating on the west coast of Africa, providing training programs, security assistance, and officer exchanges, in addition to humanitarian relief.^[111] The public diplomacy campaign has also shifted focus. AFRICOM’s Commander, General Kip Ward, has made numerous visits to the continent to assuage fears and assure leaders of his organization’s motives.^[112] AFRICOM’s leaders are now doing more listening; something Deputy Commander Mary Yates says “all of us who work with Africans need to do better.”^[113]

After a shaky start, AFRICOM has begun to refocus its efforts and build its credibility and legitimacy in Africa. These are both vital components to soft power for America. Listening and being willing to learn from mistakes are too. As Nye again finds, “by definition, soft power means getting others to want the same outcomes you want, and requires and understanding of how they are hearing your messages and adapting them accordingly.”^[114] Though not as strong a builder of American soft power in Africa as the other three programs, AFRICOM is on its way.

Conclusion

Power is clearly important in the relations between states—Africa is no exception. However, what we have learned here is that power can come in two forms, hard and soft, and what matters greatly is how it is exercised and the messages it sends. Sometimes, hard power will be necessary, but its application must be wise. Other times, soft power can be more effective and provide better long-term returns. America’s lesson from Iraq is that when it does not take soft power into account, its policies become much harder to carry out. After looking at these four flagship programs carried out by the United States in Africa, however, what then can be said about American development of soft power?

AGOA, PEPFAR, MCC, and even AFRICOM have shown that the United States knows how to build soft power reserves and apply them. These programs first show that America recognizes the values it should showcase. Caring about the poor victims of HIV and underdevelopment and creating programs that help them are well received on the world stage. Standing up for good governance, anti-corruption measures, and economic reform works too, when they are packaged transparently along with generosity. Setting the agenda, as the United States has done with HIV/AIDS relief and development programs through the PEPFAR and the MCC, will get other countries to work along side, rather than to cross-purposes. Listening and taking into account the desires and interests of others is also key for soft power. America has listened with the first three programs, and is starting to listen with AFRICOM. The result is increased credibility and legitimacy. This credibility and legitimacy will be important to bring Africans onboard for future programs. Some will be more challenging and require hard power, such as the conflict in Darfur,

political problems in Zimbabwe, Africa's civil wars, and continued energy security problems. All will require as much soft power support America can muster.

Nonetheless, the United States still has room for improvement—AFRICOM tells the United States that. The United States needs to continue to engage African opinion leaders and common citizens to 'make them want what we want.' When proposing solutions to African problems, American leaders must solicit African advice, act with transparency and honesty, and always question how legitimate American actions may appear. Well-designed public diplomacy will be important. The United States can also continue to work to build grassroots soft power through programs that bring together common citizens, such as the Peace Corps, educational exchanges, military training, and other programs that bring Africans to the United States. As Bellamy points out, "the American public is the greatest asset the United States has to promote its noblest values to the world."^[115] More importantly, as the Pew Center found, "consistently, those individuals who have traveled to the U.S. have more favorable views of the country than those who do not."^[116] Soft power programs will have to continue.

Most importantly, however, America has to exercise leadership. It has shown leadership on these four programs that is much different than its leadership elsewhere in the world—leadership that is willing to listen, leadership that is willing to incorporate others viewpoints, and leadership that has increasing legitimacy. As Nye States:

Soft power has always been a key element of leadership. The power to attract—to get others to want what you want, to frame the issues, to set the agenda—has its roots in thousands of years of human experience. Skillful leaders have always understood that attractiveness stems from credibility and legitimacy.^[117]

In Africa, that credible and legitimate leadership created attraction that should make the wise exercise of hard power more acceptable. The U.S. will have to exercise hard power in Africa and elsewhere in the future, but wielded together with soft power, it will be smart power.

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