

06/21/09 - 'Smart Power': A change in U.S. diplomacy strategy

Upon being appointed to the office of Secretary of State on January 21, 2009, Hillary Clinton has been advocating a reconditioning of the way the United States executes diplomacy. Hers is a message of smart power, in which the United States will foster better relationships with the international community through increased partnerships, development assistance, and technological innovations. This idea of smart power is not new, however; it is a concept that was originally coined by Harvard professor, Joseph Nye.

Smart power 'is a concept that underscores the necessity of a strong military, but also invests heavily in alliances, partnerships, and institutions at all levels to expand American influence and establish the legitimacy of American action.' More plainly, smart power is a combination of both hard and soft power approaches to diplomacy.

'Soft power is the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments' and it is based on a country's culture, political values, and foreign policy. Legitimacy is essential for successful soft power. Hard power, conversely, is the ability to coerce another government to act in a way they had not intended. Clinton makes clear, 'it is a mistake to count too much on hard or soft power alone.'

Smart power necessitates that states be in tune with their populace, and understand the wants of the nation, while being able to discern the ability of the nation to achieve such goals. The key is that states also consider the regional and global implications of their actions. It is paramount that state leaders know the proper strategies of diplomacy to be employed for each given situation.

In order to understand why Secretary Clinton has proposed such a drastic shift in the conduct of U.S. diplomacy, it is necessary to consider the nation's previous trends in diplomatic relations. Soft power was the preeminent form of diplomacy between the U.S. and Soviet Union during the Cold War. But as the Cold War years waned, 'soft power seemed expendable, and Americans became more interested in saving money than in investing in soft power.' The shift away from soft power was made even more conspicuous in the last decade with the Bush administration. The State Department, under the leadership of Secretary Rice, chose to downplay soft power approaches because of the difficulty in achieving short-term results. As a result 'they compromised the diplomatic and security interests of the United States, provoked unprecedented resentment around the world, and greatly diminished America's position in the world'

The overemphasis on military power by the Bush Administration has not been the

only factor leading to Secretary Clinton's divergence in policy. Rather, as Wilson explains, in today's world where power increasingly rests on a nation's capacity to create and manipulate knowledge and information, a country's capacity for creativity and innovation can trump its military ability, and new hi-tech tools can greatly enhance the reach of military and non-military influence.

Despite having only been in office for little over four months, it is important to begin to analyze Secretary Clinton's performance thus far. Two criteria will be used to evaluate her actions hitherto. First, Secretary Clinton's stated goals will be contrasted with the five focus areas for effective smart diplomacy proposed by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS); alliances, partnerships and institutions, global development, public diplomacy, economic integration, and technology and innovation. The second level of analysis will look at what Secretary Clinton has already done in office, and evaluate whether or not her actions seem to be consistent with smart power doctrine.

The United States was such a strong force in helping to create some of the longest-lasting alliances and institutions in the modern era, yet, in recent years, the U.S.'s 'neglect of their allies and institutions has created a sense of illegitimacy that has squandered [their] attractiveness.' Secretary Clinton is committed to rebuilding its relationships, particularly with the U.N. and NATO. She has also discussed the necessity of working with the global community through treaties, and that she would make it a priority to work to 'shore up' the Non-proliferation Treaty, as well as ensure the ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.

Clinton has said that, 'investing in our common humanity through social development is not marginal to our foreign policy but essential to the realization of our goals.' The U.S. has long believed in the importance of global development, and according to Secretary Clinton, the U.S. will continue to diligently work with its partners abroad to bring improvements in the areas of the health care, education and security to people throughout the world. Clinton plans to lead the U.S. in its continued fight against infectious diseases such as AIDS, malaria, and TB.

The CSIS stressed the need for the United States to ameliorate its faltering public diplomacy. They argued that increasing the number and level of cultural exchanges would vastly improve the U.S.'s public diplomacy. While Secretary Clinton has not addressed the issue of public diplomacy directly, it is clear from many of the programs she has been supporting since taking office that she is strongly devoted to pursuing public diplomacy goals. For instance in April 2009, a Pakistani girls soccer team was invited to Washington to learn more about nutrition, fitness and team-building, as well as learn about gender equality laws such as Title IX.

Concerning the fourth pillar of effective smart diplomacy, economic integration, the current global financial crisis has proven that the economies of the world are already inextricably linked. While Clinton places some of the blame on past diplomatic failures and uncoordinated global reactions to the global crisis, she also sees the crisis as an opportunity to find new ways of working together.

Lastly, in reference to technology and innovation, Clinton makes very clear the need for the U.S. to continue to be a leader in technological innovations. 'One of the most promising of the smart power tools is science diplomacy, the practice of supporting and promoting scientific exchanges, cooperation and research between the United States and other nations.' Secretary Clinton has overseen the implementation of the first Scientific and Technological Cooperation Agreement, signed on April 1, 2009 between the U.S. and Switzerland. The agreement works to uphold many of the values sought by smart diplomacy, including increased cooperation and integration, as well as an increase in scientific exchange programs.

Already, Secretary Clinton has been successful in working towards several of her major foreign policy goals. First, she made quite clear that she felt the State Department was under-budgeted, when compared with the U.S. Department of Defense, the primary source of hard power, and therefore would fight for an increased budget for the coming year. It is clear, with the release of the proposed 2010 budget, that Secretary Clinton has been successful thus far. If approved, the State Department would receive a 2% budget increase, and among other things, increased funding for global health programs, as well as an expansion of diplomatic and development operations. While the defense budget may also increase, it would be by the smallest margin in at least five years.

Acquiring the necessary budget is just one small step however. If true smart power is to be achieved, there needs to be much greater coordination between the Defense Department and the State Department. Effective smart power requires the two facets of power to compliment each other, rather than work against each other, as they have been known to do. The level of coordination Secretary Clinton is able to actualize remains to be seen, and thus requires careful analysis in the upcoming months.

Second, Secretary Clinton has made strides towards building a greater partnership with China. She made clear during her visit to China in February that she believes 'it is essential that the United States and China have a positive, cooperative relationship.' The economies of China and the United States are so inextricably intertwined, that only by working together will a viable solution to the current economic crisis be reached.

As it stands, Secretary Clinton has been successful at working towards her policy goals, and has put some of the tools of smart diplomacy to good use. However, it is still early in the administration, and much work remains to be done, particularly in the area of public diplomacy. Only time will tell how successful she is in achieving her policy objectives, and even more interesting, if smart power is even a strategy that works.

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