

What is meant by smart power and how does its application by the obama administra...

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What is meant by “ smart power” and how does its application by the Obama Administration differ from the use of “ hard power” by the Bush Administration. The terms “ hard power” and “ smart power” are often used to describe the difference between the Bush Administration and the Obama Administration in foreign policy. These terms are descriptions of the way that American governments deal with other states, especially those states which do not agree with American views. Hard power is the use of forceful tactics such as military actions or economic sanctions. It shows how strong America is, and imposes American views on other people. If the other countries involved are weak, then this can be very effective and President Bush used this kind of approach at the beginning of his first term of office. The invasion of Iraq is a classic example of hard power at work. This tough line was also an important part of President Bush’s election campaign in 2004: “ the Bush administration achieved a greater advantage over Democrats in general and Senator John Kerry in particular on this issue than on any other in the 2004 presidential race.” (Campbell and O’Hanlon: 2006, p. 119) After the 9/11 attack on New York, it was possible to present hard power as a defence tool, not necessarily an act of aggression. This made it more acceptable to the American public. Sometimes, however, the opposite of hard power, i. e. soft power is a better approach. People know that America is strong, but they might be more impressed by gentle approaches like aid and support, with diplomatic summits and exchanges of views. America’s culture and image are also aspects of soft power. This encourages partnership in some cases, and it can work when both sides want to change things in a similar way.

Unfortunately, this is not often used, because it can seem like weakness.

When President Obama came to power there was a desire to make big changes. America was trapped in long military campaigns in the Middle East and in Africa which seemed to be going nowhere. America was getting a bad reputation and the costs of these campaigns was growing and growing all the time. It was decided the policy of using violence to respond to violence was not the best way. The country needed more choices, more flexibility, and a new approach that would work better. A commission was set up to find such a way and they came up with the concept of " smart power" in 2007.

The concept of " smart power" is a combination of both soft and hard power methods. They wanted to make sure that their new policy should be seen as something just as effective: " There is nothing weak about this approach. It is pragmatic, optimistic, and quite frankly, American." (Armitage and Nye: 2007, p. 4)

Hillary Clinton's mission to Congo in 2010 aimed to change the culture of rape there and this can be seen as an example of " smart power":

" The tools she favors fall into a category known in Beltway circles as " smart power" - military intervention that focuses on training, construction, and humanitarian work while taking pains to avoid violence." (Axe: 2010, p. 1)

This contrasts with the armed invasions and air attacks that the Bush Administration used: " Obama is no pacifist, but non-military interventions like diplomacy and sanctions are more his style." (Axe: 2010, p. 1) The two terms are very different and suggest quite different approaches but in fact it could be said that Obama's " smart power" are based on Bush's experience.

When President Bush failed to achieve his objectives in military ways he

searched for other possibilities. " Many of Obama's smart power initiatives are expanded versions of programs that began during Bush's second term. But while Bush may have opened the door to smart power, Obama gave it a seat near the head of the table." (Axe: 2010, p. 1) Some critics see examples of smart power much earlier in history, for example Dickinson reports " T. E. Lawrence, or Lawrence of Arabia, describing a successful insurgency in his " 27 Articles" cites both the need for a moral basis on the ground and the physical ability to inflict damage." The truth is, both the Bush and Obama governments need both hard and soft types of power, and the term " smart power" is just a new way of saying this. References Armitage, R. L. and Nye, J. S. JR. 2007. " CSIS Commision on Smart Power: A smarter, more secure America." New York: Center for Strategic and International Studies. Available online at: http://csis.org/files/media/csis/pubs/071106_csissmartpowerreport.pdf Axe, D. November 29, 2010. " The Limits of Smart Power." The American Prospect. Available online at: http://www.prospect.org/cs/articles?article=the_limits_of_smart_power Campbell, K. and O'Hanlon, M. 2006. Hard Power: The New Politics of National Security. Cambridge, MA: Basic Books. Dickinson, E. (May/June 2010) " Brainier Brawn." Foreign Policy. Available online at: http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/04/26/brainier_brawn