

Essay by Sarah Lightstone

Machiavelli once stated that it is better to be feared than loved. The United States continues to be the last virtually unrivaled global superpower, both economically and militarily. Yet the United States' immense global power wasn't able to prevent the terrorist attacks on 9/11 or the resurgence of the Taliban in Afghanistan since 2002. Machiavelli may have believed that fear and military power were essential to political success, but today, with the rise of extremism in the poorest parts of the globe, it is time for the U.S. to disregard the tenants of Machiavelli and hard military power which have failed to create safety and peace. After the development of the Atomic bomb Albert Einstein called for a "substantially new manner of thinking." The US should lead the world with a new manner of thinking through a foreign policy that focuses on the strength and long-term effects of rebuilding through what Joseph Nye termed "soft power."

The limits of military power and the need for a more constructive approach can be seen in the Korengal Valley in Afghanistan, which is widely regarded as one of the most volatile and isolated places in the world. Years of air strikes compounded with the rugged mountain terrain have crippled almost all growth in this area. The native villagers are hostile to US soldiers who destroy their homes with rockets by night only to appear with school supplies the next day. Innocent civilians as well as militants are killed daily. Some villagers support Taliban extremists out of fear. Soldiers lack enough funding and equipment. The US is learning what Alexander the Great, the British, and the Soviets discovered long ago-Afghanistan cannot be controlled militarily. The current hard power approach in Korengal Valley represents just one example of America's failed global policy.

Any hope for a reversal in the violence in Afghanistan and in troubled areas around the world lies in soft power. Long-term change can only be accomplished through the rebuilding of public services and creation of secular education. Persuasion through assistance-not coercion-is the key to lasting change. The fight against extremists depends on our willingness to gain civilian cooperation to attract moderates across the world. Ultimately, the US must align its policies with the goals and dreams of the citizens of these countries. If the United States diverted half of the resources it puts into military technology into foreign aid and development, the world today would be a starkly different place. It is time for the US to focus its vast resources and greatest minds towards innovations that improve transportation, education, and health care all over the world. With the resources to implement soft power globally, we have a pragmatic and moral responsibility to do so. Centuries ago, Machiavelli praised the power of fear. However, today's globally intertwined world requires, as Einstein stated, a new manner of thinking. If mankind is to survive, and prosper, we must utilize soft power-the only route to long term peace and stability.