Developing a Smart Power Strategy: The Role of Cultural Exchanges in American Foreign Policy
At the time of this writing the urgent need for international cooperation and mutual understanding between groups is more pressing than ever. Crises such as the current COVID-19 pandemic highlight the lack of mutual understanding inherent in the socio-political institutions that perpetuate inequality in access to health care, education, and job security. Ultimately, these inequities endanger national and global security.

Research has demonstrated that when members of different groups know little about each other, or only what they have heard in the media, they are likely to initially perceive each other as dissimilar and potentially threatening. The current fractious geopolitical climate emphasizes the importance of promoting a more inclusive and less divisive worldview, if for no other reason than to promote national and global security.

Intercultural exchange can forge unique and enduring connections between individuals and diverse groups of people. Alliances anchored in the principles of diplomacy promote cooperation between states and peoples across the globe. As part of a larger national—and global—security strategy, soft power strategies such as intercultural exchange are critical. In the current context intercultural exchange can, and will, continue albeit in a virtual format.

Absent the meaningful face to face interpersonal experiences that in-person exchanges afford, virtual exchanges that emphasize one-to-one communication will be pivotal. There will never be a substitute for directly experiencing new cultures and traditions, but through personal one-to-one connections we can experience the commonalities of our shared humanity: our love of family, our desire to live in peace, and our dedication to leaving a world where our children can thrive.

Our intent in writing this paper is to highlight the promise of meaningful cultural exchange as an indispensable tool in fortifying the social structures that promote peace, prosperity, and security.
CONTENTS

02 Introduction
04 Executive Summary
06 Recommendations
07 Introduction
08 Economic Interdependence
09 The Rise of Nationalism
11 The Spread of Weapons Technology
12 Information Warfare - Soft or Hard Power
14 Utility of Sharp Power
16 Soft Power
19 Public Diplomacy and Soft Power
20 International Exchange & Public Diplomacy
22 Guideline for Effective Exchanges
23 The Fulbright Program as a Model for Successful Intercultural Exchange
25 Exchanges Create Community: Recommendations for Success
27 Virtual Exchange
28 Collaboration: The Key to Success
29 Smart Power
30 Investment
32 References
Transactions in the sphere of international relations and diplomacy rely on currencies of power that can be distinguished as either hard or soft power. Hard power refers to a political body’s ability to use economic incentives or military strength to influence other actors’ behaviors. Soft power, as defined by Nye, is the ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes one wants through attraction and co-option rather than coercion or payment.

The most successful power strategy for the twenty-first century utilizes hard and soft power strategically in ways that are mutually reinforcing. This strategy is referred to as smart power and is essential for advancing national interests.

Although hard power remains an important instrument, its use has become more complex and costly due to increasing economic interdependence between states, a rise in nationalism globally, and the spread of weapons technology. In today’s information age however, one form of hard power has risen to the forefront: information warfare (IW). Referred to as “sharp power” by Joseph Nye, former dean of Harvard University’s Kennedy School of Government, IW is the range of government and military operations that protect and exploit the information environment to pursue a competitive advantage over an opponent. In the wake of Russia’s interference in America’s 2016 election, it is clear that the threat posed by IW is real. However, without sufficient attention to soft power, hard power tactics such as IW will not be as able to affect desired change in the international sphere as it did in previous centuries.

The value of a nation’s soft power rests heavily on three basic resources: its culture, its political values, and its foreign policies. In order for these resources to produce attraction however, they must maintain three clusters of qualities: benignity, competence, and charisma. With these qualities is it possible for states to produce the requisite attraction to generate and leverage soft power over others. This attraction can affect its targets both directly and indirectly.
In the direct model, leaders and individuals are affected by the attraction (soft power) of another state. In the indirect model, public and third parties are included by the resources of another state that in turn affects leaders of other countries. When populations or governments are attracted to the resources of another state, an enabling environment is created for certain policy initiatives, thus giving the “attractor” state soft power over its target. This enabling environment can be used to achieve foreign policy goals and spread liberal democratic values that have the potential to increase the national security of the attractor state. In a world where public attitudes and public opinion matter, diplomacy aimed at public opinion can become as important as traditional diplomatic communications between leaders.

Public diplomacy is defined as a tool used by state and non-state actors for objectives such as advocacy, influence, agenda-setting, and mobilization; reinforcing other foreign policy objectives; promotion and prestige, correcting misperceptions; dialogue and mutual understanding; and harmony based on universal values.

In this environment governments, intergovernmental organizations, and nongovernmental organizations all use public diplomacy for their own goals. In this effort to advance one’s narrative, international student and cultural exchanges have proven to be a vital tool. Following are the recommendations asserted by this paper and a discussion of the rationale.
RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the value of cultural exchange programs in advancing America’s foreign policy agenda we recommend:

1. **R1:** The U.S. must continue to host and participate in cultural, educational, and professional exchanges. In order to maximize their effectiveness as tools of soft power, these exchanges must meet Atkinson’s (2010) three guidelines of close social interactions, experience a sense of community, and provide skills that can be used upon repatriation.

2. **R2:** In order to effectively implement public diplomacy as a means to advance soft power, the U.S. must collaborate with NGOs at local and national levels.

3. **R3:** The U.S. must pursue a smart power strategy that balances the use of hard and soft power if it wishes to effect desired change within the international political system.

4. **R4:** The U.S. must bolster resources to its soft power institutions such as the Department of State and Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs.
INTRODUCTION

Within the world of international relations, power is the ability to exercise influence over other actors within the international political system. Power is often associated with the possession of certain resources such as population, territory, natural resources, economic size, military forces, and political stability.

Historically, controlling the international system has been done through hard power, a term that refers to a political body’s ability to use economic incentives or military strength to influence other actors’ behaviors. When the USSR invaded Afghanistan in 1979 the country was exerting its hard power — and so too was the United States when it invaded Iraq in 2003. More recently, states have increasingly used economic pressure to achieve similar ends such as trade embargoes and other economic sanctions — also forms of hard power.

Alternatively, soft power, as defined by Nye, is the ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes one wants through attraction and co-option rather than coercion or payment. A country’s soft power rests on its resources of culture, values, and policies. “A country may obtain the outcomes it wants in world politics because other countries want to follow it, admiring its values, emulating its example, and/or aspiring to its level of prosperity and openness.”

While visiting the U.S., the son of China’s foreign minister remarked: “Our experiences made us see there are alternative ways for China to develop and for us to lead our personal lives. Being in the United States made us realize that things in China can be different” (Nye, 2011, p. 85).

Both forms of power remain important today, but hard power specifically will not have the same utility for states that it had in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Nye, 2011, p. 49). Its use has become more complex and costly, caused in part by the ever-increasing economic interdependence between states, the rise in nationalism globally, and the rapid spread of weapons technology.
ECONOMIC INTERDEPENDENCE

With advancements in communication and transportation since the 1990s, economic interdependence between states has increased substantially. This interdependence is further enhanced by the rapid spread of telecommunication. In 2015 the WTO predicted that by the end of that year, 97 out of 100 people would have a mobile phone subscription, while 47 per cent of the world’s population will hold a mobile broadband subscription (WTO, 2015, p. 22). By the very next year, 2016, approximately 62.9% of the world’s population owned a mobile phone, and that number increased to about 67% by 2019 (Statista, 2020).

The World Trade Organization (WTO) reports that “the average share of exports and imports of goods and commercial services in world GDP increased significantly from 20 per cent in 1995 to 30 per cent in 2014. In other words, today’s GDP is highly influenced by international trade” (WTO, 2015, p. 17).

While governments certainly can intervene in such global markets, “…if they do so with a heavy hand, they will incur enormous costs in their own economic growth and risk unintended effects,” (Nye, 2018, p. 161). Indeed, hard power tactics such as economic sanctions can reduce revenues of U.S. companies and individual business owners.

Each year U.S. sanctions against international partners cost U.S. companies billions of dollars of revenue and affect many thousands of U.S. workers (Haass, 2016). In addition, sometimes sanctions “…can bring about undesired effects that include bolstering the [authoritarian] regime, triggering large scale emigration, and retarding the emergence of a middle class and civil society,” (Haass, 2016).

As a result of the increasing interconnectedness between economies around the world, it is now much more difficult and complicated to successfully utilize economic hard power tactics alone.
Nationalism asserts that each nation should govern itself, free from outside interference and further aims to build and maintain a single national identity based on shared social characteristics such as culture, language, and religion (Triandafyllidou, 1998). Since the mid-2010s, the world has seen the emergence of state-centric nationalist movements across Europe, North America, and elsewhere. One aspect of this brand of nationalism is the tendency to see other countries not as allies in a mutually beneficial international system, but as rivals in a global competition for power and influence.

As nationalist sentiments rise in the populations of these countries, government leaders frequently advocate foreign policy strategies that seek to promote the interests of the nation itself, rather than those of the international system. We see this today in Trump’s “America First” campaign, Theresa May’s Brexit campaign, and the election of far-right Nationalist Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil. Another aspect of this brand of nationalism is the tendency of individuals to see outsiders as enemies of the state. These xenophobic sentiments have been increasing in popularity in countries such as the United States, Germany, Italy, and Greece. In this environment, economic hard power by foreign actors becomes even less effective; indeed, sanctions against adversaries can often stiffen their resolve (Trenin, 2015).

In Russia for example, “…nationalism has been on the rise since the fall of the Soviet Union along with attempts by the regime to commandeer it” (Arnold, 2016). After Russia annexed Crimea, many Western nations imposed sanctions in an effort to curve what they perceived as Russian aggression. Yet despite the severity of these sanctions, they have done very little to alter Russia’s behavior in the international system. In fact, some research points to an increase both in Putin’s popularity and Russian nationalism after the implementation of sanctions (Trenin, 2015).
In countries with high levels of nationalism, populations are more likely to be antagonistic to foreign interference, thus making military intervention more difficult. “Occupation helps to unite what under other circumstances would be disparate populations,” (Nye, 2011, p. 30). The United States and the Soviet Union in Vietnam and Afghanistan respectively found the costs of maintaining troops unsupportable. The cause of this, as Nye points out, was less an increase in the power of a weaker state than the costliness for outsiders to rule a nationalistic and therefore more antagonistic population. In 1953 the United States “…was able to restore the Shah of Iran to his throne through a minor covert action. It is hard to imagine, however, how many troops would have been needed to restore the Shah in the socially mobilized and nationalistic Iran of 1979,” (Nye, 1990, p. 160). Increased nationalism makes both military and economic hard power strategies more complicated and less effective today than in earlier times.
With the rapid spread of and easy access to technological advancements, the ease with which insurgency groups can obtain relatively high-grade weapons has increased. In recent years, these weapons have become easier to produce, especially for developing countries, making the weapons extremely low cost and widely available (Boutwell, 1998). Furthermore, “...the increasing sophistication and lethality of rapid-fire assault rifles, automatic pistols and submachine guns and their diffusion to non-state actors has given such individuals, groups, organizations or communities a firepower that often matches or sometimes exceeds that of state armed forces,” (Boutwell, 1998).

Another contributing factor is the increased possession of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) by less developed countries and non-state actors. Of the twenty-two countries that have or are suspected to have WMDs, more than half are on the lower two-thirds of the most recent Human Development Index by the United Nations Development Program (ProCon, 2009; UNDP, 2017). Non-state actors too have the potential to obtain WMDs. In 2015 the Islamic State was found to have “…developed at least a small-scale chemical weapons program and may have manufactured low-quality blister agent or obtained chemical arms from undeclared or abandoned [Syrian] government stocks” (Chivers, 2015).
With the widespread use of information technology, information warfare (IW) has arrived at the forefront of hard power. IW can be defined as the range of government and military operations to protect and exploit the information environment to pursue a competitive advantage over an opponent (Theohary, 2018). Three main informational tools of an IW strategy include propaganda, misinformation, and disinformation.

Propaganda exploits an idea or narrative to produce perceptions that over time have the ability to steer decision makers towards a specific course of action. Misinformation sows divisiveness and chaos in a target society through the dissemination of false information, unfounded conspiracy theories, or web hoaxes by individuals who may believe them, making true facts harder to discern. Disinformation deliberately inserts false news stories in the media, manufacturing protests, altering pictures, and tampering with private and/or classified communications before their widespread release (Theohary, 2018, p. 5).

The opportunities for IW strategies to be utilized successfully have greatly increased with the Information Revolution, led by the ongoing rapid evolution of cyberspace, microcomputers, and associated information technologies. Indeed, cyberspace, and social media in particular, presents a force multiplier for IW activities.

“The affordances of social media platforms make them powerful infrastructures for spreading computational propaganda” (Howard et al., 2018 p. 39). Social media are particularly effective at directly reaching large numbers of people, while simultaneously microtargeting individuals with personalized messages. Indeed, this effective impression management—and fine-grained control over who receives which messages—is what makes social media platforms so attractive to advertisers, but also to political and foreign operatives” (Howard et al., 2018, p. 39).
Both soft and sharp power involve narratives, persuasion, and framing information. Unlike soft power, however, sharp power intentionally uses deception to remove a subject’s ability to discern and voluntarily make informed decisions, effectively an invisible form of coercion (Nye, 2018).

The ability to segment audiences and target messages in a quick, cheap, and largely unregulated way, provides political operators with nearly infinite opportunities to manipulate and deceive the voting public and to undermine democracies (Howard et al., 2018). IW can be used to attack government agencies, political leadership, or news media in order to influence public opinion or to compel and coerce decision makers to take certain actions.

With the intent to coerce rather than persuade, IW is a form of hard power. Political theorist Nye describes this form of hard power as “sharp power” because it has the capacity to pierce, penetrate, or perforate political and information environments in the targeted countries by using information deceptively for hostile purposes (Nye, 2018).
Sharp power has been utilized by the world’s authoritarian powers, particularly China and Russia. “Over the past decade, Beijing and Moscow have spent tens of billions of dollars to shape public perceptions and behavior around the world — using tools new and old that exploit the asymmetry of openness between their own restrictive systems and democratic societies” (Nye, 2018). Most prominently, in 2016 Russian President Vladimir Putin “ordered an influence campaign in 2016 aimed at the US presidential election” in order to “undermine public faith in the US democratic process, denigrate Clinton, and harm her electability and potential presidency.” (U.S. Congress, 2018, p. 10). This campaign has been carried out by Russia’s Internet Research Agency (IRA) beginning in 2013 and has used various social media tools to spread a mix of propaganda, misinformation, and deliberately misleading or corrupted disinformation.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of this campaign was that while conservative voters were actively encouraged by IRA content to support Trump’s campaign, other voters were encouraged to boycott the election, or to spread cynicism about participating in the election in general (Howard, 2018).

In their comprehensive study, Howard and others found that: “...all of the messaging clearly sought to benefit the Republican Party—and specifically, Donald Trump [who] is mentioned most in campaigns targeting conservative voters, where the messaging encouraged these groups to support his campaign. The main groups that could challenge Trump were then provided messaging that sought to confuse, distract, and ultimately discourage members from voting,” (Howard, 2018, p. 20).

In total, IRA content was shared by an estimated 31 million users, “liked” by almost 39 million users, garnered almost 5.4 million emoji reactions, and generated almost 3.5 million comments. With this staggering reach, the various tools utilized by the IRA have had a devastating impact. This interference is likely to continue as well with America’s top security officials warning that Russia is planning to interfere in a similar manner in the 2020 election (Bash, 2020).
By compromising the fidelity of information, sowing discord and doubt in the American public about the validity of intelligence community reports, and prompting questions about the legitimacy of the democratic process itself, Russia has and will continue to put the country’s national security at risk (Howard, 2018).

The threat posed by information warfare is real. IW is now a useful and arguably necessary tool for nations in the contemporary international political sphere. However, like other forms of hard power, IW alone does not contribute to a net increase in power for those states who wish to utilize it. Sharp power may have disrupted western democratic processes and tarnished the brand of democratic countries, but it has done little to enhance the soft power of its perpetrators and in some cases has done the opposite (Nye, 2018).

While hard power remains a crucial component of power in world politics, judicious and targeted use of soft and hard power will now be required to achieve desired change in the contemporary international system (Nye, 2011, p. 49). Ultimately then, the answer to the question “Is hard power the most important form of power in world politics?” depends upon the context. In much of the world, the answer is yes, but not in all domains or on all issues (Nye, 2011, p. 28, 29).

In the twenty-first century, power increasingly rests not on a nation’s capacity to coerce others with economic or military threats, but on their capacity to create and manipulate knowledge and information. Indeed, soft power has become more important now than ever before (Wilson, 2008).
Soft power is the ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes one wants through attraction and co-option rather than coercion or payment. The value of a nation’s soft power rests heavily on three basic resources: its culture, its political values, and its foreign policies. In order for these resources to produce attraction however, they must maintain three clusters of qualities: benignity, competence, and charisma. As Nye explains: “‘Benignity’ is an aspect of how an agent relates to others. Being perceived as benign tends to generate sympathy, trust, credibility, and acquiescence. “Brilliance” or “competence” refers to how an agent does things, and it produces admiration, respect, and emulation. “Beauty” or “charisma” is an aspect of an agent’s relation to ideals, values, and vision, and it tends to produce inspiration and adherence” (Nye, 2011, p. 92).

The same dynamic influences students during an academic or leadership exchange: “Research has consistently shown that exchange students return home with a more positive view of the country in which they studied and the people with whom they interacted,” (Atkinson, 2010, p. 3) Moreover, such programs can have beneficial ripple effects on indirect participants (Nye, 2011).

With these qualities is it possible for states to produce the requisite attraction to generate and leverage soft power over others. This attraction can affect its targets both directly and indirectly. In the direct model, leaders and individuals are affected directly by the attraction (soft power) of another state and are persuaded by the benignity, competence, or charisma of other leaders (Nye, 2011).
In the indirect model, publics and third parties are influenced by the resources of another state which in turn affects the leaders of their country. When attracted to the resources of another state, an enabling environment is created for certain policy initiatives, thus giving the “attractor” state soft power over its target. It is important to note, however, that what produces attraction for one target may produce revulsion for another. For example, a film depicting women as empowered and independent may produce attraction in Brazil but revulsion in Saudi Arabia (Nye, 2011, p. 93). If attraction is not produced, a disabling environment is created making it more difficult for states to promote certain policy initiative over their target and thus weakening their soft power. Intercultural and interpersonal sensitivity can effectively mediate soft power.

By spreading these liberal democratic values, states stand to increase their national security. Armed conflict is unlikely among fellow democracies (Atkinson, 2010, p. 19). Soft power is also critical against the threat of transnational terrorism. American and British intelligence agencies have reported that their use of hard power in Iraq, without sufficient attention to soft power, resulted in an increase rather than decrease in the number of Islamic terrorists. The attraction of soft power is vital in winning over the hearts and minds of those who may see the U.S. as an enemy.
For example, without gaining the support of mainstream Muslims, long-term success against Islamic extremist terrorism will be impossible (Nye, 2008). Soft power also presents the best defense for democracies against the sharp power being employed by authoritarian states.

By encouraging certain soft power tools such as cultural exchanges, states can encourage the development of tolerance, understanding, and empathy among its population.

These values effectively open lines of communication between different ideological groups both within and between countries, thus providing opportunities for shared experience, mutual understanding, and civil discourse. Values based on tolerance decrease the public’s vulnerability to the subversive tactics of sharp power and lower the likelihood that it can be successfully used to sow discord and division. This improved defense against sharp power can increase a state’s national security.

In a world where public attitudes and public opinion matter, states cannot overlook the importance of soft power in order to directly or indirectly influence foreign policy decisions of other countries (Lee et al, 2015).

Diplomacy aimed at public opinion can become as important as traditional diplomatic communications among leaders (Nye, 2008, p. 99).

With more than half of the world’s countries now democracies (Pew), coupled with the ease with which people can access information and communication, the indirect model for soft power is potentially becoming more important than the direct model. As Nye states, “Information creates power, and today a much larger part of the world’s population has access to that power,” (Nye, 2011, p. 103).
Initially, public diplomacy was seen as official, state-centered government-to-publics interaction that is linked to a state’s foreign policy outcomes. For centuries states have sent ambassadors as diplomatic representatives to discuss and negotiate on problems that occur within the international system. In an increasingly interconnected global context non-state actors such as NGOs, intergovernmental organizations and corporations have also entered the diplomacy stage (Lee et al, 2015). With this change, a more modern definition pegs public diplomacy as:

“A tool used by state and non-state actors for objectives such as advocacy, influence, agenda-setting and mobilization; reinforcing other foreign policy objectives; promotion and prestige; correcting misperceptions; dialogue and mutual understanding; and harmony based on universal values,” (Lee et al, 2015, p. 60).

In this environment, governments, intergovernmental organizations, and NGOs all use public diplomacy for their own goals. If governments wish to use public diplomacy to wield soft power, they must compete with these other actors for attention, of which credibility is a crucial resource. As Nye states:

“The world of traditional power politics is typically about whose military or economy wins...politics in an information age ‘may ultimately be about whose story wins’. Narratives become the currency of soft power. Governments compete with each other and with other organizations to enhance their own credibility and weaken that of their opponents,” (Nye, 2011, p. 104).

In this effort to advance one’s narrative, states must have the ability to communicate directly and invest in long-term relationship building. For this task, international student and cultural exchanges have proven to be a vital tool.
Effective public diplomacy is a two-way street that involves listening as well as talking. Soft power “...requires an understanding of how [others] are hearing your messages and adapting them accordingly,” (Nye, 2008, 103). This is why Nye argues that cultural exchanges are some of the most effective tools in public diplomacy and one of the best ways to increase one’s soft power. Through exchange programs participants are given the opportunity to interact with the host country’s values, ideals, culture, citizens, and, sometimes, government. And these interactions are not trivial.

“The ideas and values that America exports in the minds of more than half a million foreign students who study every year in American universities and then return to their home countries...tend to reach elites with power,” (Atkinson, 2010, p. 3).

These effects are not unique to student-exchange programs. International training programs aimed at mid-career professionals can enhance democratic values and orientations of program participants. In her empirical study, Core Fulbright Scholar and retired USAF Lieutenant Colonel Dr. Carol Atkinson argues that U.S.-hosted exchange programs play an important role in supporting the development of liberal values and practices in authoritarian states.

The official National Security Strategy of the United States recommends international exchange programs as a key strategy whereby the United States can promote its national security by effectively engaging in the so-called “battle of ideas” with non-liberal forces (Atkinson, 2010).
“One of the most effective mechanisms for the dissemination of democratic ideals is international educational exchange...Through the exchange experience, participants (who may have little exposure to democratic norms and ideas) observe how people behave within a democratic system, acquire knowledge about how democracy functions, and learn what to expect of their own leaders and institutions,” (Atkinson, 2010, p. 1-3).

Cultural exchange programs play an important role in spreading liberal democratic values and increased favorability toward democracy and the U.S. within a target populace, vital for the creation of an enabling environment for certain foreign policy goals and boosting soft power to promote national security. While exchange programs are some of the most effective tools in the public diplomacy arsenal, some exchange programs have a much greater potential than others to increase soft power.
GUIDELINES FOR EFFECTIVE EXCHANGES

Atkinson finds that in order for cultural exchange programs to increase American soft power they must impact the political institutions and influence political behavior in the home countries of program participants. To achieve this, three contextual conditions are important.

First is the depth and extent of social interactions that occur while abroad. To this end, it is important for programs to incorporate explicit socialization opportunities and goals into their agenda. Secondly, the sharing of a sense of community or common identity between participants and their hosts is important. She and other scholars note that a sense of belonging to a community or sharing a common identity with those in the host country is an important factor affecting foreign students’ attitudes. Transnational communities of individuals who share similar life experiences and knowledge are more likely to serve as effective socialization channels than unstructured exchanges of diverse persons (Atkinson, 2010).

“…the closer the personal social interactions a student had with Americans, the more favorable their attitude toward the United States, both toward American people and their lifestyle,” (Atkinson, 2010, p. 3).

The third and final factor is the repatriation of exchange participants to their home community upon completion of the program. This allows for the introduction of outside views and ideas in the often very closed political environment of their home countries. To maximize the reach of such ideas, programs should seek to recruit student leaders, community activists, or rising business, academic, political, and NGO professionals (Atkinson, 2010).

This process cultivates informal “ambassadors” for each other’s country, culture, and governance. These three factors, laid out by Atkinson, form a model of success that can act as a guide for government agencies when seeking to facilitate international exchanges as part of an effective public diplomacy campaign. Several exchange programs implemented here in the U.S. already subscribe to Atkinson’s model and they provide prime examples of how the U.S. can utilize them for soft power goals.
The most prestigious and widely known cultural exchange program is the Fulbright Program, sponsored by the U.S. Department of State’s Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs (ECA). This program has coordinated the exchange of students, academics, and professionals around the world for the past 66 years. In the words of its founder, it aspires to “bring a little more knowledge, a little more reason, and a little more compassion into world affairs, thereby increasing the chance that nations will learn at last to live in peace and friendship,” (Starr, 2012, p. 5). The program works to achieve this goal by awarding grants to individuals that sponsor time spent overseas teaching, conducting research, working and studying. Through their time spent abroad, participants not only engage in a formal education exchange, but also become immersed in a foreign culture and gain valuable insight into their host country’s history, people, and traditions (Starr, 2012). This process ensures that participants have extensive opportunities for meaningful socialization and interaction between themselves and their host communities.

Furthermore, Fulbright grantees go through a rigorous application process and applicants are most often successful if they demonstrate a commitment to the program’s goal of establishing mutual understanding and indicate significant leadership capacity. This vetting system assists Fulbright in sending only those students and professionals who will appear most attractive to the communities they travel to join (Starr, 2012). This rigorous application process, in addition to the fact that individual programs are made up of students and professionals that share similar academic and career interests, ensures that a strong sense of community and identity with the host community develops.

In addition to creating a shared sense of community and mutual understanding among participants and hosts, programs such as Fulbright also seek to encourage the spread of democratic values by communicating to foreign participants the image of a powerful and thriving America in the hopes that they will desire to emulate the American way of life (Starr, 2012). By ensuring that participants are leaders in their fields, the program ensures that the learned democratic values have the opportunity to influence foreign societies and governments through exchange participants who can communicate those ideals.
While it may be difficult to empirically prove the success of the Fulbright Program as a soft power means of promoting American values and democracy, there is evidence that it does have a significant and enduring impact. Twenty-nine international Fulbright scholars have gone on to become heads of state including the past presidents of Colombia, Chile, Ghana and the prime ministers of the Slovak Republic and Haiti, as well as the Governor General of Belize (Starr, 2012, p. 38). Success has not been limited to the field of politics, however. Fulbright scholars have pursued careers in many disciplines including government, science, economics, business and the performing arts. “Impressively, forty-three Fulbright alumni, representing eleven different countries, have been awarded the Nobel Prize, and seventy-eight have received Pulitzer prizes,” (Starr, 2012, p. 43).

The Fulbright program has left its mark on these and many other individuals by effectively communicating ideas of liberalism, democracy, and mutual understanding early in their professional careers. These values are likely to influence their future decision making, which, as heads of state or leaders in their fields, will be extremely important for the success of American foreign policy. This process increases the likelihood that American foreign policy can be accepted in other countries, increasing American soft power. Because the Fulbright Program meets all three of Atkinson’s contextual conditions at its foundation, it can be said that it “…provides one tool with which the United States can shape the international community’s perception of America and its policies,” or in other words, act as a tool for American soft power (Starr, 2012 p. 10).

Programs like this are a very important tool that the State Department can advisably continue to use to increase American soft power impact globally. In addition, there are a multitude of programs hosted by the government and implemented by non-state organizations such as non-profits that are having similar impacts. ECA programs have had more than nine million participants, 596 of whom are current or former heads of state and government or heads of international organizations (Latypova, 2017). These programs, in addition to Fulbright, were extremely important during the cold war: in two separate studies, researchers found that “Scholarly exchanges increased Western influence particularly within the Russian intelligentsia whose interactions in Western political, scientific, and academic circles helped foster gradual liberalization in the Soviet Union that contributed to the eventual collapse of the Soviet system” (Latypova, 2017).
EXCHANGES CREATE COMMUNITY: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUCCESS

R1: The U.S. must continue to host and participate in cultural, educational, and professional exchanges. In order to maximize their effectiveness as tools of soft power, these exchanges must meet Atkinson’s three guidelines of close social interactions, experience a sense of community, and provide skills that can be used upon repatriation.

Today, most of the ECA’s programs require collaboration with non-profit organizations in order to facilitate them successfully. One New Mexico-based NGO, Global One to One, has hosted multiple in-person cultural exchanges in partnership with two highly regarded agencies based in Washington D.C. The Open World Leadership Program (OWLP) is the first and only international exchange agency in the U.S. Legislative Branch to bring emerging leaders from Russia, Ukraine and other post-Soviet states to the U.S. Visitors experience living with a local host family, observing democratic governing systems, meeting with U.S. professionals in their field, comparing best practices with these colleagues, and developing skills to enhance their work in their home communities. OWLP Executive Director Jan Sargus, states that:

"Due to this network [of community-based host organizations] these future leaders form positive views of the United States and come to recognize the value of good relations."

Global One to One has had the privilege of serving as one of OWLP’s community-based host organizations for delegations from Tajikistan (2016, 2017, 2020), Serbia (2018), and Ukraine (2019). Additionally, Global One to One has worked with World Learning, a Washington D.C.–based NGO funded by the ECA. Like Global One to One, World Learning believes that:

"Building relationships across cultures is vital to creating a more peaceful and just world. When people from diverse cultures and backgrounds know and understand one another—and gain the skills they need to contribute as citizens and leaders—they form the global partnerships that undergird global security, economic stability, and tolerance."
Through World Learning, Global One to One has hosted Youth Ambassador Program high school students from Argentina and Chile, Communities Connecting Heritage youth leaders from India, a cadre of the Iraqi Young Leaders Exchange Program, and high school environmental activists from Mexico with the Jóvenes en Acción program. Each exchange involves arranging host family accommodations and meetings with local NGOs for comprehensive two-week programs focused on multicultural awareness, intercultural understanding, civic engagement, and peace-building.

Members of these delegations establish stronger ties with their host community and cultivate civic engagement at an authentic, one-to-one level. These connections ensure a depth of social interaction between program participants and host communities that are personally significant and develop a sense of community and shared humanity. In the process, intercultural empathy and understanding dismantle harmful stereotypes, and lay a foundation for long term collaboration. The ECA and World Learning select young leaders who are “…not only very likely to internalize the ideas of freedom and democracy, but who also [have] a will and capability to share and enact their ideas in home communities,” (Latypova, 2017). These American exchange programs act as effective tools for public diplomacy and do much to promote and expand American soft power.
VIRTUAL EXCHANGE

In the last decades of the 20th century several civil society organizations in Europe and North America began to focus their attention on building intercultural communication skills with secondary and post secondary students through telecommunication. Virtual exchange, in contrast to direct in-person exchange, utilizes technology to create and sustain people-to-people connections. When international political tensions or global health threats create unsafe conditions for in-person exchanges, virtual exchange becomes an accessible alternative. In addition, it has opened up opportunities for youth and marginalized populations that have not previously had access to in-person exchange opportunities. International communication and intercultural understanding skills gleaned from cultural exchange provide future leaders with the skills they require to thrive in global society.

An early program launched by the Copen Family Fund, known as iEARN (International Education and Resource Network), utilized telecommunication technology between youth in the U.S. and Russia in the 1980s, later expanding to other countries in the 1990s. Numerous other virtual exchange programs have since been developed, including the Stevens Initiative. Inspired by U.S. Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens, it is an example of public-private collaboration, receiving some of its funding from the U.S. Department of State, the Aspen Institute, and the Bezos Family Foundation among others. Their program focuses on connecting youth in the U.S. and several countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA).

Although a variety of virtual exchange programs exist, most share similar characteristics and provide the conditions recommended by Atkins. Lessons and activities take place in a structured setting over the course of several weeks or several months. Asynchronous activities such as online forums facilitate participation by students in different time zones and varying levels of access to internet. Synchronous activities, such as videoconferencing on Zoom or Skype, allow participants to experience the cultural and personal nuances that generate feelings of community and mutual understanding among participants. Upon completion of the virtual exchange, participants carry their experience back into the public discourse of their communities. In many cases, as with the Global One to One virtual exchange, participants will maintain contact with each other over social media, continuing the benefits of the intercultural exchange.
While public diplomacy programs such as intercultural exchanges have been demonstrated to be very effective tools for public diplomacy and the cultivation of soft power, it is essential that they not be mere window dressing for hard power. Without underlying national credibility, the instruments of public diplomacy cannot translate cultural resources into soft power (Nye, 2011). As Nye points out “the treatment of prisoners at Abu Ghraib and Guantánamo in a manner inconsistent with American values led to perceptions of hypocrisy that could not be reversed by broadcasting pictures of Muslims living well in America,” (Nye, 2011, p. 106).

Because most publics are generally skeptical of authority, and governments are often mistrusted (Nye, 2008) it is often the case that NGOs are better positioned than governments to utilize public diplomacy. The World Learning, Open World Leadership Center and Global One to One organization examples discussed previously demonstrate how NGOs can effectively use public diplomacy for their own purposes, and how cooperation between them and the government has the potential to benefit all parties involved.

Non-state actors bring many advantages to the realm of public diplomacy. According to Lee and Ayhan, “...non-state actors’ activities are rather freer from skepticism [than state actors] as they enjoy more neutrality and credibility in the field than do state agencies,” (Lee et al, 2015, p. 61). When state credibility is the greatest obstacle to reach out to certain publics, collaboration with non-state actors can facilitate communication and relationship management. This form of collaboration can also give non-state actors much needed funding while allowing state agencies to utilize the experience, expertise, and networks of non-state actors that would otherwise be very difficult and costly to maintain within state agencies.

Collaboration with non-state actors can add long-term vision to public diplomacy activities because “...non-state actors are more committed for long-term efforts on the ground. They naturally maintain their [established] relationships for their main purposes,” (Lee et al, 2015, p. 62-3). Indeed, “Collaborating with or outsourcing to non-state actors would bring more effective results for public diplomacy objectives,” (Lee et al, 2015, p. 62-3).
Soft power, with its constituent aspects of attraction and persuasion, may arguably be the most effective of the available power strategies in the contemporary information age—but hard power remains a vital resource. As asserted previously, combined power strategies are likely to be the most effective. The most successful power strategy for the twenty-first century utilizes hard and soft power strategically in ways that are mutually reinforcing in order to effectively and efficiently advance a state’s political position (Wilson, 2008, p. 110). This strategy is referred to as smart power and is essential for advancing national interests.

A successful smart power strategy requires knowing the strengths and limitations of each instrument of statecraft. What can armies be expected to achieve, and at what cost? What do exchange programs have the potential to achieve, and under which circumstances will they not be sufficient? (Wilson, 2008). For example, whereas soft power did little to divert the Taliban government away from its support for al-Qaida in the 1990s, hard military power ended that problem in 2001 rather quickly (Nye, 2008).

During the cold war military deterrence helped to prevent Soviet aggression in Europe, while soft power strategies that promulgated Western culture and ideologies undermined confidence in communism behind the Iron Curtain (Nye, 2011). In contrast, while the American military invasion of Iraq in 2003 toppled Saddam’s regime rather quickly, U.S. soft power was undercut by the subsequent inefficiency of the occupation and the scenes of mistreatment of prisoners (Nye, 2011). When used correctly, smart power can bridge the inefficiencies of hard and soft power, acting as a more efficient tool for statecraft than the sum of its parts. This is why we recommend:

**R3: The U.S. must pursue a smart power strategy that strategically balances the use of hard and soft power strategies if it wishes to effect desired change within the international political system.**

Smart power combines elements of hard power with soft power into one targeted strategy.
To develop an effective smart power strategy a state must prioritize the distribution of adequate resources for both hard power and soft power strategies. In the U.S., resources allocated to institutions of hard power far outweigh those allocated to programs designated to develop and deploy soft power strategies. Since 2000, military spending has dominated the U.S. federal budget while spending on the Department of State, the agency responsible for national public diplomacy, is allocated only 1% of the federal budget (Jones et al, 2017).

This trend continues today: for four years in a row, including this upcoming fiscal year, the current administration has proposed dangerous and disproportionate cuts to America’s development and diplomacy programs while granting more money to the Department of Defense (DOD) (USGLC, 2019; Macias, 2019). The disproportionately large DOD budget is evidence of the U.S. preoccupation with hard power despite evidence that this strategy, without the appropriate and commensurate level of soft power implementation, is inadequate to assure U.S. security and foreign policy goals. This continued reliance on hard power is why an independent Smart Power Commission concluded that America’s image and influence has declined in recent years (Nye, 2008).

Despite its clear benefits, soft power institutions in the U.S. have been forced into a subordinate position, lacking the resources and clout of their hard power counterparts (Wilson, 2008). This imbalance greatly hinders America’s ability to pursue an effective smart power strategy, hindering the country’s ability to achieve foreign policy goals and protect its national security. If America is committed to protecting its national interests, it must reconfigure the institutional landscape of hard and soft power. This will mean addressing the gross asymmetries between the two forms of power in terms of budget and organizational capacity.
Only by meeting this last recommendation will the U.S. be able to fully address the first three recommendations. With regard to R1, the Department of State can only continue to facilitate international exchanges if it has adequate resources to do so. The importance of exchanges to American soft power cannot be overstated, and while many forms of American soft power can persist without government support, exchange programs rely heavily on government assistance to operate (Nye, 2008).

This relates to R2: effectively using public diplomacy as a means of soft power requires collaboration with NGOs. But, effective collaboration between the two actors requires that they each have the necessary resources to establish and implement an effective strategy for cooperation. With greater funding, state agencies will be more able to actively seek partners who will add value to public diplomacy initiatives (Lee et al, 2015).

Lastly, regarding R3, the U.S. will not be able to pursue an effective smart power strategy if it does not bolster its soft power institutions. When the hard power capabilities of the country far outweigh those of soft power, an imbalance results which makes it impossible to use smart power, a strategy that requires equal attention to both.

The recommendations presented here provide a basic framework for the U.S. to follow in the search for an effective smart power strategy. Pursuing such a strategy requires understanding the importance of soft power in today’s international political system as well as the complexities of combining it with hard power. Successfully implementing a smart power strategy however stands to benefit the country both in terms of its foreign policy goals as well as defending its national security.
REFERENCES


