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Soft Power and Nation Branding in the Cultural Hegemony of the United States

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I. Introduction

The United States has recently been experiencing considerable challenges in terms of appeal and credibility, not only in terms of the global crisis at the level of the economy but also at the root level, i.e. in its underlying socio-cultural values under the umbrella of which its superiority was – until the recent past – highly successful in exporting her concepts and principles as well as in investing her peculiar worldview and lifestyle. Today, however, fewer and fewer people believe in the American dream even within the US itself (Huntington, 2004) and many envision the swiftly approaching diminishment of the US's preponderance in global economic and political matters. Some even talk about the end of *Pax Americana* and attempt to interpret the post-Soviet era as a gradual "shift from anti-Americanism to post-Americanism" in the framework of the third major power shift in modern history (Zakaria).

Far-fetched and not a little biased as it may seem, this dire future forecast might actually invite us to pursue an exciting intellectual quest with the purpose of contemplating – and hopefully revealing – some points of consideration related to the possible causes of the emergence of an ideological hegemon in general. Next, we might begin to ponder of the possible causes that might lie behind the decline of the unquestionably unique appeal of "the Land of the Free and the Home of the Brave." The role of soft power and its diminished scope of application have become apparent recently through their dire consequences, such as the increasing popularity of extremism and of trigger-happy nationalistic militarism, in the discerning eyes of those who nourish pluralistic democracies and consider the US as its most prominent representative.

Therefore, I shall strive to gain insight into the nature of soft power in an effort to put a finger on its essence as accurately as possible within the limited framework of this study. The concept of soft power requires that we take a closer look at some tightly related concepts within the same conceptual domain, therefore, I shall also try to discuss the following questions: what is a regime and what is the hegemon's significance in it? Why is the American nation brand perceived to be on the decline? What, in fact, are the sources of soft power? How can soft power facilitate the sustainability of regimes? What institutions are necessary for the maintenance of soft power? What is the relevance of the US's nation branding in the current changing environment and how are guerilla diplomacy and public diplomacy involved in the shaping of its perception?

Going along the above-mentioned questions revolving around the same line of thought, the hypothesis of the present paper is the following: Soft power has been highly instrumental in the rise of the United States as a normative cultural hegemon on a global scale as well as in the maintenance of her post WW2 cultural regime.

Finally, some words about the motivation behind the present paper and the choice of the topic. I firmly believe that there indeed are such things as American values and pluralistic democracy has so far proved to be the most benign social engineering model. I am also convinced that despite its shortcomings the United States has been as yet the best social experiment that has managed to elaborate the most humane constitution to serve as a role model all over the world with the purpose of ensuring human dignity and development in a social context.

The present paper cannot possibly hope to address the questions above in their full depths but perhaps it is not groundless to presume that this conceptual domain could provide us with thought-provoking problems worth further research in the future.

II. Framework for analysis: International Political Economy

1) What is a regime and why is it necessary?

> *"Almost as if according to some natural law, in every century there seems to emerge a country with the power, the will and the intellectual and moral impetus to shape the entire international system in accordance with its own rules."*
>
> (Kissinger, p. 17)

The long 20th century saw the transformation of the United States from an isolationist state protected by the ocean shields first to a regional hegemon on the verge of total annihilation, and second to a global hegemon compelled to expose itself to "globalized informal violence" (Keohane) by stretching its sphere of interest to an unprecedented extent, making American perception of safety lower than ever. The question as to the nature of this move as a mutually beneficial step for the US and "the rest" (the responsibility to protect) or rather an act of sole opportunism to maximize its international power to her own ends (Strange) is not to be discussed in the course of the present paper. What this paper is concerned with is the ideological features of this institutionalized order and the ways that soft power can be utilized to sustain it.

In outlining the concept of regime, Krasner differentiates between three distinct approaches as far as their pervasiveness is concerned: the conventional structural, the modified structural and the Grotian approach.

The first school of thought, hallmarked by Strange, dismisses regime as an epiphenomenon, a fictitious concept lacking substantial proof. In this paradigm, self-seeking actors function in closed sets of interest unmoved by principles, norms or rules, but are primarily driven solely by their constantly changing normal interests, thus there is no permanent cooperation between states. However, the term "normal interest" lacks proper definition and is dealt with as a black box not taking into consideration the intricate factors that provide its context and thus define interest itself, not to mention "normal" interest. Indeed, the very term "interest" implies that it is not devoid of a basic set of projected values and therefore it is normative in nature, thus there is no contradiction between the parallel existence of self-seeking actors and regimes. Hence rational self-seeking actors strive to extend their own sets of values maximizing their own utility to other actors. In other words, regimes are extended sets of values nurtured by an entity to be extended in scope to the community trickling down to the level of the individual.

The modified structural concept is more lenient in its approach to regimes and characterizes regimes as having conditional autonomy in the sense that they can be sustained only if cooperation is a positive-sum game between states. If such preconditions do not apply, and the game is perceived to be a zero-sum game, the states' self-seeking efforts undermine the establishment of regimes. In other words, regimes can be utilized only if uncoordinated individual calculations of self-interest would lead to sub-optimal results.

The Grotian tradition regards the broader social environment as the unit of investigation and rejects the assumption that only the balance of power poses viable constraints on the international system constituted by sovereign states. The state has limited power to directly control and influence the course of events overarching boundaries. Military strength is not regarded as the sole means of conflict management in an increasingly interdependent world; security and state survival are not exclusive objectives. This school asserts that regimes are pervasive constituents of the political sphere where pervasive behavioral schemes bear normative significance. In order to illustrate these, Vígvári offers a possible taxonomy of regime theories outlining their basic features ranging between rationalist and cognitivist (the equivalent of the Grotian concept) categories. (Figure 1). The conventional structural

approach is not represented in this figure on account of the fact that it does not consider regimes as pervasive elements of international relations.

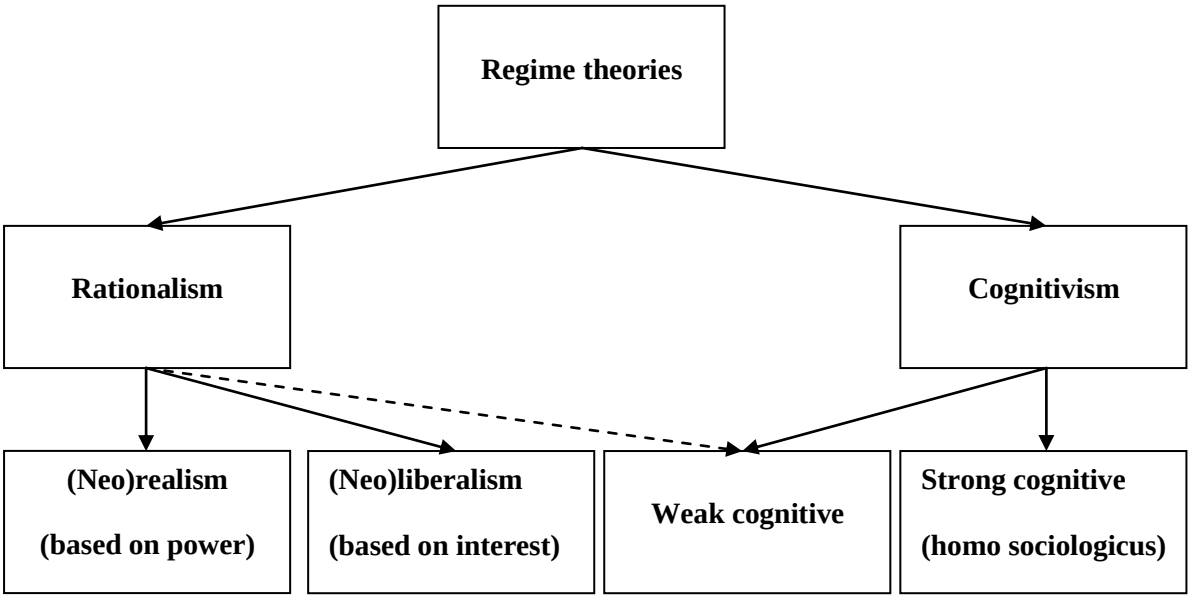

Figure 1: A possible taxonomy of regime theories. Source: Vígvári, p. 156.

In the course of the present paper an attempt is made to highlight what seems to be the combined truth in the weak cognitive approach and the rational interest-based neoliberal approach, stating that it is eventually the cognitive interpretation of interest that defines a regime, i.e. the knowledge of how interest is represented in an actor's mindset construing their concept of self-interest. (Figure 2) This is justified by the fact that the weak cognitive approach complements conventional regime theorems and emphasizes a rather dynamized utility function of states explaining them eventually through knowledge and ideas, highlighting the key role of cognition in the creation of regimes with a focus on the supply side of regimes, while the neoliberal approach highlights self-interest, which, as the present paper attempts to point out, is definitely a perceived self-interest, 'real' self-interest being a rather vague concept, as interest itself is deeply embedded in and thus interpreted primarily on the basis of already existing knowledge and thus, perception of knowledge. Therefore, what matters is eventually our knowledge of what we think we know since any reality is construed eventually in the mind of the perceiver. No independent concept of self-interest can be construed as there is no independent mind to construe such a concept and no independent perceiver either, being inseparably interrelated, existing only in continuous streams of mutual interaction. Thus, self-interest can really be considered only also as a continually changing

perception of what is construed as such by similarly continually developing dynamically interrelated minds of perceivers. As Kövecses elaborates,

> How do we view the relationship between the mind and external reality? There are basically two major views here. In one, the relationship is such that the mind reflects a preexisting reality, and in another, it is the mind that creates,“ that is, provides structure for, this reality.[…] Indeed, it is possible to claim in the second view that we can see only an “imagined,” a “projected,” kind of reality. (Kövecses, p. 7)

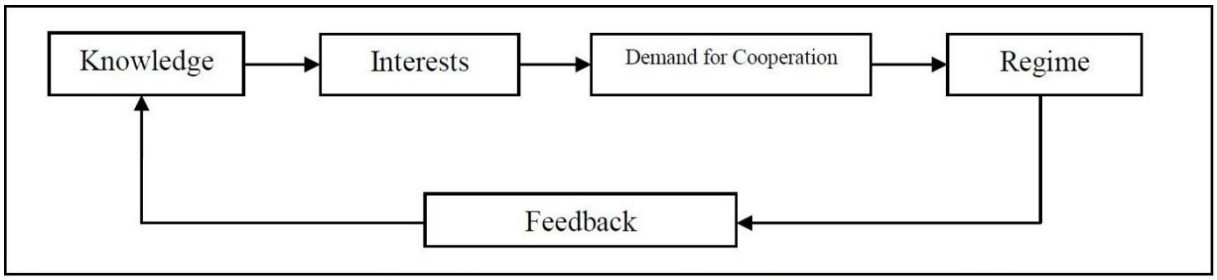

Figure 2: The causal scheme of thinking of the weak cognitivist theory. Source: Vígvári, p. 168.

According to Magyarics, the United States chose to shape the post-World War world along regional alliances because this system reduces the costs of peace by relieving the hegemon of the burden of constant power demonstration while providing public goods for the states under its protective umbrella making secession from the alliance costly (Magyarics 2010b). In the present paper the above mentioned means to channel frictional tension within the community is called regime[1], a framework designed to optimize decision-making and reach a consensus on the means and ways of dissent through learning and adjustment, as Tharoor described it: “to agree on how to disagree.” (Tharoor) The basic motif behind this common understanding is that the participants should “speak the same language”, in other words, they should have a common understanding as to the fundaments of the relationship for only this way can reciprocity and redistribution[2] be achieved among the members since actors must be aware of the actual “trade-offs” of political or economic favors or mischief.[3]

[1] “Regimes can be defined as sets of implicit or explicit principles, norms, rules, and decision-making procedures around which actors’ expectations converge in a given area of international relations.” (Krasner, p. 2)

[2] “Reciprocity and redistribution are able to ensure the working of an economic system without the help of written records and elaborate administration only because the organization of the societies in question meets the requirements of such a solution with the help of patterns such as *symmetry* and *centricity”.* (Polányi)

[3] By common understanding I do not mean a homogenous worldview within the regime but the actor’s awareness and appreciation of the costs and benefits their action might have on other actors. Refraining from it may result in the increase of the costs of maintaining the regime as exemplified by the unilateralism of the Bush Administration in its retaliatory missions against Al-Quaida and the military operations against Saddam Hussein in Iraq as well as Washington’s subsequent loss of prestige in the aftermath of the military operations on account of the Iraqi and Afghan “wars without peace”.

2) The American Ideological Hegemony – Ideological Hegemonic Stability

"You cannot avoid the interplay of politics within an orthodox religion. This power struggle permeates the training, educating and disciplining of the orthodox community. Because of this pressure, the leaders of such a community inevitably must face that ultimate internal question: to succumb to complete opportunism as the price of maintaining their rule, or risk sacrificing themselves for the sake of the orthodox ethic."

(Frank Herbert)

The theory of hegemonic stability has been the target of heated criticism on account of the fact that there is no basis for comparison with a world without hegemons. (Gilpin) However, if we apply the interpretation of international political economics, we can conceptualize the international sphere as the competition of states and thus utilize Tuckman's stages of group development on an international level. In the light of this, the specific states periodically go through the successive interrelated processes of forming, storming, norming, performing (and if all goes well adjourning) as shown in Figure 3.

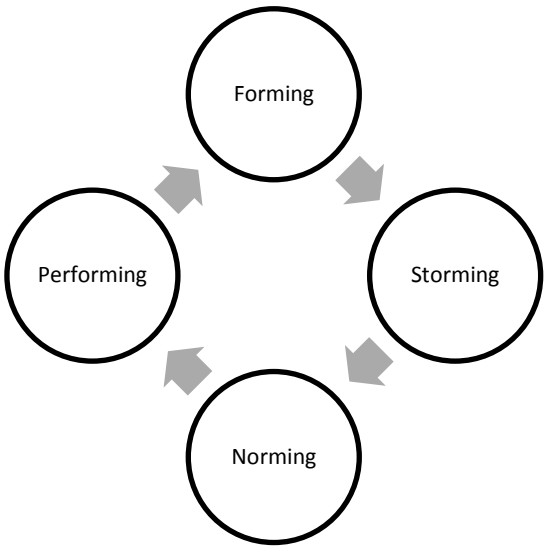

Figure 3: Stages of group development

Forming is the formulation of various actors with their own perceptions of interest or the redefinition of the power conditions[4] here associated with the end of British hegemony and the Great Depression reshaping the international environment. Storming takes place in

[4] The domestic aspects of turmoil are naturally not touched upon at this point.

open armed conflicts (in our framework ending with the Second World War), whereas norming, i.e. the solidification of a particular order, can historically be associated with the establishment of regimes, the functioning of which is performing (not necessarily leading to adjourning).

The Cold War saw the increased propagation of the American narrative and the myth of America as a normative power. From Truman onwards, American foreign policy was consistent (perhaps in the case of Nixon to a lesser extent) in its view that the world can be a safe place only if the American narrative prevails on the global scale. The hegemonistic nature of American liberalism as a political philosophy is illustrated in Figure 4.

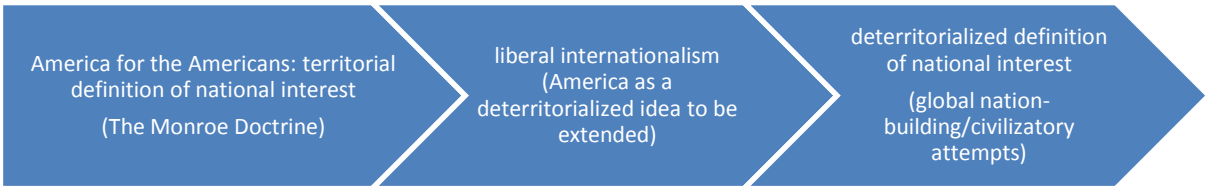

Figure 4: The author's concept on the evolution of American liberalism

The American hegemonic aspirations coincided with the historical civilizatory transition between traditional European civilization and global civilization taking shape as of the late 20th century. This transition brought about a cardinal change in the set values as illustrated by Hankiss. (Figure 5) As it can be discerned in the comparison, there is a fundamental difference between the traditional and the new set of (American) values. The same transition between a "character-oriented" to a "personality-oriented" culture, which American nation-building is about – has taken place in America as Gabler asserts:

> [T]he old Puritan production-oriented culture demanded and honored what he [Warren Susman] called character, which was a function of one's moral fiber. The new consumption-oriented culture, on the other hand, demanded what he called personality which was a function of what one projected to others. It followed that the Puritan culture emphasized values like hard work, integrity, and courage. The new culture of personality emphasized charm, fascination and likability. Or as Susman put it, "the social role demanded of all in the new culture of personality was that of a performer. Every American was to become a performing self."
>
> (Neil Gabler as quoted in Kövecses p. 146)

The great transformation: aims, values, forms of behavior

Traditional	**New**
Love your neighbor.	Love yourself.
Sacrifice yourself.	Realize yourself.
Restrict your desires.	Give way to your desires freely.
Be honest.	Be successful.
Be obedient.	You are the master of the universe.
Be industrious.Work hard.	Enjoy your life.
Be thrifty.	Consume.
Appreciate what you've got.	Get as much as you can.
Do your duties.	Protect your rights.
You are originally sinful.	You are innocent.
Care for the helpless.	Every man is the architect of his own fortune
Life is suffering.	Life is a wonderful journey.
The purpose of life is salvation.	The purpose of life is happiness.
Man is mortal.	Man is immortal.

Figure 5: Hankiss's concept of the transformation of nations from character- to personality orientation, p. 363.

In the light of that, it should not strike us as surprising that nation-building and the spreading of the American new model is not successful in regions where due to harsh natural or political reasons life is, after all, not about joy and happiness and character-oriented patterns are stronger. If Reagan's three dogs[5], who came from a basically similar background, had such difficulties understanding one another, states with more divergent cultural backgrounds and with more differing world perceptions may be far less ready to accept such an incompatible worldview. This might be a reason behind the extremely low reputation of America in Muslim countries. The ultimate question is, as in the cases of all philosophies perceived as striving for absolute relevance, if American liberalism, as a secular religion, can remain consistent with its own values or shall rather change into its reverse in the eyes of preceptors with such diverging backgrounds.

3) Reasons behind the perceived decline of the US's position

After the Second World War the United States created a hegemonic position within its own sphere of interest. The consent of the allies was ensured by the perceived existential

[5] Ronald Reagan's famous Soviet joke about the American, the Polish and the Russian dog. The American dog boasts that when hungry he just has to bark for a while and finally gets food. The Polish dog asks: What is 'food'? And the Russian dog asks: What is 'bark'?

threat that the Soviet Union represented and the unprecedented benevolence that the US testified toward Germany and Japan as an act of both calculations and goodwill. The menace of Moscow and the American shield forged together the Western camp, based on a shared worldview not restricted solely to the elites but enjoying a wide social support. The American hegemony was therefore seen as "benevolent" and legitimate following the excessive bloodshed of World War 2.

The collapse of the Berlin Wall marked a transitive period for not only the post-Communist countries but for the western alliance as well. The temporary withdrawal of Moscow brought about the concomitant extension of American influence from a regional to a global scale in a realistic attempt to fill the apparent vacuum. However, the realization of this opportunity sowed the seeds of decline of American hegemony in political, economic and cultural terms as well.

i) Geopolitical aspects

"Polar bears are not endangered. They are just unlucky."

(Robin Williams)[6]

The collapse of "the other" brought an end to the so far keenly emphasized common worldview of the Western camp. The cost of dissent decreased with the disappearance of the direct threat and the value assigned to the US's protection has decreased from the European allies' perspective. The new challenges in the changed security policy environment represented a new wave of problems characterized by networking (such as drug-trafficking or international terrorism) or the threat of impersonal difficulties (climate change). These problems clearly exceed the scope of NATO primarily designed for problem-solving on a state level.

With Europe being a relatively weak area in military terms (capability gap), the United States was compelled to take the necessary steps in the light of the emergence of non-state actors along with the menace of the proliferation of WMDs. Naturally, these posed additional responsibilities on the US, which it attempted to share with other members of NATO, in vain. Simultaneously, in light of the military inadequacy of European states and their reluctance to assume greater responsibilities in NATO and with the increasingly independent foreign

[6] The punch line was said with reference to the 2008 American presidential election and was meant to indicate the narrow-mindedness and self-righteousness of American Republican politicians, particularly those of Sarah Palin's but could be interpreted as a criticism of the cynical foreign policy of the Bush Administration as well.

political trends in Europe, Washington, too, began to question the principles serving as the cohesive basis for NATO and parallel to this, deemed the UN as obsolete, surpassed.

Concomitantly, the American image eroded with the increasingly unilateral policy the Clinton Administration occasionally (in Kosovo), and the Bush Administration frequently exercised in the name of humanitarianism, the latter described by Hoffmann as "the Machiavellian scheming behind a Wilsonian facade" (Hoffmann, p. 36). These unilateral steps occasionally violated international norms and circumvent the very foundations of the international regime Washington helped to create, which had a disruptive effect on the accord of Western democracies and undermined the credibility of the former democratic bloc and their leader's image as a benevolent global peace broker.[7]

The "realist bargain", i.e. the American security guarantee, with the extension of the territorial scope (e.g. "out-of-area" missions in the redefined Middle East) demanded a more equal share of the costs and responsibilities with Europe in the sustenance and extension of democracy in military terms but as indicated previously, Europe was reluctant to increase its military capacities as it sought to reach that end, i.e. nation-building through non-military means. This might be a cardinal difference between the US and the EU: the reliance on a big stick or big carrot policy.

However, there are voices that regard these pessimistic voices groundless and far-fetched. In their view, post-WW2 US administrations have cultivated a relatively consistent worldview based on the preponderance of power and post-Cold War administrations did nothing that previous administrations – regardless of their political orientations – had not done before. In particular, the trinity of the Bush Doctrine, i.e. preemption, nation-building and unilateralism, was by no means a novelty in American foreign policy and its elements should not be shown in a negative light as they are and have always been indispensable tools of foreign policy. (Kagan, pp. 37-38)

Moreover, these critics also claim that "American predominance in the main categories of power persists as a key feature of the international system". (Kagan, p. 38) The American military superiority is to last for decades as only China has embarked on a comprehensive military development and China's current policy of non-intervention – a source of its soft power – does not make it possible to project its strength without exerting serious damage on Beijing's reputation. Russia, on the other hand, cannot pride itself with the reputation of a

[7] Magyarics (2011b) contemplates on the possible undermining effect of this unilateralism on international norms, yet, Lattmann concludes that the decentralized nature of international legal system and the lack of a single strong legislator result in a strong urge to reach a consensus among the states, which they can reject only at a high political price: isolation, Lattmann pp. 112-113.

conflict-evading state but given its declining military capabilities – which the Georgian intervention so aptly highlighted – cannot hope to counterweight America alone and a joint cooperation between the two Eastern giants is improbable given their historically fueled mutual suspicion and distrust toward each other. Moreover, the strengthening of China has an advantageous element for American hegemony as Australia, Japan and India are moving closer to Washington. A similar dynamics is working in the EU-Russia relationship as Moscow's military show-off in Georgia evoked well-grounded anxieties in the Baltics and Eastern Europe.[8]

According to Kagan, "it should continue to be a primary goal of American foreign policy to perpetuate this relatively benign international configuration of power." (Kagan, p. 41) Despite its shortcomings, American hegemony sustains a relatively stable system amidst an increasingly nationalistic environment. Therefore, as Kagan claims, the United "stands in the way of regression toward a more dangerous world" (Kagan, p. 41) since the alternative of American hegemony is not a new regional stability but nationalistic conflagration, again.

It was, indeed, the global perception of upsetting this benevolence that resulted in an increasing aversion towards American foreign policy. The Bush Administration's attempts to wage war against Muslim countries had a whiplash effect as public opinion turned from initial sympathy to at first resentment and eventually outright hatred both at home and abroad. President Bush clearly misinterpreted the situation by identifying a geographically and historically isolated micro-regime (that of the Taliban) with the entire cultural environment that contained it and forgot that "diplomacy was designed and is sustained as a means of addressing the problems inherent in the relations between polities with different accounts of the concept of 'good life', rather than as an instrument for promoting our own account to others". (Hall) The result was a highly publicized postmodern crusade amidst the telecommunication boom, which witnessed home-made coverage of atrocities matching in severity the ones in Vietnam and making the motifs and roles of the participants highly relativistic, a phenomenon that undermined the Bush Administration's efforts to depict the Muslim world as homogenous, monolithic and inherently conflict-seeking. The Internet age and the diffusion of power to propagate a wide variety of views on events made it crystal clear that the conventional methods of pushing through "the" one correct interpretation have lost their power. This failure clearly highlighted the unsustainability of what Huntington described as "the Clash of Civilizations", a highly militarized term in its very cognitive essence. Our age

[8] However, Obama's "Reset Button" was a great disappointment to many European states the long-term effects of which cannot, as yet, be fathomed.

does not seem to be receptive for repackaged cataclysmic visions between the forces of Good and Evil on the long run and clearly today's people cannot be sustainably motivated solely by hatred and fear.

Consequently, it might be advantageous to shift the focus of attention from clashes between cultures to the adjustment or balance of micro and regional regimes. Culture is a multi-faceted construct and depicting cultures as solely political (identifying Islam with political Islam) depriving them of their other similarly significant aspects leads to oversimplification which might only drive up emotions and make reaching a consensus even more difficult. Cultures are not solely political in nature but regimes predominantly are. Micro-regimes, concerned with the way certain micro-communities perceive their own problems and the stakeholders involved, clearly provide a better basis for comparison. In addition, micro-regimes can also be isolated and dealt with with greater efficiency, i.e. moderate Islam groups vs. militant fundamentalist groups.

This approach would also be much more in line with the incorporative and civic republican aspects of American culture by highlighting intercultural cooperation and intelligent, enlightened and consensus-seeking attitude to problems. Therefore, it may be advantageous to consider shifting public awareness from the liberal and ethno-cultural aspects of the American set of values to the incorporative and civic republican ones. This shift is all the more imperative since liberalism and ethno-culturalism are two ideas which are traditionally very sensitive issues in the midst of an economic crisis and can be best utilized by belligerent groups in all parts of the world (in the Muslim world and among the "losers of the Transition") to target the United States on account of their arrogance and to sustain a negative picture of the United States.

The Obama Administration has started the process of demilitarization of American foreign policy and embarked on a policy based on smart power which gave more space to multilateralism. This has changed the public perception of Washington's intentions and role in the world and resulted in the first improvement of America's image for years as indicated by the findings of Gfk Group (Figure 6) and BBC World Service Poll (Figure 7, 8 & 9) which are proofs of the fact that the reputation of the US is far from being irreversibly on the decline.

Anholt-GfK Roper Nation Brands Index[SM] Overall Brand Ranking (Top 10 of 50 Nations)		
	2011	**2010**
1	United States	United States
2	Germany	Germany
3	United Kingdom	France
4	France	United Kingdom
5	Japan	Japan
6	Canada	Canada
7	Italy	Italy
8	Australia	Switzerland
9	Switzerland	Australia
10	Sweden	Sweden

Figure 6: Anholt-Gfk Roper Nation Brand Index, Source: http://www.gfkamerica.com

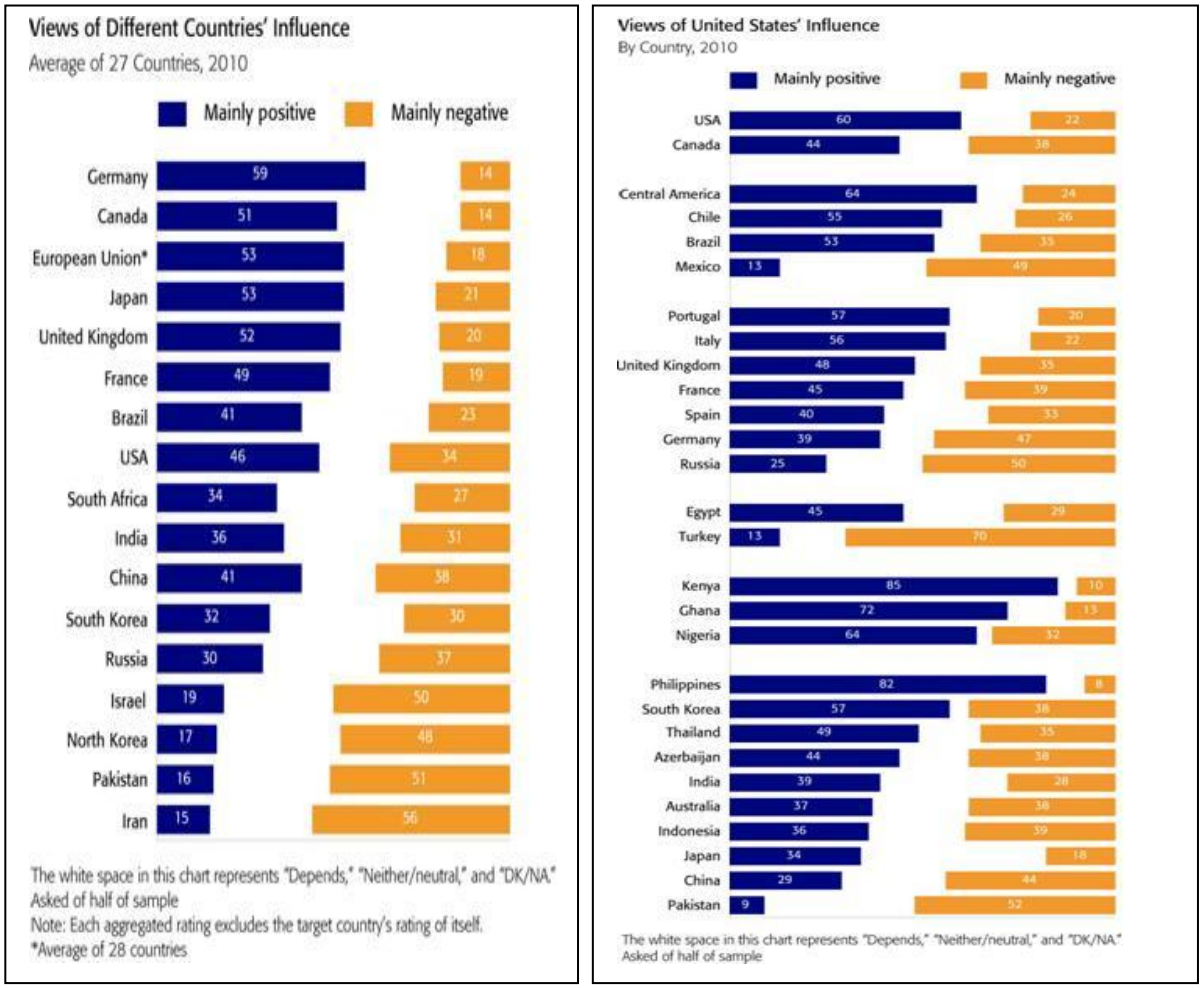

Figure 7 & 8: BBC World Service Poll released on April 18, 2010, Source: http://www.worldpublicopinion.org

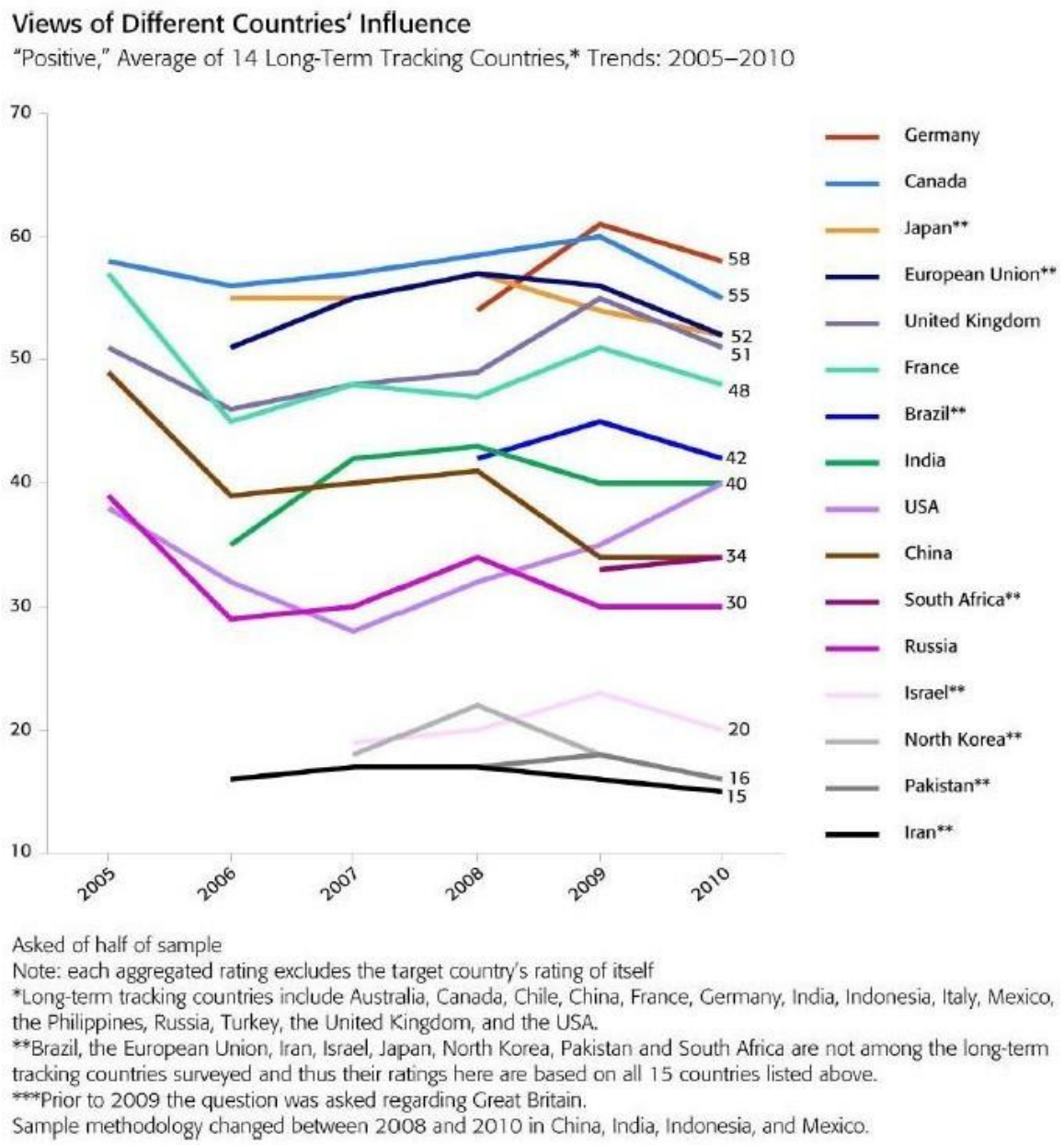

Figure 9: World Service Poll on the views of different countries' influence, Source: http://www.worldpublicopinion.org

ii) Economy

The financial and economic crisis is another major factor in the deterioration of the American image. The apparent shortcomings of the neoliberal economic philosophy, i.e. the increasing gap between financial regulation and financial innovation, the asymmetrical distribution of the benefits of free trade and open markets and their environmental implications eroded the appeal of the Washington consensus, which manifested the underlying philosophical source of the American way of life, which Magyarics considers one

of the major export goods of the United States. The questionable repeal of the Glass-Steagall Act, which was seen as an efficient means of preventing speculation, reinvigorated conspiracy theories and questioned the ability of America to exercise responsibly benign control over financial institutions. In addition, the depiction of the permanent overconsumption of American people coupled with media coverage showing mostly arrogant overweight Americans has made the American Dream less attractive in public view and questioned if greed is indeed good. All these things jointly strengthened the voices of anti-capitalism, anti-globalization and alter-globalization (Bratton) among elites and ordinary people alike.

The other source of criticism comes from the sometimes controversial policies of the Bretton-Woods institutions. The technocratic conditionalities of the IMF and the World Bank, i.e. deregulation, liberalization, privatization and downscaling of government, raised harsh criticism among developing countries on account of the IMF's alleged insensitivity to social changes and disregard to non-domestic factors. The 2001 crisis in Argentina and the structural reforms in Turkey after the 2002 IMF loan are just two examples which resulted in the belligerence of two geopolitically important countries toward America.

Third, the prestige of American TNCs, the symbols of American success, has also faded with the rising of powerful competitors from the EU, Russia and China. Although the voices calling attention to the signs of the imminent diminishment of the prestige of the United States in economic terms seem more than exaggerated, as the slow ebb of American economic dominance is nonetheless still conspicuous as shown in Figure 10:

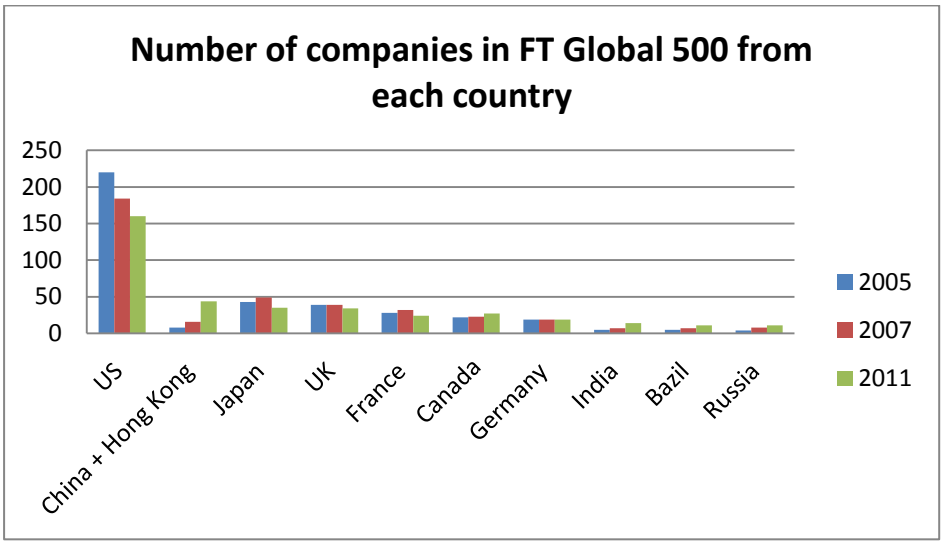

Figure 10: compiled by the Author based on FT.com/Reports

The US public debt is another matter of concern on account of its effect on inflation, interest rates and economic growth as well as the increasing exposure to foreign, i.e. Chinese and Middle Eastern, investors, which is considered by many observers as a direct indication of a decline of the US in economic terms. However, in his series of articles, Krugman argues against the urgency of the reduction of public debt calling it an exaggerated and "misplaced focus" both in the short and long run and complains about the mistaken allegory of public debt and private debt:

> People think of debt's role in the economy as if it were the same as what debt means for an individual: there's a lot of money you have to pay to someone else. But that's all wrong; the debt we create is basically money we owe to ourselves, and the burden it imposes does not involve a real transfer of resources. That's not to say that high debt can't cause problems – it certainly can. But these are problems of distribution and incentives, not the burden of debt as is commonly understood.
>
> (Krugman, 2011e)

To support his claims with facts, Krugman offers visual aids imbued with numbers illustrating first the GDP percentage of total domestic non-financial debt (public plus private), and U.S. net foreign debt (Figure 11), and second the changes since the 80s (Figure 12).

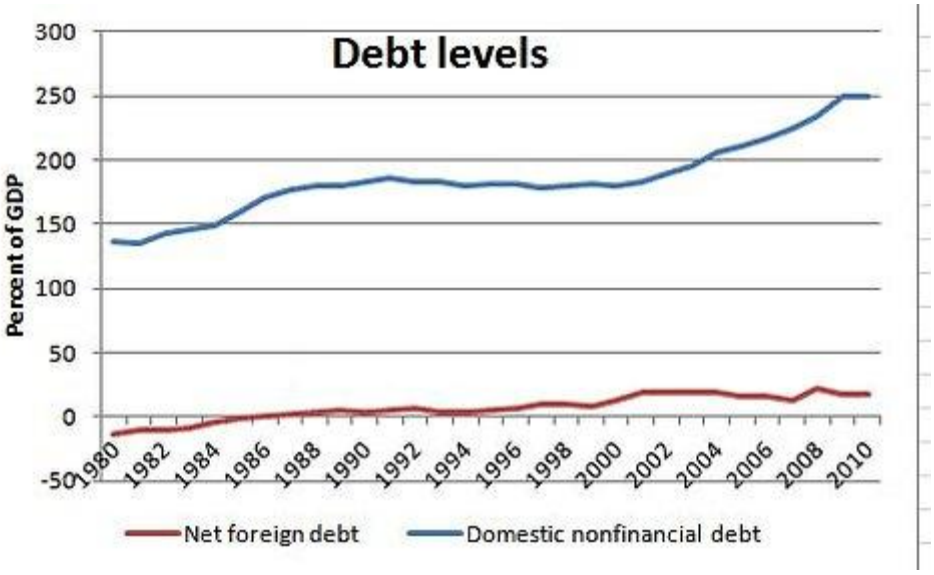

Figure 11: Source: Krugman, 2011e

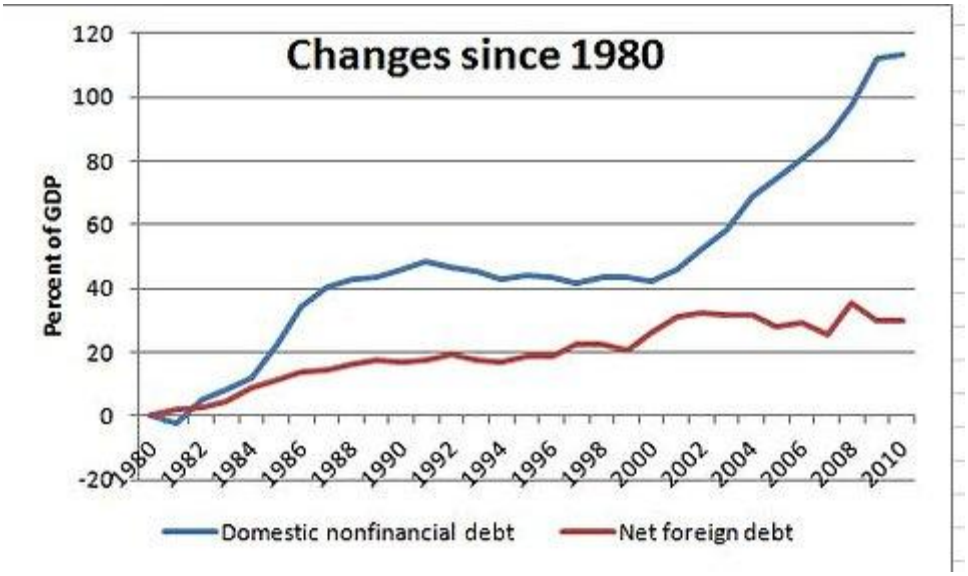

Figure 11: Source: Krugman, 2011e

It is clearly discernible in these figures that the enormous rise in debt was not followed by a comparable increase of net foreign debt. Moreover, foreign borrowing was a significant but minor fracture of the rise in debt. In the light of that, public discourse, indeed, seems to be on the wrong track and should rather be concerned with incentives for productive activity and about what the macroeconomic vulnerability of being indebted entails. (Krugman, 2011b)

Figure 13: Source: Krugman, 2011c

Moreover, Krugman argues that

> American assets, often taking the form of foreign subsidiaries of US corporations, earn a higher rate of return than US liabilities – especially now, when there's a lot of foreign money parked in Treasuries, but this was true even before the crisis. As a result, income from US-owned assets abroad – the blue line below – consistently exceeds payments on foreign-owned assets in the United States, the red line:

Figure 14: Source: Krugman, 2011d

In short, the United States, in fact, earns more from its assets abroad than it pays to foreign investors, even during the crisis, owing to the fact that foreign investors tend to put their U.S. investments into safe, low-yield assets.

In conclusion, Krugman offers a convincing criticism of the pessimistic opinions complaining about the extent of American public debt. Yet, as his articles suggest, public perception of the exposure of America seems to go in a different direction both domestically and abroad.

iii) Generation shift in Hollywood

There is a third, seemingly less important, yet significant reason behind the deteriorating perception of America: the distorted depiction of American society in the American mass media itself as a "cruel, Godless, vulgar society" strengthening earlier Soviet bloc criticism of the decadent nature of capitalistic societies by describing them as essentially propagating excessive violence, loose sexual adventurism and anti-social behavior incompatible with the set of values of more traditional societies who identified America with these images and believed Hollywood had a subversive effect on their society. According to Medved, the

reason behind this propagation of social dysfunctionality starting in the 1960s was the major generation shift in Hollywood between the classical narrative and New Hollywood.

Hollywood's glamour and heritage as the source of entertainment and inspiration was created in the "Golden Age" by predominantly East European immigrants escaping from religious persecution who perceived the American experience as unique and felt genuine gratitude towards their host country, which they strived to express through the propagation of the greatness of the United States.[9]

> There seems to have been an irresistible magnetism about the whole assemblage of American attitudes – optimism, hope, belief in progress, profound assumptions of human equality, informality – often more apparent to foreigners than to Americans themselves, that the outside world has found compelling. Over many decades these attitudes became so entrenched in world opinion as 'American' that in recent times, when certain Hollywood films have taken on a distinctly negative tone, America has still retained its dramatic power, Hollywood, as it were, living on its spiritual capital.
>
> (Richard Grenier, 1992 as quoted by Medved)

Their successors, however, born already in the USA and thus socialized in a completely different social environment, played on a countercultural credential in order to establish their independence and artistic integrity. They moved from their predecessors' conviction of depicting American heroism as riveting and something to be followed and making decency appear dramatic, towards highlighting the basic contradictions of American life and expressing their alienation from it. As Medved pointed out,

> while the populist products of Hollywood's Golden Age most certainly encouraged the world's love affair with America, today's nihilistic and degrading attempts at entertainment may, in the long run, produce the opposite effect, helping to isolate this country as a symbol of diseased decadence […] American pop culture is not so much liberating as it is anarchic and even nihilistic. Our entertainment offerings do not honor our freedom and liberty as political or cultural values so much as they undermine all restraints and guidelines, both the tyrannical and the traditional. [It] offers no organized system of ideas or values by way of replacement.
>
> (Medved, p. 51)

Once, the United States pictured herself as the holder of the torch of hope and the book of (moral) law. If she is to sustain her image of a "moral empire" and thus the international trust

[9] This of course does not mean that the first studios and television networks did not exercise social criticism, in fact, Charles Chaplin was expelled from the US partly on account of his criticism of American immigration control.

in its benevolent and idealistic nature, she must gather strength from the classical values of the Golden Age which made her popular.

III. Soft Power

The concept of soft power is instrumental in our discussion of American hegemonic aspirations therefore in this chapter I should like to elaborate on the official definition as well as outlining my own understanding of the concept. In order to understand the concept of soft power first we have to take into account the set the constituents of which it is a part. This way we might understand not only what it is but also what it is not and by this delineating the concept by enumerating its capacities and shortcomings as well.

1) What is soft power?

> *"We do have a destiny to give something more to the world simply than an example which other nations in the past have been able to give… an example of spiritual leadership and idealism which no material strength or military power can provide"*
>
> (Richard M. Nixon)[10]

Richard Nixon's presidency could hardly be described as the era of elevated idealism with himself the apostle of peace. Yet, the quotation above and his close subordinate, Henry Kissinger's accounts indicate that even his realism was not devoid of idealism and the yearning to live up to rigorous moral standards. Nixon's example is illuminating in the sense that even his conception of power was "associated with dominance expanded by the exercise of 'intellectual and moral leadership'" (Arrighi, p. 46):

In Joseph Nye's definition power is the multifaceted capacity to achieve a given outcome and can be exercised in a multitude of ways. In Nye's conceptualization, power is a three-dimensional chessboard: the top board is the sphere of military power, in which the United States has, as yet, undisputed dominance over the rest of the world; the second board is the platform of economic power, in which power is more balanced and is shared between various regions of the world. These two together constitute what is traditionally called hard power, which basically works on a carrot (payment) and stick (coercion) principle; the last

[10] As qouted in Kissinger: Diplomacy p. 706.

one is transactional in nature and involves relations including challenges (like drug trafficking, regional terrorism etc.) overarching national, regional or even continental borders therefore being hardly under the jurisdiction of a single government. On this level, power is heavily dispersed among entities making it virtually impossible, or at least exceedingly costly even in a well working regime, for one single conventional entity to exercise surveillance or interfere into its dynamics without causing considerable inconvenience or damage to itself.

This creates a new situation in which the complex interdependence in terms of technological, political, economic and cultural cooperation makes it imperative that the concept of power be amended and extended. On a global or even a regional scale, population is not merely manpower, i.e. a quantitative thing anymore but a qualitative one which determines the value of the other traditional components of power (territory, natural resources etc.). Other, more sublime methods are at hand to manipulate foreign affairs.

This is where soft power, i.e. "the ability to get others to want what you want, to get the outcomes without coercion or payment", comes into the picture. (Nye, 2004) It tries to "persuade and influence other countries through the attractiveness of its society, its values, its culture, and its institutions"[11] (Kurlantzick, p. 420). It is a means to reduce transaction costs in a regime by attracting cooperative allies to agree with the hegemon's aims and simultaneously implementing like policy. However, Nye complains that his concept of soft power has been gravely misunderstood and rejects the broad interpretation of soft power deriving it from "the attractiveness of a country's culture, political ideals and policies" (Nye, 1999). In his concept, popular culture is not a constituting element of national appeal. In his attempt to revise Nye's interpretation of soft power, Bohas observes that Nye does not take into consideration the roots of that attractiveness and "misses a fundamental part of soft power – the early shaping of taste, collective imaginary and ideals which constitutes a way of dominating other countries." (Bohas, p. 409)

In my interpretation soft power is the combination of ideas as goals and narratives as the means to achieve those goals[12]. Together they can delineate the framework of a mechanism indirectly exercised but consciously stimulated in order to decrease transactional costs in politico-economic and socio-cultural terms alike. Alternatively, I will use the term 'intercepting power' as it might sound less "softish" for those who might be deceived by its wording and believe that soft power is not efficient or aggressive. In the present paper

[11] However, Nye admits that beside the afore mentioned points certain components of hard power, e.g. military strength and the aura of invincibility might transform into soft power assets as well.
[12] I used Nawaz's definition of idea and narrative.

intercepting power is interpreted as a definitely intelligent, adaptive and dynamic, although not violent or pushy means of ideological pre-emption, an underlying programming working at the level of abstractions, preferences, symbols deeply embedded in the individual's preferences and therefore remaining predominantly tacit.

The levels in which soft power can exert its effect can be modeled in Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, which places the individual into a power field in which the individual, in our case the political and economic actor-decision maker, is exposed to and shaped by various sets of systems arranged in concentric circles as shown in Figure 15.

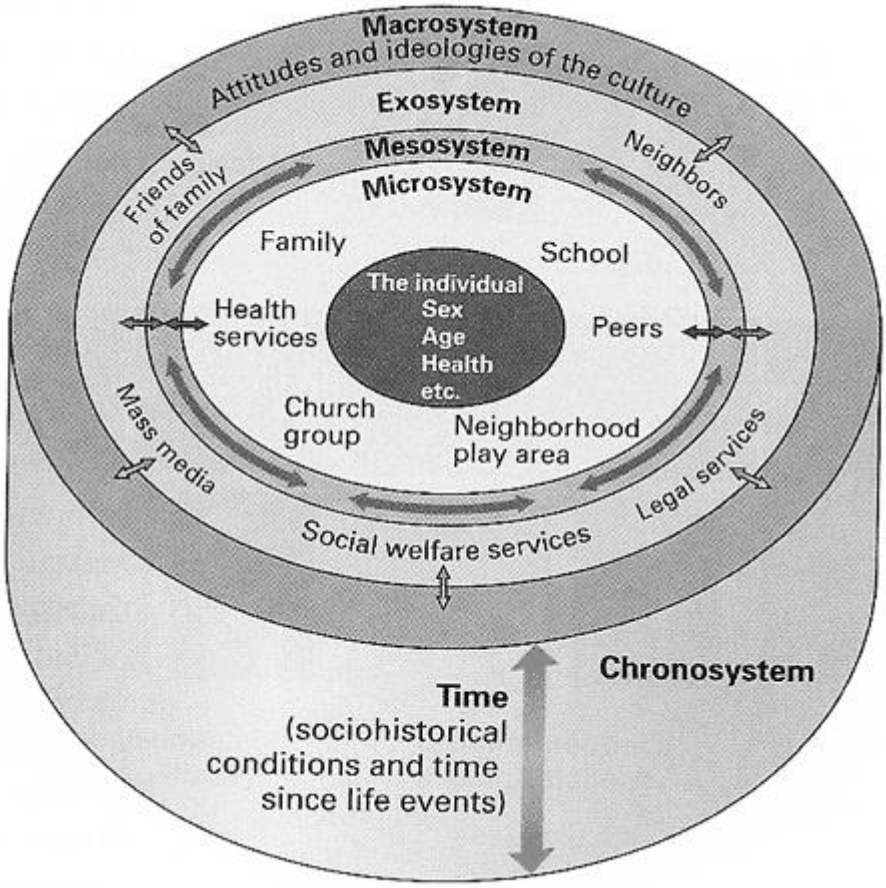

Figure 15: Bronfenbrenner's ecological model. Source: http://ici.umn.edu

These systems constitute the various layers of context with the interaction of which the individual (and with the extension of which whole communities, states, regions or even civilizations) develop. Utilized predominantly in the visualization of the contexts of socialization of children, we may well assume that soft power saturates all levels of human interaction from birth and therefore plays a key role in the formulation of preferences. Socialization along the same set of values, i.e. within compatible macrosystems, makes future understanding and cooperation between actors easier.

In order to discuss the reasons of the rise, present challenges and future possibilities of the U.S., the macro- and chronosystems are of greater significance as they are the vessels that contain ideologies and attitudes; elements which, according to Magyarics and Huntington can be considered as nation-building components of the US on their own right (Magyarics, 2010a p. 5 and Huntington, p. 75) and therefore are of crucial importance in terms of nation branding.

According to Kurlantzick, the social constructs that convey these abstractions and which are therefore the vessels of soft power are popular culture, public and private diplomacy, participation in multinational organizations and other forums, businesses' actions abroad, economic strength, technological edge (Internet and IT revolution).

But what is the relevance of soft power in terms of political and economic decision-making and social engineering? Although there are critical voices as to the validity or applicability of the very concept of soft power[13], we shall remind ourselves that the fruits of "the American experiment" that Americans enjoyed – and may still enjoy – is not something to be taken for granted. As the very term 'experiment' indicates, the creation and solidification of Washington's aura of exceptionalism was a missionary experiment fuelled by the bravery, sacrifices and industriousness of larger-than-life "American" characters[14], who had the courage to question old beliefs in a constructive manner. The reason why I feel important to highlight this fact is that this passion was clearly an engine of American growth and taking it for granted will not bring us closer to understand its importance in the rise of the United States and its possible role today in inspiring people and hindering the slow diminishment of the appeal of pluralistic democracy as a civilizational model. Despite never being an American citizen and even expelled from the United States, the importance of soft power was perhaps best described by one of the most iconic "American" actors and directors, Charles Chaplin in his final speech in *The Great Dictator*:

> Our knowledge has made us cynical; our cleverness, hard and unkind. We think too much and feel too little. More than machinery, we need humanity. More than cleverness, we need kindness and gentleness. Without these qualities, life will be violent and all will be lost.
>
> (Charlie Chaplin: The Great Dictator)

[13] According to Greenwald: "What has come to be called soft power is so intimate a part of the American experiment that it barely qualifies for classification as a foreign-policy tool. America is not only a nation; it is an idea, an idea of what can be done when people are allowed to exercise their right of self-government."

[14] At this point the term "American characters" refers to people, natural-born or immigrant, from artists to political philosophers, who contributed to the positive cultural perception of the United States.

These thoughts, amidst totalitarian aspirations and ahead of an unprecedented arms race culminating in the Cold War, were prophetic in that era and – on account of their heightened relevance today – still continue to provide us with deep insight into the importance of supplementary means in addition to sheer force. Soft power is not only important because it reduces transactional costs but also because it makes sustainability and continuity easier. In the post-Cold War world the diffusion of nuclear military capabilities brought us from the shadow of "mutually assured destruction" to multilaterally assured destruction, which makes appreciation of these ideas all the more important. As German Chancellor Angela Merkel cautioned us it is not sure that Europe (or the world) will have another 60 years of relative peace, it is also far from granted that a possible next world-scale conflagration will leave us with anything at all to sustain.

2) Competitive identity as the engine of soft power

"I love the values we used to believe in."
George Carlin

But where does soft power stem from? What is the source of appeal on a national level? Strange as it may sound, I believe, the origins of such appeal are the same as of those on the individual level: consistency, integrity, intelligence and charm out of which the simultaneous existence of at least three are required. It is not by chance that Central European countries, disillusioned after an ill-performed accession to the capitalist world, are trying to gather strength from the presidency of Ronald Reagan, who truly embodied these values. Nor is the fact that the American people and the whole world felt an initially messianistic, yet even at that time unrealistic, hope towards Barack Obama (Magyarics, 2009), an unquestionably great orator, after the Bush Administration, mocked by some as the "Reign of Error" (Robin Williams). In other words, a strong and charismatic leader, or a group of charismatic leaders, is a symbol of (soft) power and therefore inevitably suited for its projection.

Secondly, soft power requires a well-defined and multifaceted identity in which there is an element of contextual intelligence[15], remaining adaptive without losing its core values and messages or in other words: integrity. In my opinion, the great strength of the United States on the ideological "product range" has always been its preparedness to diversify its identity portfolio and adjust it to different historical necessities in order to cater for various individual needs. Just as the immigrants could find their own interpretation of the Frontier and the vast

[15] The term was first used by Nye designating "the intuitive diagnostic skill to align your tactics with the strategy that fits a given context". Source: Nye (2011)

new land of opportunity, so could foreign states project their ideas/illusions into an exotic, and isolated country before it went global openly.

However, the ability to act flexibly does not mean that there are no American values on their own right. On the contrary, it is indicative of the existence of an unusually potent and pragmatic identity-mix designed to lead America to "victory". As Magyarics describes, American identity is characterized by a sense of exceptionalism and moral superiority (Magyarics, 2010b). Depictions of this phenomenon are numerous from Winthrop's "Shining City Upon a Hill" concept, through the settlers' self-identification as the antithesis of decadent European order, Lincoln's perception of America as "The last, best hope of earth", Wilson's revolutionary 14 points paving the way for American liberal internationalism, Kennedy's Inaugural Address or Reagan's 'rendezvous with destiny' (Reagan) and cataclysmic battle against the 'Evil Empire' (reinvigorated in George W. Bush's concept of the 'Axis of Evil'). Gradually, the United States formulated a unique brand the essence of which is that the values on which the country is founded make it the epitome and sole representative of democracy, liberty, equality of chance, individualism, and constitutionalism. In order to understand this apparently constant reference to the moral qualities as the justification of foreign policy we have to investigate its root.

The literature on the American experience is abundant in richly elaborated analyses, however, I propose that we should begin with a relatively simplistic, yet very didactic, approach to the problem. According to Dennis Prager, the quintessence of the American experience can be found in what he calls "the American Trinity", the unique combination of '*e pluribus unum*'[16], 'Liberty' and 'In God We Trust' in the American mind depicted on the American one-cent coin (Prager).

The first two ideas have fuelled the positive American perception to a great extent as they indicate even-handedness and impartiality and a kind of positive neutrality towards newcomers as well as social mobility, the opportunity to get from rags to riches based on virtue and individual merit. Prager regards the American interpretation of liberty as unique and distinct from the European concept as the European concept finds liberty closely linked to equality whereas liberty in the American sense simply means equality of chance, i.e. that men are born equal, thus equality is essentially perceived as the original status and not an end to itself, as it is individual achievement through virtue and merit that is the key factor in how high an individual may rise in US society, and certainly individual performances are far from

[16] 'Out of many, one.'

equal. Immigrants from European states have always been inspired, to varying extent, by the idea that there is a place where they might be judged on account of their merits and not based on arbitrarily and unjustly determined grounds or privileges. This idea of embracement is represented in the following excerpt of Emma Lazarus's sonnet, "The New Colossus" displayed on the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty:

> Give me your tired, your poor,
> Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
> The wretched refuse of your teeming shore;
> Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
> I lift my lamp beside the golden door!

The golden door symbolized opportunity to those adventure-seeking people who believed in self-reliance and the Covenant of Work. Paradoxically, the third value on Prager's list seems to contradict these as it appears to legitimize American ideology with the metaphysical. The conviction concerning the legitimacy of the American experience as based on God-given rights explains the recent religious zeal in nation-building and democracy building. This brief introduction is a good starting point to bring the "multiple traditions model" into our discussion to explain the content of American identity.

The multiple traditions model indicates that the core content of the American experience is based on four main concepts: liberalism, ethno-culturalism, civic republicanism and incorporationism (Smith quoted in Schildkraut pp, 36-62).

The liberal aspect of American culture emphasizes

> minimal government intervention in private life and promotes economic and political freedoms along with equality of opportunity.[…] The normative boundaries liberalism places on membership in the American community are that each member should endorse liberal principles, that they not infringe upon the political or economic rights and freedoms of others and that they try to achieve the American Dream through hard work. Liberalism is the normative tradition Huntington invokes when he writes of the creedal component of American identity.
>
> (Schildkraut, p. 42)

The second feature, ethnoculturalism has probably been the most attacked element of American identity on account of its exclusiveness. It basically restricts group membership exclusively to White Anglo-Saxon Protestant people. However, perhaps as a result of continuous criticism, a "softer" version of the concept has evolved lifting the restriction on ethnic background but maintaining the condition that American citizens of different ethnic backgrounds must acquire the cumulative cultural knowledge and behavioral patterns

characteristic of WASPs even at the cost of rejecting their own. Proponents of this idea, like Huntington, argue that American civilization was founded on a firm Christian basis.

Third, civic republicanism focuses on the responsibilities of citizenship instead of the rights ascribed to it. It dwells from the Tocquevillian idea, which assumes that the basis of a sound and self-governing community is the pool of proactive, well-informed citizens capable of critical thinking and willing to participate actively in public life. It prioritizes the collective and places it in the center of individual identity. Indeed, many journalists and scholars, among others Huntington and Medved, called attention to the diminishing social capital and the increasing provincialism in America and ascribed the decline of American reputation to the public's lack of political involvement or civic engagement.

Finally, incorporationism emphasizes America's capability to incorporate immigrants of extremely diverse backgrounds. Initially termed the "Melting Pot", later redefined as a "Salad Bowl", the American nation prides itself over the appeal its openness and tolerance exert. The peculiarity of incorporation lies in the simultaneous obligation, on the one hand, to assimilate to American culture and on the other hand, to retain and cherish one's ethnic heritage as an enriching asset.

Having outlined the major concepts around which American identity is claimed to be revolving, I would like to touch upon a few ideas concerning the difficulties in the implementation of these values in other environments from CEE to the Muslim world. Since the antagonism between American liberalism and what is perceived as such from post-communist countries to Islam states can be interpreted as a competition between social engineering models, competitiveness might be an important factor. All the more so since ex-Soviet and neo-Marxist Islamic propaganda has been aimed at targeting American values through a projection by attributing the failure of their ideas of and the failure of their own implementation of what they interpreted as American capitalistic values to inherent systemic inadequacies, stating that it was American values and capitalism as such that was impossible to implement in their countries while it was only their own interpretations of capitalism embedded into and suffused with their post-communist paradigms that did not work, leading to widespread disillusionment with US values and all that the US represented to their citizens.

Competitiveness, a key concept of capitalism, is generally associated with innovation and diversification. Yet, Schwartz asserts that the key to happiness is limited options and low expectations. (Schwartz) Limited options relieve the individual of responsibility should the outcome be unpleasant as responsibility can then be shifted to other entities relieving the

individual from the cognitive dissonance caused by the discrepancy between people's generally favorable self-image and the obvious proof of inadequacy. However, when there are a huge number of options, failure to choose wisely or efficiently cannot be alleviated or blamed on somebody else, therefore as opportunity costs increase, the level of satisfaction and perception of utility plummets. In other words, diversification might lead to a decrease in the perception of utility.

Translating this mechanism to our point of discussion, diversification of civilizational patterns is not beneficial from the point of the hegemon in nation-building either because it makes the question of civilizational patterns a sole political decision. Should, for example, a country have competing civilizational patterns (e.g. pluralistic democracy, military dictatorship, theocracy) instead of competing political options within a single civilizational model, the failures and mistakes of its political representatives can create a situation in which the entire civilizational model (e.g. democracy) is rejected and another one (e.g. theocracy or dictatorship) embraced on account of the false assumption that the mistakes of a small proportion of the representatives of a civilizational model is testament to its entire inferiority leading to gross generalizations and sub-optimal outcomes (Nawaz). Nawaz translates this theory to the Bush Administration's failure to "democratize" Middle Eastern countries and recommends an alternative method. In his view, the problem with Washington's approach was that it tried to force its neo-conservative views and methods onto the particular situation and embarked on the implementation of a supply-led trickle-down model.

History has shown us the futility and counter-productive nature of this approach but at the same time showed us an alternative method which might be more utilizable in those circumstances. Here I turn again to Nawaz, who tries to contrast the American supply-led approach to that of Islamist and other extreme (Left or Right) organizations' and highlight the necessity to build demand at grassroot level:

> what is needed is a genuine transnational youth-led movement that works to actively advocate for the democratic culture – which is necessary more than just elections […] If we start building this demand on the ground on the civilizational level, rather than merely on a political level, creating this civilizational demand for this democratic culture […] what we will have in the end is the ideal that people should vote in an existing democracy, not for a democracy.
>
> (Nawaz at TED)

Nawaz's observation is shared by Fukuyama, who misses the social agenda in U.S. foreign policy and claims that openly anti-American forces worldwide are embedded partly as a result of an active social agenda. (Fukuyama, p. 213) Therefore, if the US is to appeal to a wider layer of society in these sensitive regions (the Middle East, CEE, South America) it should begin to build legitimacy based on a wider social basis.

3) Nation branding: radiating attractiveness

Nation branding is the wider concept, a vessel in which soft power gains context. It is an inevitable comprehensive framework which is mainly concerned with a country's political, economic and cultural image on the international stage. It utilizes contemporary interpretations of brands[17] and adjusts them to suit the needs of brand strategists. A comprehensive and sophisticated definition of nation branding is provided by Fan, who asserts that

> a nation brand is a total sum of all perceptions of a nation in the minds of international stakeholders, which may contain people, place, culture/language, history, food, fashion, famous faces (celebrities), global brands and so on. A nation's 'brand' exists, with or without any conscious efforts in nation branding, as each country has a certain image to its international audience.
>
> (Fan, p. 98)

The concept is an indispensable intermediary between a nation's identity, image, "a dynamic perception of a specific area of national distinction", and reputation, "feedback received by the nation from the outside world, concerning the credibility of the nation's identity claims". (Fan, p. 99)

national identity	⇨	nation branding	⇔	nation's image
(*self-perception*)		(*nation brand identity*)		(*perception by others*)

Figure 16: The relationship among national identity, nation branding and a nation's image, Source Fan p. 99.

This image is defined by the people outside the country; their perceptions are influenced by stereotyping, media coverage as well as personal experience". It is also important to stress

[17] Accoding to Aaker quoted by Fan p. 98: "A brand is a multidimensional assortment of functional, emotional, relational and strategic elements that collectively generate a unique set of associations in the public mind."

that “national brand identity refers to the identity of a specific ’nation brand’, not the nation. It is a set of associations that the brand strategist seeks to create or maintain”. (Fan, p. 98)

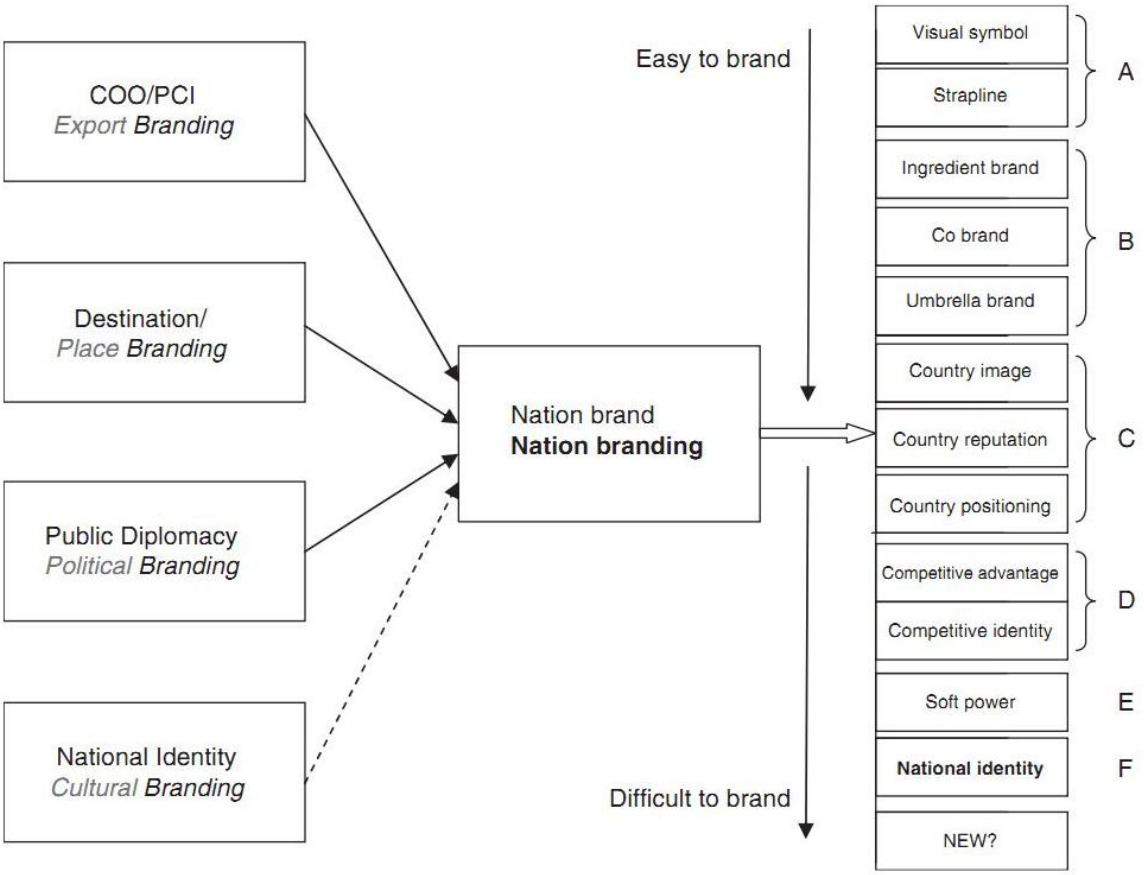

Figure 17: Fan, p. 98

Fan offers a comprehensive categorization of nation branding (Figure 17), which encompasses a wide range of interpretations of nation brand(ing) according to their “brandability”. The purposes of branding activity includes remoulding national identities, enhancing a nation’s competitiveness, embracing political, cultural, business and sport activities, promoting economic and political interests at home and abroad, and altering, improving or enhancing a nation’s image/reputation. (Fan, p. 100)

Anholt further refined the concept by elaborating the so-called Nation Brand Hexagon (Figure 18), which distinguishes and analyses the following dimensions: exports, governance, culture & heritage, people, tourism and investment & immigration.

Figure 18: Anholt's Nation Brand Hexagon

- Exports – Analyses the public awareness and perception of a country's products and services and the extent to which they are sought or rejected along their COO (country-of-origin).
- Governance – Determines public opinion about the performance of a country's government according to its competence and fairness as well as its perceived integrity, i.e. the conherence between its principles and deeds in terms of global issues e.g. democracy, justice, poverty and the environment.
- Culture & Heritage – It is concerned with the global public opinion about and appreciation of a nation's cultural heritage and its continuity in contemporary culture via film, music, art, sport and literature.
- People – Reveals the overall population's reputation in terms of competence, on the one hand, education, openness and friendliness, on the other hand, on the perceived probability of hostility and discrimination.
- Tourism – The appeal of a country in touristical terms, i.e. the range of possibilities for recreation, natural or man-made.
- Investment & Immigration – Determines public perception of the country based on its magnetism for residence, labour or studying as well as the reputation of a country's economic and social standing. (Anholt)

Fan draws comparison between nation branding and commercial branding, shown in Figure 19 with the intention to shed light on the fact that nation branding is not entirely in the control of branding strategists and many of its constituents cannot be modified in the short term. Anholt, who coined the phrase 'nation brand', goes even further by claiming that nation branding as such does not exist and shunning it as "a wicked waste of taxpayers' money". (Carey)

	Nation brand	*Product brand*	*Corporate brand*
Offer	Nothing on offer	A product or service on offer	Related to the product or sector
Attributes	Too complicated to define in simple terms	Clearly defined	Well defined
Benefits	Purely emotional	Functional and emotional	Mainly emotional
Image	Complicated, diverse, vague	Simple, clear	Simple, visible or hidden
Association	Secondary, numerous and diverse	Primary and secondary, relatively fewer and more specific	Mainly secondary, fewer and specific
Purpose	To enhance a nation's reputation	To help sales and develop relationships	To enhance reputation and develop relationships
Dimension	Political, economic, social and cultural	Mainly economic	Economic and social
Ownership	Multiple stakeholders, unclear	Sole owner	Sole owner
Audience	International, diverse, 'significant others'	Targeted segment	General public or targeted

Figure 19: Source: Fan p. 99

However, there might be another point worth discussing, namely the validity of the idea that a nation brand does not have a specific item on offer. Anholt also believes that enhancing the reputation of a country is essentially different from the marketing of goods and service.

> […] it's state propaganda, and it can't work in our modern globalised world because every message is always challenged, and nobody is paying attention anyway! Using advertising for marketing tourism or investment or export promotion, by contrast, is entirely different because you *are* selling a product or service to people who might be interested to buy it.
>
> (Anholt)

In Anholt's opinion it is not only impossible to deliberately brand a nation but it is also a fascist act of cultural aggression that "cheapens and vulgarizes countries, reducing their complexity and richness to the level of a childish, superficial stereotype." (Anholt)

Anholt's opinion idealizes diversity as inherently good and does not take into consideration that characteristic traits are based on generalizations and stereotypes even at the national level, as stereotyping is an indispensible and – despite its bad reputation – a useful function of the human mind. Ultimate diversity as such does not exist in a community as the lack of common self-perception undermines the cohesive force and thus the very existence of the community. Excessive diversity can be a cause of aggression just as excessive generalizations. Therefore, it should be reasonable to assume that there is a justifiable explanation behind the legitimacy of nation branding and that is the creation of a constructive balance of diversity and stereotyping, which conscientious and broad-minded nation branding strategists can achieve. Fan may imply the same line of thought when claiming that "a nation's image can be repackaged, repositioned and communicated in a professional manner". (Fan p. 100) Fan offers the term "nation image management" for "a process by which a nation's images can be created or altered, monitored, evaluated and proactively managed in

order to enhance the country's reputation among the target international audience". However, when branding a nation, it must always be kept in mind that nation branding is context-dependent, which raises the question of how to communicate a single image or message to different audiences in different countries."

As indicated before, a nation brand is not devoid of an emotional and thus a functional element. If elaborated, implemented and managed appropriately, it can interfere with the dynamics of the motivated state of mind by bringing closer the set of values between distinct and sovereign actors as illustrated in Figure 20.

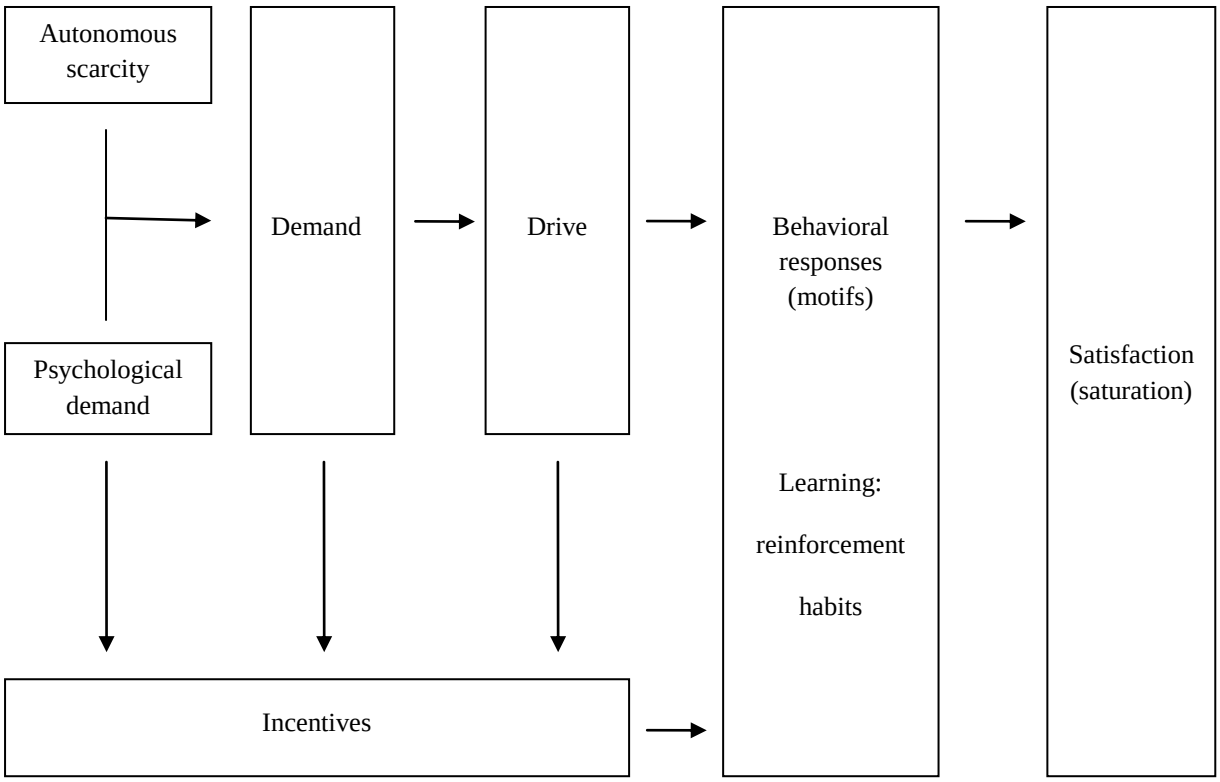

Figure 20: The motivated state of mind. Source: Dúl, Urbán & Demetrovics p.171.

It can create a unique and powerful infatuation through the mental images of the country held by foreign people as indicated by the widespread euphoria in Central European countries at the early stages of the Transition period. The never-ending queues in front of McDonald's at Régiposta Street in Hungary or people's willingness to spend half a month's salary on a pair of genuine American sneakers in the early 90s seemed to indicate that the products at hand meant more than a mere means to satisfy material needs. As "extended products" they represented "the American Lifestyle" or "the American Identity", a clearly non-material need

("the sense of belonging"[18]), the erosion of which is all the more apparent for example in today's Hungary.

4) Guerilla diplomacy

> *"A diplomat is a person who can tell you to go hell in such a way that you actually look forward to the trip."*
>
> (Caskie Stinnett)

In the next part of the present paper I should like to discuss an exciting idea which might prove to be useful in both nation branding and the discussion of soft power, which bears the name Guerilla Diplomacy coined by Daryl Copeland, who raises his voice against the recent marginalization of diplomacy in international problem-solving patterns. The reason behind this is twofold: on the one hand, the transition from the bipolar world to a heteropolar one with "rouge states, greedy companies, crazy religions and dumb public diplomacy" (Sharp) is transcending the international policy mix – ideological competition, geopolitical rivalry and alliance politics – of the Cold War Era. On the other hand, the adaptation of diplomacy, i.e. the careful reconsideration of key elements of international relations – security and development – from the perspective of diplomacy has not been implemented in a satisfactory manner. This is a most unfortunate development since diplomacy is, as Hall defines, "the management of legitimacy" and its peripheral position renders the more sophisticated solutions of global problems impossible.

According to Copeland, the overreliance on armed forces has to be reconsidered and it should be replaced with a reformed diplomacy ready to address contemporary challenges. In order to do this, the entire diplomatic ecosystem – foreign ministry, foreign service and the diplomatic business model – must be dismantled and reconceptualized from the ground up. This should entail addressing the immediate as well as the underlying drivers of insecurity and underdevelopment an element of which is to reconceptualize diplomacy and the diplomat.

> Today's envoy must be somewhat of a renaissance polymath – part activist, part humanist, part lobbyist. The outdated archetype of the cartoon cutout bedecked in pearls or pinstripes and lost in a haze of irrelevance somewhere between protocol and alcohol must be punctured by the counter-image of a street-smart, BlackBerry-toting emissary in sandals and denim.
>
> (Copeland)

[18] According to Fan: "A nation's identity refers to the essentially irrational psychological bond that binds fellow nationals together", Fan, p. 101.

Copeland portrays the guerilla diplomat as possessing the following qualities: agility, adaptability, improvisation, self-sufficiency and popular support. Although not matching all points – especially not in terms of technical expertise – the above mentioned definition immediately brings into mind a Kissingerian diplomat, whose diplomatic efforts were based on the optimal mix of flexibility and perseverance ready to

- suspend judgment until it is right and proper to apply it
- engage in appeasement
- on principle suspect universalist claims. (Hall, p. 253)

As Kissinger's Hollywood-like popularity and star-status proves, efficient diplomacy can indeed contribute to a more favourable perception of a state.

5) Public Diplomacy

During the Second World War, the United States placed special emphasis on the carefully designed and implemented propagation of its own narrative. Public diplomacy, i.e. government funded programs with the aim of influencing public opinion abroad, was a crucial element in this endeavor. The central institution of public diplomacy was the United States Information Agency established by the Eisenhower Administration in 1953, the mission of which was:

- To explain and advocate U.S. policies in terms that are credible and meaningful in foreign cultures;
- To provide information about the official policies of the United States, and about the people, values, and institutions which influence those policies;
- To bring the benefits of international engagement to American citizens and institutions by helping them build strong long-term relationships with their counterparts overseas;
- To advise the President and U.S. government policy-makers on the ways in which foreign attitudes will have a direct bearing on the effectiveness of U.S. policies. (USIA Alumni Association)

Indeed, the significance of Radio Free Europe, Voice of America and Radio Liberty as tools of nurturing the hope in freedom-yearning people behind the Iron Curtain was self-evident. Coordination of international exchange programs, such as the Fulbright Scholarship Program, and the maintenance of libraries, American centers, exhibitions and press services in order to facilitate cross-cultural understanding in the academic field were also important in creating

bonds between the US and the other nations. Another key element – also successfully utilized by the Soviet bloc for their own purposes – was government-sponsored tours of artists and musicians, who brought culture closer to people through representatives of entertainment.

However, as Nye notes, the emphasis on soft power was already on the decline[19] even though the end of the Cold War meant a real change in government perception of the significance of the USIA. With the collapse of the only globally competitive ideological adversary, President Clinton considered the USIA virtually useless. The enormous slash of the budgets for the State Department's public diplomacy efforts[20] and the merging of the USIA into State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs were indicative of this policy. As a result, funding for educational and cultural exchange programs declined between 1993 and 2002 (Figure 21 shows the period between 1981 and 1996) and the number of academic and cultural exchanges between the US and foreign nations plummeted from 45,000 in 1995 to 29,000 in 2001.[21]

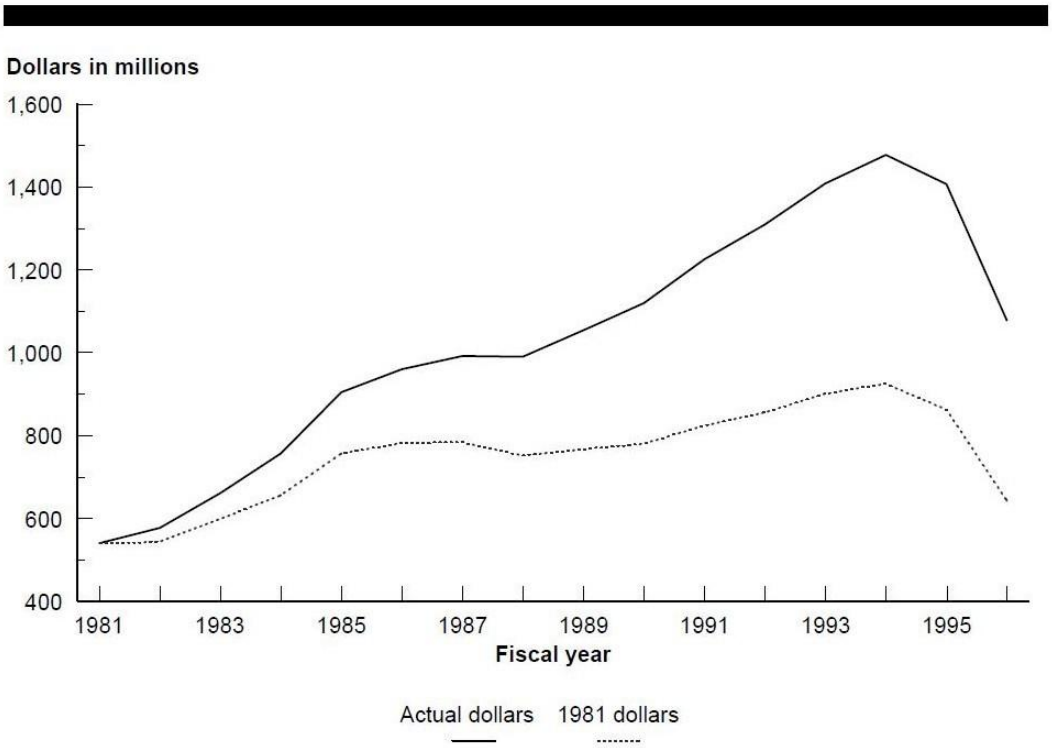

Figure 21: USIA budget between 1981-1996, Source: GAO/NSIAD-96-179 U.S. Information Agency

Between 1993 and 1999 the number of Foreign Service staff responsible for public diplomacy in the State Department fell by nearly one-quarter (in 1999 the USIA had roughly half the

[19] Nye: between 1963 and 1993 15-fold growth of the federal budget was umatched by the 6.5-fold increase of the USIA budget.
[20] Nye: between 1989 and 1999, the budget of USIA, adjusted for inflation, decreased 10 percent.
[21] Ibid.

staff it did in the 1960s) and USIA libraries abroad were closed in great numbers. All this was carried out in an era when the new position of the US as the sole superpower would have required careful management. In the course of the 20th century American nation branding was relatively easy as the competing ideologies were mostly totalitarian and oppressive. Competing with the Nazi ideology or proletarian internationalism was by far less complicated than retaining appeal in a unipolar world where the legitimacy of American values should have been more carefully justified and articulated.

The post-9/11 period brought about the growing politicization of Voice of America which seriously undermined VOA's perception as an accurate and unbiased source of information and made foreigners reconsider their perception of American freedoms and rule of law. Interestingly enough, the modified priorities necessitated by the War on Terror shifted focus from Central and Eastern Europe on the assumption that the NATO enlargement process in the region had ended with satisfactory results, with the solidification of the military alliance with the region. Therefore, the Middle Eastern responsibilities received enhanced attention in the forefront of American public diplomacy.

Yet, despite the increased attention that Muslim countries were exposed to, Washington failed to implement a comprehensive public diplomacy strategy and did not manage to communicate America's values beyond short-term political campaign-style responses to global events. The supply-based approach of the Bush Administration has already been touched upon, but as Nawaz suggests, there might be other factors why democratic values failed to be conveyed appropriately. In Nawaz's opinion, America failed to communicate its credo because of

> […] political correctness. That we have a hesitation in espousing the universality of democratic culture because we are associating that – we associate believing in the universality of our values – with extremists. Yet actually, whenever we talk about human rights, we do say that human rights are universal. But actually going out to propagate that view is associated with either neoconservativism or with Islamist extremism. To go around saying that I believe democratic culture is the best that we've arrived at as a form of political organizing is associated with extremism.
>
> (Nawaz at TED)

Although the full-fledged PR attack[22] against Muslim countries during the Bush Administration was unquestionably spectacular, it may not have been the most sophisticated

[22] Culminating in its appearance in pop culture like the movie '300', in which the Spartans, supposedly intended as a metaphor for American soldiers in the Middle East, were depicted as the perfect embodiments of masculine Gentile valour while the Persian army, similarly as a metaphor for people of Middle Eastern and black origin, consisted of orc-like, hysterical creatures with low pain tolerance level (stereotyped as feminine)

way of expressing a healthy awareness of the greatness of American values. For all its patriotic sentiments, it failed to serve as an efficient counterbalance for the excesses of the war on terror – media reports on cracked up US troops committing crimes of war and the abuse of prisoners in Guantánamo and Abu Ghraib criticized even by US congressmen. On the contrary, these abuses resulted in the second legitimacy crisis in the US after Vietnam.

IV. Conclusion

In the present paper I have made attempts to discuss some of the factors behind the deterioration of public perception of the United States. In this effort, I tried to utilize some concepts and lines of thoughts of international political economy through an outline of regimes and hegemonic stability in order to place the topic into a context in which the significance of soft power and nation branding could be more thoroughly demonstrated.

Then I mentioned some possible reasons behind the relative decline of American popularity. While the geopolitical and cultural aspects proved valid sources of this decline, based on Paul Krugman's line of argument, the economic background of this criticism was proved to be insufficiently well-grounded. Yet obviously, that is not to say that the very perception is not valid, and that is precisely the reason why I found it worthwhile to present some of the possible reasons behind this perceived decline. Next, the concept of soft power was elaborated on along with the concept of identity and nation branding and finally, guerilla diplomacy and public diplomacy were discussed as potentially significant tools in the management of cultural appeal abroad.

The findings of the present paper reinforced my initial hypothesis that soft power plays a crucial role in the political-economic-social-cultural competitiveness of a nation. Therefore, it can only be hoped that more and more leaders will recognize its benefits and thus contribute with heightened efficiency to the establishment of a new dynamic global order in which no one has to hold well-grounded fears that our future depends on 'might is right' principles, in which science and progress will lead to an improved mutual understanding and sustainable growth of peace instead of an extended-scale war with all the more advanced weapons in the shade of nuclear proliferation.

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and a leader, Xerxes, as a 50 Cents rapper verging on the brink of androgynousness invoking an extremely complex set of stereotypes.

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