

AMERICAN SMART POWER STRATEGIES: *redefining leadership in a post-American world*

Under the direction of :
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The purpose of this study is to provide an analysis of the redefinition of American leadership under president Obama, by analyzing the tools of *smart power* strategies. It studies the key concepts of the strategy of “smart realism” – the “Obama strategy” – in foreign policy. By taking a close look at what *smart power* entails, as well as at its limits, this study aims to provide an **overview and a first evaluation of American foreign policy under President Obama**, as he enters the second half of his last mandate.

Definition and genesis of *smart power*:

The two principles that illustrate the vision of Barack Obama and American foreign policy under his leadership are:

- **adapting to the new threats** of the 21st century and **to the new challenges** brought by a “multipolar world”;
- **making a clear break with the *hubris*** of his predecessor George W. Bush, whose two mandates were characterized by unprecedented levels of interventionism and unilateralism.

In order to make this vision and these objectives a reality, the Obama administration defined a **new approach** to US foreign policy, **(re)defined by “smart power”**, an “intelligent” power, **a new, skillful combination of *hard* and *soft power***, which would see America's leadership restored and maintained.

Smart power: a rhetoric to give new life to the *soft power* dulled by the Bush years, or a truly avant-gardist strategy? The origin of *smart power* can be traced to the thought of political scientist and former Assistant Secretary of Defense of the Clinton administration, **Joseph Nye**. In 2007 he co-wrote with Richard L. Armitage, also a former Deputy Secretary of State under George W. Bush, a report on *smart power*, with the aim of **tailoring US foreign policy to crises and to the 21st century**.

Key concepts and essence of *smart power*:

- **A more measured, targeted and subtle use of *hard power***

The discernible effects of this “Obama doctrine” in foreign policy can be seen in the military realm through various strategies: the “**light footprint**” strategy, in particular in Africa, or the “**leading from behind**” strategy in Libya. Elsewhere, like in Europe, Asia or the Gulf, it **relied on its allies** and the deepening of **strategic partnerships**, with a desire to move from burden-sharing to burden-shifting of regional security to US allies.

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➤ **Soft power tailored to "asymmetric" and transgovernmental relations**

The State Department, meanwhile, drew up new "intelligent" cooperation initiatives with US partners, both public and private, as well as a grand strategy, the QDDR, modeled on the quadrennial strategic review (QSR) of the Pentagon. It also continued the move towards digital technology started at the end of the Bush years to modernize the instruments of US public diplomacy. In the field, this means cooperating with the different actors of the public para-governmental sphere (CEOs, institutions, NGOs, ordinary citizens), an approach that places the United States **at the vanguard of diplomacy 2.0.**

➤ **Rebalancing the spheres of influence and action of US foreign policy: Turn towards Asia, withdraw from the Middle East, redefine the United States' role in Europe**

In Asia, the new strategic priority, the Obama administration was careful not to confine its increasingly volatile open confrontation with Beijing to a uniquely military dimension, where the risk of conflict would continue to grow. America's desire to "turn towards Asia" (to *pivot*) remains a **long-term objective** shared by both parties in the United States.

It is also a sign of its desire to **withdraw from the Middle East**, from a military standpoint at the least. This rejection of the military option is characteristic both of *smart power* and has been a constant hallmark of the Obama administration, which has constantly strived to put the focus back on diplomacy, to replace the military by other levers of influence, and to **restore the soft power** of the United States.

This effort also resulted in a desire to **turn increasingly towards America's allies** - with Europe at the forefront - who are to play a part in its new smart power strategies, both within Europe and in Africa.

What conclusions can be drawn from this study?

1. Smart power as a strategy reflects the **return to a form of realism in US foreign policy**, breaking with the neoconservative theories that had inspired the first mandate of George W. Bush.
2. This "Obama approach" to global issues has proven to be **more nuanced** than the Bush approach, but **its effectiveness and subtleties are yet to be confirmed.**
3. In **Asia**, both a strategic priority and the ideal place to develop this new smart power, it seems that it is rather **hard power that is in rising demand.**
4. Smart power sometimes looks like an **Obama approach that favors inaction over strategic action at all costs**, which can sometimes result in dramatic consequences, such as those observed in the **Middle East** today (Syria, Iraq, etc.).
5. Lastly, **foreign economic policy**, at the juncture of hard and soft power, may be the **ultimate reflection of the smart power** put forward by the Obama administration. What remains to be seen is if this new economic diplomacy can prove effective and produce results, which is not yet the case in Asia nor in Europe at the time of publication of this study.