

Mini Simulation

Soft Power

Last Updated:
February 03, 2022

Overview

Soft power is a country's ability to influence others through example and the normal actions of a society. In practice, this process entails countries projecting their values, ideals, and culture across borders to foster goodwill and strengthen partnerships. This can build admiration and respect that makes working with other countries easier. In this hypothetical scenario, the United States needs to decide whether and how it can enhance its standing in the world to help pursue its interests.

The Situation

First, cover the fundamentals of this foreign policy tool with the CFR Education resource, [What Is Soft Power?](#) Then, put these principles into practice with this simulation's hypothetical decision point below.

Decision Point

A recently published report has detailed several international polls revealing increased anti-American sentiment worldwide, indicating a decline in the United States' soft power. At the same time, the report documents increasing global favor for Nemessia—a powerful U.S. rival. Worryingly, those trends have been particularly pronounced in several countries that have long been close trade partners. Analysts predict that with less persuasive power, the United States will have a harder time cooperating with other countries or could be forced to use coercive policy tools like [sanctions](#) more often. The president has convened the National Security Council (NSC) to determine what, if anything, the U.S. government should do to bolster U.S. soft power.

NSC members should consider the following policy options:

- *Devote significant new funding to sweeping cultural, educational, and scientific programs, along with a media campaign.* This could lead to more favorable foreign policy outcomes without requiring coercion. However, it would demand a large investment, potentially at the expense of other objectives.
- *Maintain current investment in soft power initiatives such as media outlets and educational exchange programs, but devote no new funds.* This option would save funds for other priorities, and does not necessarily entail losing U.S. soft power. However, it does nothing to actively address the declining U.S. image abroad. If current trends hold, achieving other U.S. foreign policy goals could become more difficult and potentially require policymakers to rely more heavily on costlier coercive tools.
- *Prioritize investment in hard power, funding military and economic endeavors, such as overseas bases or foreign assistance programs, designed to counter Nemessia's growing influence.* This option could bolster U.S. readiness to address foreign policy challenges, but it carries the greatest risk of allowing the U.S. image to continue eroding, requiring greater reliance on hard power tools.

[The Rise and Fall of Soft Power](#) Foreign Policy

[The Benefits of Soft Power](#) Harvard Business School

[China's Big Bet on Soft Power](#) Council on Foreign Relations

