

U.S. “Soft Power”: How to Dominate Without the Use of Force or Coercion

By [Joseph Thomas](#)

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US soft power is included in US policy papers and promoted by US politicians and diplomats on a regular basis. It is also included as the admitted purpose of US, UK and European international programmes like Chevening and Fulbright scholarships.

Foreign Affairs magazine, published by big-business-funded US policy think tank, the Council on Foreign Relations, would reveal in a review of Joseph Nye’s book, “Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics,” that (my emphasis):

...the term “soft power” — the ability of a country to persuade others to do what it wants without force or coercion — is now widely invoked in foreign policy debates.

The United States can dominate others, but it has also excelled in projecting soft power, with the help of its companies, foundations, universities, churches, and other institutions of civil society; U.S. culture, ideals, and values have been extraordinarily important in helping Washington attract partners and supporters.

And in reality, US domination and its soft power work together to create what is modern day empire and the foundation of US global hegemony.

The United States’ many organisations, from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) to its Young Leaders Initiatives targeting the Americas (Young Leaders of the Americas Initiative/YLAI), Africa (Young African Leaders Initiative/YALI) and [Southeast Asia \(Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative/YSELAI\)](#), all seek to indoctrinate and co-opt the populations of targeted nations to serve the interests of Wall Street and Washington rather than their own.

While the US does this often under the guise of promoting “democracy,” it is clearly engaged in precisely the opposite. While democracy is generally understood as a process of self-determination, through US soft power, the process is co-opted and abused to allow Wall Street and Washington to determine the policies and direction a targeted nation takes rather than its own people.

Often times victims of US soft power are youths who are indoctrinated in university programmes or targeted by US-funded fronts posing as nongovernmental organisations (NGOs). They believe they have arrived at their conclusions and adopted their personal set of principles on their own, unaware of the amount of time, money and energy invested in ensuring they adopt a worldview and a set of political proclivities that serve US interests

rather than those of their own nation, people and those of the individuals themselves.

The use of soft power is not new. [It is a practice as old as empire itself.](#)

The ancient Romans engaged in sophisticated cultural colonisation we could easily describe as soft power.

Ancient Roman historian Tacitus (c. AD 56 – after 117) would adeptly describe the systematic manner in which Rome pacified foreign peoples and the manner in which it would extend its sociocultural and institutional influence over conquered lands.

In chapter 21 of his book *Agricola*, named so after his father-in-law whose methods of conquest were the subject of the text, Tacitus would explain (my emphasis):

His object was to accustom them to a life of peace and quiet by the provision of amenities. He therefore gave official assistance to the building of temples, public squares and good houses. He educated the sons of the chiefs in the liberal arts, and expressed a preference for British ability as compared to the trained skills of the Gauls. The result was that instead of loathing the Latin language they became eager to speak it effectively. In the same way, our national dress came into favour and the toga was everywhere to be seen. And so the population was gradually led into the demoralizing temptation of arcades, baths and sumptuous banquets. **The unsuspecting Britons spoke of such novelties as ‘civilization’, when in fact they were only a feature of their enslavement.**

In a very similar manner, youths today in nations targeted by US soft power describe the notions of “democracy” and “human rights” as well as Western-style neo-liberal politics and institutions as “civilisation.” They often seek out every opportunity to disparage the culture and institutions of their own nation, describing them as backwards and demanding they be promptly replaced with new notions and institutions modelled after or directly beholden to those in the US and Europe.

We can see across the whole of Asia this full process of soft power coming to fruition. Years and millions of dollars spent in infiltrating universities, indoctrinating youths through programmes like YSEALI or [the British Chevening scholarships](#) and funding and directing fronts posing as NGOs has led to the creation of entire political parties contesting power, comprised of indoctrinated youths beholden both to the notions of Western culture and institutions as well as the money and technical support nations like the US and UK directly provide these parties.

Hong Kong’s [“Demosisto” political party](#) is made up entirely of youths and NGO representatives that have been created and funded for years by the US, UK and various other European interests.

Myanmar’s ruling National League for Democracy has the top echelons of its party run by former journalists, activists and politicians cultivated, funded and trained by US-funded programmes for decades. This includes [the current minister of information, Pe Myint](#).

Case Study: Thailand

The recently formed “Future Forward” opposition party headed by Thanathorn

Juangroongruangkit, the heir of a multi-million dollar auto-parts business, has overtly advertised itself as an amalgamation of Western-style neo-liberal political ideology.

While the supposed “founders” of the party appear to fully represent various social issues, the immense amount of money needed to perform “Future Forward’s” campaigning indicates the true founders (and financial sponsors) have chosen to remain behind the scenes.

Reuters in its article, [“Thai auto heir launches new party, promises to heal political rift,”](#) would admit:

Thanathorn introduced other party co-founders on Thursday, including a filmmaker and a number of activists involved in LGBT and environment causes, among other issues.

Party co-founder Piyabutr Saengkanokkul, a law lecturer at Bangkok’s Thammasat University, said the party hopes to transcend Thailand’s political divide, a sentiment echoed by the student-led groups that have held anti-junta protests across Bangkok in recent weeks.

But some say the party might find it difficult to appeal to grassroots voters.

“Will they, academics and NGOs ... be able to connect with grassroots people, which is a large part of the electoral base?,” asked one Twitter user.

To create that electoral base, the US is currently funding programmes inside Thailand specifically to infiltrate and co-opt local, regional and national concerns. Everything from environmental issues regarding the building of dams and power plants to women’s rights and access to education have been used as vectors by US-funded organisations seeking to co-opt and knit together various genuine individual pragmatic causes into a singular, national political clearinghouse.

Part of this singular front’s responsibilities will be to serve as a voting bloc to place parties like “Future Forward” into power.

NED and YSEALI are two examples of how single US organisations are targeting and cultivating youths much in the way Tacitus described in Agricola. These individuals are cultivated to be “leaders” who then create their own organisations (often US funded) to begin recruiting and indoctrinating additional members.

Like a pyramid scheme, the efforts’ structure enables the US to recruit and indoctrinate Thais faster than any single US organisation could do on its own. While programmes like YSEALI boast of thousands of leaders who undoubtedly have infected thousands more with US-funded indoctrination, its still isn’t likely enough to create a voting bloc big enough to place “Future Forward” into power.

But it doesn’t need to be. The US is still depending on existing political machines of politicians like US proxy Thaksin Shinawatra to create the support needed to propel “Future Forward” and other parties like it politically.

Future Forward: The Evolution of a US Proxy

While Reuters admits that Future Forward has been accused of ties to US proxy Thaksin Shinawatra, the article fails to mention the substantial evidence those making the accusations are citing.

Piyabutr, mentioned by Reuters as the party's co-founder, had previously abused his academic credentials to organise and host an indoor event for Thaksin Shinawatra's United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD) also known as red shirts. The event held at Thammasat University, included Thaksin Shinawatra's lobbyist Robert Amsterdam given a front row seat during the proceedings.

The red shirts are Shinawatra's street front whose reputation had become a political liability after back-to-back riots and deadly armed violence the front carried out in 2009-2010.

Piyabutr and fellow academics endeavoured to rehabilitate the UDD's public image by transforming it into a more academic movement, papering over the crass populism and demagoguery used to create it in the first place. While the "red shirt" street front is still used to give emerging successors to Shinawatra's political machinery the numbers they need at public events, protests and rallies, this new, more academic face is what is being presented to the public, and the world.

Soft Power's Final Destination: Consume All, Including Allies

The US will continue attempting to create a voting bloc independent of traditional political figures like Thaksin Shinawatra and his own networks of patronage. While Thaksin Shinawatra has been a loyal servant of US interests for years, the US would prefer a political party and a voting bloc it controls entirely on its own. By Shinawatra supporting the creation of parties like "Future Forward" he is in reality sealing his own political fate.

Special interests sponsoring "Future Forward's" political activities are also creating a monster that will eventually consume them both politically and economically in the future. As demonstrated in nations around the world subjected to the full cycle of US meddling, co-opting, infiltration and domination, even those special interests that eagerly assisted US ambitions find themselves unwelcomed competitors once the US finally succeeds.

Those who believe they can "ride the tiger" of US hegemony into power often find themselves the target of the very domestic networks of agitators and activists they helped the US create.

Protecting Against US Soft Power

Clearly, the soft power process has nothing to do with any genuine interpretation of democracy. It is simply using democratic themes and procedures to lend legitimacy to what is modern day imperialism and the very sort of soft power employed by the Romans against the ancient world centuries ago.

Thailand and other nations targeted by US soft power can only defend themselves by being able to both effectively expose US soft power methods, and by countering them through the work of indigenous institutions and genuine NGOs filling Thailand's political, activist, educational, information and economic space sufficiently enough so that no room remains for foreign-funded alternatives.

As to why the US is so interested in co-opting and controlling Thailand politically, the answer

lies in Washington's larger Asia-Pacific agenda which includes the encirclement and containment of China with nations that do business with and are entirely under the influence of Washington. A political party run by the products of decades of US cultural colonisation and soft power efforts taking office in Thailand would directly serve Washington's wider regional ambitions and augment its efforts to co-opt and control Thailand's Southeast Asian neighbours as well.

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Joseph Thomas is chief editor of Thailand-based geopolitical journal, [The New Atlas](#) and contributor to the online magazine "[New Eastern Outlook](#)".

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