

## "Smart Power" at Work

Contributed by La Alborada newspaper

How does the US State Department pursue its interests in Cuba? Why does it appear to undertake talks with Cuba on matters of common interest, implicitly with an eye to improving relations, while continuing to promote dissidence and subversion on the island with the goal of overthrowing the government? ((

The Department itself explains its approach on its Web page, American "Smart Power": Diplomacy and Development Are the Vanguard.(( The page notes that "Military force may sometimes be necessary to protect our people and our interests. But diplomacy and development will be equally important in creating conditions for a peaceful, stable and prosperous world. That is the essence of smart power – using all the tools at our disposal."

The latter are listed as follows.((

Foreign Policy Tools(:

- Negotiating, persuading and exerting leverage(.
- Cooperating with our military partners and other agencies of government [i.e., the Pentagon, CIA, Treasury, Commerce and other departments](.
- Partnering with NGOs, the private sector and international organizations(.
- Using modern technologies for public outreach(.
- Empowering negotiators who can protect our interests while understanding those of our negotiating partners((.

One can see most of these tools at work in the case of, for example, Honduras. The US was able to appear to cooperate with the OAS and the UN in opposing the coup in Honduras, while in fact acting to support the coup. The Honduran resistance had called for a boycott of controlled elections without independent observers. In the end, the US promptly

accepted the official figure of a 62% turnout as a basis for declaring that constitutional order had been restored. In fact, the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE) later provided final figures of less than 50%, while a video news report documenting the voting-counting process showed that turnout had been at 49.2%.

The Honduran organization Hagamos Democracia, trained and organized by the National Democratic Institute, found a rate of 47.6%, although it failed to mention this in its report.. ((A compliant media —not listed on the Web page among the tools available to State, but surely one of the most helpful— helped to propagate the original false figures while failing to report on the continuing death, disappearance, and torture of opposition activists during and after the elections.

No matter; the Honduran neoliberal economy controlled by a handful of families, and the US base at Palmerola, remained safe for a while longer. No overt military action was required: Smart Power worked.(( In Cuba, State is making use of the tools it used in Honduras and also two others: "Partnering with NGOs, the private sector and international organizations, " and "Using modern technologies for public outreach."((

The US Interests Section has long been active in creating, coordinating, and funding NGOs in Cuba, albeit these are small, barely known on the island, and essentially powerless. Their real value lies in the international publicity that they generate. State also focuses on modern technologies "for public outreach," meaning the distribution of cell and satellite phones, computing equipment, and Internet hardware and software that under US law cannot be sold to Cuba. A special effort under this heading is the generation and publicizing of opposition blogs and the coordinated use of social networking applications such as Twitter and Facebook. ((

Cuba is not the only target of this version of Smart Power. An interesting summary of activities around the world can be found in the Stanford Social Innovation Review, (which reported:((In the days after last fall's presidential election, President Obama's social media team began organizing a nonprofit coalition of these cause-wired, global youth activists, inviting the most powerful to Columbia University last December for a conference cosponsored by Facebook, Google, MTV, and Howcast Media. The conference ended with the birth of the nonprofit Alliance for Youth Movements, and last March, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton announced plans for a second AYM conference, which was held a few weeks ago [October 2009] in Mexico City and focused on sustaining and strengthening the youth coalition as a focal point for the State Department's new 21st Century Statecraft initiative. The agency's goal is twofold: engage with existing youth leaders using social media to wield "citizen power" in conflict zones around the world, and help nurture new online pro-democracy groups where none currently exist.

In effect, it's the State Department's effort to create its own nonprofit youth presence as a way of extending its work worldwide. (("You come from different cultures and countries and speak different languages," Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said in a welcome video to the young activists attending the Mexico City event October 14-16, "but you all share a common commitment to engaging with the world, to using every tool at your disposal to bring people together to solve problems. And that makes you the kind of leaders we need as we work to meet the challenges and seize the opportunities of the 21st century." ((State publicized the effort at Mexico City on its Web site.

Here is what it said:(( Under Secretary of State for Democracy and Global Affairs Maria Otero and U.S. Ambassador to Mexico Carlos Pascual will open the Alliance of Youth Movement's second annual summit in Mexico City on October 14, 2009. Sponsored by the U.S. Department of State, Facebook, Hi5, Google, MySpace, Gen Next, Howcast Media, MTV, PepsiCo, Mobile Behavior, Univisión, Interactive Media, Inc., Causecast.org, WordPress.com, Edelman, and YouTube, the event will convene individuals, government officials, academics, and private and public sector leaders from around the world October 14-16, 2009, to explore ways to advance grassroots movements seeking positive social change through 21st century technology and tools.((

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton first announced this summit in March 2009 during her digital town hall on the campus of Tecnológico de Monterrey in Monterrey, Mexico. The Secretary is committed to connecting and empowering these young community leaders. Participants in the summit will discuss a variety of practical topics, including politics, resisting violence, and technology; sustainability and long-term planning; and the use of viral video in social movements. The sessions will be streamed live during the conference through news sources and other Web sites. (State does not foresee much of a future for the Cuban government. In April, the Secretary of State so informed the House Foreign Affairs Committee: "You can see there is beginning to be a debate (in Cuba), I mean this is a regime that is ending. It will end at some point."

It's doubtful that State would be taking seriously talks with a government that it expects to collapse soon. That is especially the case if State is actively promoting such a collapse, as has been shown by the recent news of its subcontractor who was arrested there. (President Obama and Secretary Clinton face continuing internal opposition to any loosening of the blockade. Perhaps they believe that a hard-line public position is needed while they pursue policies that are more conciliatory. But, in the context of State's own official positions and its actions consistent with those positions, it looks like the official statements accurately reflect US policy on Cuba.

Smart Power is on the move.

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