

SOFT POWER

In the comments to this thread, we discussed the possibility that Obama would execute a long overdue shift in emphasis in our foreign policy, emphasizing the State Department and soft power over DOD and military power (and, even, soft power implemented by the military). See, especially, this nadezhda comment.

That appears to be the plan:

Yet all three of his choices – Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton as the rival turned secretary of state; Gen. James L. Jones, the former NATO commander, as national security adviser, and Robert M. Gates, the current and future defense secretary – have embraced a sweeping shift of priorities and resources in the national security arena.

The shift would create a greatly expanded corps of diplomats and aid workers that, in the vision of the incoming Obama administration, would be engaged in projects around the world aimed at preventing conflicts and rebuilding failed states. However, it is unclear whether the financing would be shifted from the Pentagon; Mr. Obama has also committed to increasing the number of American combat troops. Whether they can make the change – one that Mr. Obama started talking about in the summer of 2007, when his candidacy was a long shot at best – “will be the great foreign policy experiment of the Obama presidency,” one of his senior advisers said recently.

The adviser, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak publicly, said the three have all embraced “a rebalancing of America’s national security portfolio” after a huge investment in

new combat capabilities during the Bush years.

The article points out many of the hurdles Obama will face in implementing this plan. There's DOD's insatiable appetite for money—the same money that would need to be switched to State. And there's the right wing suspicion of any kind of foreign policy that doesn't give them a hard-on.

Of course, those hurdles may be easier to overcome given the team Obama is announcing today, partly because Gates will give Obama cover for "gutting" Defense, Hillary will be adamant about increasing her portfolio, and Jones will have the chops to knock any skeptics in the military back in place.

Let's hope they succeed.