Private Universities, the State and Soft Power: the American University of Beirut and the Université Saint-Joseph de Beyrouth

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Abstract

This paper contributes to the understanding of the soft power of private foreign-affiliated universities and the interaction between such universities and the state for university soft power and national soft power. The analysis shows university soft power in the Middle East host society and its basis of academic excellence and biculturalism. Historically, university soft power has been limited first by proselytizing and later by unpopular American and French foreign policies. These universities have previously undescribed reverse university soft power in the West on behalf of the Middle East: advocating Middle East interests and raising moral, political and financial support for education, healthcare and development in the region.

France has since the 1880s pursued national soft power through the Université Saint-Joseph de Beyrouth (USJ). The USA has pursued national soft power through the American University of Beirut (AUB) since the 1950s. University soft power has been furthered by state financial and academic assistance to academic excellence, while too close association with the state has threatened university soft power. The universities have contributed to the national soft power of the USA and France concerning milieu goals of attraction to education, language and liberal norms among elites. The universities have not contributed to national soft power regarding
acceptance of unpopular foreign policies in the Middle East, which was also not a university or government goal.

Introduction: Soft Power of Transnational Actors

The American University of Beirut (established 1866) and the Université Saint-Joseph de Beyrouth (1875) as private American- and French-affiliated universities in the Middle East have received much policy attention from the USA (since the 1950s) and France (from the 1880s) for soft power purposes. The universities continue to receive such attention, and the AUB play a central role in, for instance, the Tomorrow’s Leaders Scholarship Program of the Middle East Partnership Initiative, which is an important part of current US soft power policy in the Middle East. The French state continues to support the USJ for soft power reasons. This long-running policy interest has not been matched by corresponding scholarly attention concerning the soft power of these universities and their contributions to the soft power of the USA and France. This lack of attention reflects gaps in the literature regarding explaining the soft power of transnational and other non-state actors, historical developments of soft power, and universities as transnational actors in world politics, which this paper seeks to address.

The literature on soft power states that the soft power at the disposal of states is often highly dependent on the soft power resources of non-state actors beyond the control of the state (Nye 2004, Lord 2006, Hocking 2005, Riordan 2005). Accordingly, there is a growing awareness of the importance of such non-state resources and networks for states pursuing soft power. However, these questions are not addressed adequately even by Nye himself (Zahran, Ramos
or in the literature which ends up focusing on the narrow soft power of the state pursued through public diplomacy.

In the volume on ‘The New Public Diplomacy’ (Melissen 2005b), Brian Hocking (Hocking 2005) and Shaun Riordan (Riordan 2005) outline a development from a hierarchic state-centered one-way public diplomacy to a network based public diplomacy created in the interface between the state, civil society organizations, educational institutions and business among others. Such networks engage its members and audiences in dialogue where legitimacy is a crucial currency and information moves in many directions. However, this awareness is not coupled with adequate analysis and explanation of non-state actor soft power and its relation with the national soft power at the disposal of states.

The war on terror and the USA’s difficult relations with the Middle East have spurned interest in the role of soft power and public diplomacy for this difficult relationship. Carnes Lord (2006) in his study of soft power in the war on terror acknowledges the importance of non-state actors such as business, diasporas and education, but has great issues with the ‘uncontrollability’ of non-state actors and in the end focuses overwhelmingly on US government policies and resources. William Rugh (2006) gives an overview of US public diplomacy in the Middle East, but limits himself to the efforts of the US government. In the edited volume on the US and Japan as soft power superpowers (Watanabe, McConnell 2008), there is characteristically for ‘de-militarized’ Japan significant attention to education (Altbach, Peterson 2008, Akiyoshi 2008, Mashiko, Miki 2008), popular culture (Allison 2008, Yoshiko 2008, Tsutomu 2008, Fraser 2008), sports (Guthrie-Shimizu 2008) and civil society (Repeta 2008, Katsuji, Kaori 2008), but again
insufficient analysis of the basis and extent of non-state actor soft power and in the end emphasis on state public diplomacy policy (Seiichi 2008, Crowell 2008, Naoyuki 2008). This inadequate analysis of non-state actors soft power and focus on state public diplomacy is also the case concerning other countries’ soft power, such as Canada (Potter 2009) or China (Guo 2008, Li 2009).

The observations of the importance of non-state actor resources and networks raise a number of current and historical questions concerning: What is the extent and basis of the soft power of non-state actors toward different state and non-state actors? How is such non-state actor soft power affected by relations with the state and public policy? Does non-state actor soft power contribute to national soft power? Can the state pursue national soft power through non-state actors? These are the questions addressed in this paper.


Soft power is a recent concept in IR, but an old phenomenon in international politics. This historical pedigree is illustrated, for instance, by France, which at least since the court of Louis XIV through its various republican regimes has been extremely conscious of its message
conveyed abroad (Olins 2005) and use of cultural diplomacy (Sretenovic 2009). Yet, there is little analysis of historical cases or long-term historical developments of soft power or soft power policies. US Cold War policy has received some attention (Geiger 2010, Parmar 2010, Krige 2010). A rare example on early soft power is Sheng Ding’s (2008) discussion of the historical soft power of classical Chinese culture. This paper analyses the development of the soft power of transnational actors, private foreign-affiliated universities, throughout their histories from their founding in 1866 and 1875.

Universities are overlooked in the IR literature on transnational actors, even though, they often historically have been and continue to be heavily involved in Nye’s and Keohane’s *global interactions* of moving information, money and people across state boundaries (Nye, Keohane 1971, Bertelsen, Møller 2010, Bertelsen 2009). This role is clear from the historical literature on the two universities in this study and is acknowledged in the literature on private higher education in the Global South in educational studies (Altbach, Levy 2005, Altbach 1999), but absent in the IR literature on transnational actors. Research on transnational actors in IR also does not give sufficient attention to historical developments, which Fred Halliday—quoting Martin Wight—terms “‘presentism’, the exaggeration of the novelty of the present” (Halliday 2001: 27-28). This paper follows the development of important transnational actors, private foreign-affiliated universities, from their founding in the late 1800s.

Nye defines soft power as when others adapt desired behavior through attraction or co-optation. Soft power is at work, when persuasion is achieved without threats or exchanges. According to Nye (Nye 2004) the soft power of a state relies on three resources: culture (if it is
attractive to others), political values (when they are being observed at home and abroad), and foreign policy (when seen as legitimate and with moral authority) (Nye 2004). Power is always contextual (Baldwin 1979), and soft power particularly so due to its dependence on the reception by interpreters and audiences (Nye 2004). This dependence dictates that soft power is rather with than over somebody. How this attraction works deserves close attention, and Steven Lukes (2007) and Janice Bially Mattern (2007) raise the question of attraction through manipulation or coercion.

Power is always contextual (Baldwin 1979), and soft power particularly so due to its dependence on the reception by interpreters and audiences (Nye 2004). Therefore, it is potentially problematic to use terms as governments exercising or wielding soft power for two reasons highlighted here: the non-state basis of much soft power beyond government control and the dependency on acceptance by the receiving audience (Nye 2004). This dependence dictates that soft power is rather with than over somebody, and it is clearer to talk about having or holding soft power than exercising or wielding it.

These observations contribute to understanding the soft power of the two universities here as transnational actors and the relationship with the soft power of the US and French state. These universities as transnational universities held and hold significant soft power in their own right. It is important to keep in mind that non-state actors can hold soft power of their own separate of the state (Nye 2004). This soft power of the universities has contributed to the soft power the US and French state hold in the Middle East. The US and French state understand this contribution and support the universities materially to augment their national soft power. On
the contrary, US and French Middle East policy has been detrimental to university soft power. It is, thus, not a question of the US or French government ‘exercising’ soft power through these universities, or the soft power of the universities being an extension of the soft power of the state.

The soft power of the private foreign-affiliated universities here is termed university soft power. University soft power is here operationalized as behavior by outsiders to the universities, which is desired by the universities and based on attraction or co-optation. It is, thus, a behavior- and not a resource-based operationalization. Desired behavior is first and foremost embracing the mission of the university, whether proselytizing in former times or later secular education according to American or French traditions. Acceptance of the universities, and moral, political and financial support from a wide range of private and public actors in the Middle East, the USA and France are other important desired behavior. Such support reveals support for the mission of the universities. The motivations for desired behavior show the basis of the soft power of these universities. The absence of university soft power is displayed through rejection of the mission of the university, denial of support or political or violent attacks on them. This university soft power is distinct from the national soft power, which is defined here as the public- and privately-based soft power at the disposal of the state.

University soft power with students, their families and the host state is analyzed in University Soft Power with Middle Eastern Students and Host States. This paper also introduces the term of reverse university soft power: the soft power of this American- and French-affiliated university vis-à-vis American and French society and state. Reverse university soft power with
academia, philanthropy and business in the USA and France are analyzed in Reverse University Soft Power in the American and French Societies of Origin. The relations between the universities and the US state concerning the reverse soft power of the universities vis-à-vis the US and French state, the interaction with US and French public policy, and contributions to US and French national soft power are analyzed in The Universities and the US and French .

Soft power is usually more effective in achieving, what Arnold Wolfers (1962) called milieu goals than possession goals (Nye 2004, see also Melissen 2005a). This difference is at the core of this university soft power, its relations to the state and contribution to national soft power. According to then AUB President John Waterbury, graduates of the AUB may “continue to resent U.S. policies and criticize U.S. leadership, but they want to import its institutional successes in governance, legal arrangements, and business organization (2003: 67).”

Methodology: Structured, Focused Comparison of University Soft Power

The analysis of university soft power vis-à-vis different actors is conducted as a structured, focused comparison (George, Bennett 2005) between the two universities of: (i) university soft power with Middle Eastern students and the host state; (ii) reverse university soft power in the American or French society of origin; (iii) relations with the US and French state and public policy; and (iv) contribution to US and French national soft power. This comparison tests actual and not potential soft power behavior and examines the status of the universities in practice, because of the analysis of relations between universities and outside actors and of the actual behavior of these actors.
This structured, focused comparison is based on historical literature on the universities and 60 interviews with board members, presidents and senior administrators, faculty from all disciplines, local and foreign students, US and French diplomats, lobbyists in Washington DC, US congressional staffers and US civil servants. The broad range of interview persons ensures an all-round view of the relations of the universities with their Lebanese host society and their societies of origin in the West. Individual interviews are not referenced as promised to interviewees. The method of structured, focused comparison overcomes the lack of opinion data from students or the public on these universities and steers the analysis clear of unstructured anecdotal evidence. The analysis does not focus on illustrious alumni. Such evidence is anecdotal and unsystematic in the absence of large datasets and relies on assumptions of university socialization of students with effects on later behavior.

The AUB and USJ as private foreign-affiliated universities are a subclass of transnational actors (George, Bennett 2005). They are transnational actors since they are private universities founded and originally funded by American and French missionaries with the aim of providing explicitly American- or French-style education in Middle Eastern societies. They continue to have important transnational characteristics since they are strongly characterized by what Nye and Keohane termed *global interactions*: the movement of information, people and money across state boundaries (Nye, Keohane 1971, Wolfers 1962, Josselin, Wallace 2001, Kaiser 1969). AUB is incorporated and accredited in the USA, has American presidents and a predominantly American Board of Trustees based in New York and continue to benefit from American public and private financial support. Much of the faculty is American educated. The USJ is part of the Jesuit order, which together with the Roman Catholic Church are important
examples of transnational actors (Ryall 2001, Vallier 1971). USJ has had predominantly French presidents, is served by a global Francophone Strategic Council and has and continues to enjoy close financial and academic relations with the French state and Francophone universities.

American- and French-origin higher education in the Middle East provides particularly suitable material for the study of transnational actor soft power, their interaction with the state and their contribution to national soft power. American- and French-origin education is widespread and well-known in the Middle East, and the two universities here are among the leading universities in the region. They are, therefore, crucial cases (George, Bennett 2005) for observing transnational actor soft power and contributions to national soft power. As crucial cases, these universities have to have soft power to render transnational actor soft power and contributions to national soft power probable. According to Waterbury, American higher education has more attraction (soft power) and familiarity to Middle Easterners than any other American institution: “the word ‘American’ is to education, what ‘Swiss’ is to watches (Waterbury 2003: 66, see also Ghabra, Arnold 2007).”

The comparison of an American- and a French-origin university in Lebanon allows the comparison of the soft power aims and strategies of American and French private and public actors. It allows comparison of the interaction of the Middle East with the USA and France respectively and the soft power of two distinct university systems working predominantly in either English or French.
University Soft Power with Middle Eastern Students and Host States

The analysis shows that these private, foreign-affiliated universities in the Middle East as transnational actors held and hold soft power in their Middle Eastern host society. The soft power is clear from their popularity among students and their acceptance by the host state and other actors. However, this soft power has also been limited and taken unintended turns in nature and direction. The host society has rejected the core historical missions of these universities and attacked them violently or threatened their survival politically.

Students and the state in the host society are the most interesting interlocutors for understanding the extent and limits of university soft power. A detailed look at acceptance and rejection of these universities reveals the basis of their soft power. The basis of soft power has remained stable in the Middle Eastern host society. Middle Eastern students and their families have continued to demand and embrace quality education and especially English skills offering better life chances. However, American liberal arts education is less understood by students’ families, who look for professional education for securing employment and income. Also the successful and respectful merger of Arab and Western culture in these institutions and their integration into local society has been crucial for their attractiveness. The responses of the Ottoman Empire, independent Lebanon and other regional states to the universities have been characterized by cautious acceptance.

University soft power was originally limited by the proselytizing nature of the universities, which was rejected by students and society. Unpopular American or French Middle East policies and too close an association with the US or French governments later limited university soft
power. The analysis of university soft power, therefore, focuses first on limitations from proselytizing and then from US/French-Middle Eastern political relations.

_AUB: Rejection of Protestant Proselytizing followed by Embrace of Education_

The founding of the Syrian Protestant College (SPC) (American University of Beirut since 1920) in 1866 had soft power goals. In 1862, Dr. Daniel Bliss along with other American Protestant missionaries in the Levant set out to found an American college with a medical school. The aims were to attract and co-opt the indigenous population to Protestantism through education and to train leaders for society. However, both Islam and local Christian rites rejected conversion, so the university mission of proselytizing was unsuccessful showing limitations to university soft power (Dodge 1958, American University of Beirut 2005, Bliss, Coon & Bliss 1989, Munro 1977, Penrose 1970, Makdisi 2008, Makdisi 1997, Bashshur 1964, Anderson 2008a, Anderson 2008b, Interviews 2008-2010).

The Young Turks revolution of 1908 promoted freedom of religion, and non-Christian students at SPC/AUB protested—in vain—against the obligatory chapel services and bible classes. This protest showed the nature and limitations of university soft power: the attraction to SPC/AUB as an educational institution and the rejection of Protestant proselytizing. Gradual secularization and offering English-language education attracted students across all religions and beyond Lebanon’s borders. This attractiveness contributed to the religiously and nationally diverse student body in the post-WWII years at AUB. This diversity ensured a broad impact for AUB in Lebanese and Middle Eastern society (Dodge 1958, Munro 1977, Penrose 1970, Makdisi 2008, Bashshur 1964, Hanna 1979).
WWI posed an early test of SPC/AUB university soft power with the Ottoman state, which allowed the college to continue operating, showing university soft power. However, Ottoman authorities rejected the core proselytizing mission of the college when they ended compulsory religious exercises. Ottoman acceptance of SPC/AUB (university soft power) was based on the loyal work of SPC/AUB with the Ottoman Empire in supplying medical assistance to Ottoman forces in Palestine, and on the US decision not to declare war on the Ottoman Empire (Dodge 1958, Penrose 1970, Makdisi 2008). Under the French mandate and in the post-WWII years, AUB was discriminated against by the Maronite (USJ) dominated state which did not recognize AUB degrees to their full extent, showing limits to university soft power with the Francophone Maronites (Bashshur 1964).

After WWI, new Arab states and British mandate authorities turned to AUB graduates and faculty for school teachers and civil servants and sent bursary students to the university, which shows university soft power with these states. AUB also attracted a substantial number of scholarship students from Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon and Saudi Arabia in the 1950s (Dodge 1958, Penrose 1970, Burns 1965). In contrast, Nasserite Egypt established the Arab University in Beirut in 1960, which was affiliated with Alexandria University to compete with the American- and French-origin universities, which shows limits to their university soft power (Munro 1977, Hanna 1979).

US-Middle East political relations became an issue for AUB soft power in the years after WWII. The intense student political activism at AUB with demonstrations and strikes, motivated by Arab nationalism around 1950, and by the Arab-Israeli conflict after 1967, illustrates what
students found attractive and what they rejected about AUB. Students strongly opposed US Middle East policy and were suspicious of generous US government support for AUB. However, even many Palestinian militants still chose to study at this American university motivated by its educational quality and paid tribute to its message of intellectual freedom. Students clearly distinguished between unacceptable US Middle East policy and attractive AUB education and intellectual freedom (Munro 1977, Anderson 2008a, Interviews 2008-2010, Hanna 1979, Khalaf 1977, Anderson 2008c).

According to interviews, the regional popularity and acceptance (university soft power) of AUB in the 1960s and 1970s reflected the fact that the university was increasingly seen as an Arab-American institution with an Arab tone to it due to its predominantly Arab student body, staff and faculty. It was regarded as more Arab than Lebanese and as one of the last vestiges of Pan-Arabist sentiments. The university had contributed to pan-Arabism through its education of students from all over the region and through its intellectuals such as Constantin Zureiq. Its attractiveness for students, faculty and supporters, and its protection later during the civil war, was based on the idea that it exemplified the ideal of a great, liberal university, while also being respectful of Arab identity, politics and culture. The university was not seen as a predatory, American intrusion, but as the best combination of American and Arab values. There was and is pride in AUB and awareness and appreciation of its great contributions to Arab state building from the 1930s to the 1970s. In the years before the Lebanese civil war, AUB was exceptionally cosmopolitan in its faculty and student body (Interviews 2008-2010).
The Lebanese civil war, 1975 to 1990, exposed AUB to extreme security and financial pressures, which revealed both support (university soft power) in the Middle East and the USA as well as violent rejection of the institution in some quarters (absence of university soft power). AUB survived because all sides of the civil war acknowledged its value to Lebanese society. Protection of the university in West-Beirut by Leftist-Muslim, Palestinian and later Druze forces demonstrated this acceptance. This protection was possibly a gesture of good will toward the USA (Interviews 2008-2010, Hanna 1979, Oweini 1996).

During the civil war, rising hospital expenditure in particular, along with the drop in tuition income pushed AUB into deficits threatening its continued existence. As a measure of its soft power, AUB raised sufficient local, regional and American financial support to survive (Munro 1977, Hanna 1979). However, as noted above there was also violent rejection of the university by some, showing the limitations of university soft power. Most prominently, in January 1984, President Malcolm Kerr was assassinated, presumably, by Islamic Jihad threatening that “not a single American or Frenchman will remain on this soil”, thus denying soft power to AUB and USJ (American University of Beirut 2005, Interviews 2008-2010, Oweini 1996).

The civil war forced the foreign students and faculty out of Beirut and made AUB an overwhelmingly Lebanese institution unlike its exceptionally cosmopolitan and pan-Arabist past. Because of its educational excellence and the superior life chances it offers, it is very attractive across all sects and ethnicities, and attracts Hizbollah students and others very critical of the USA. It is also a very attractive academic employer locally, but the Lebanese security
situation hampers international student and faculty recruitment severely (Interviews 2008-2010).

**USJ: Limited to a Maronite and French-Speaking Constituency**

Jesuit missionaries founded USJ in 1875 in response to the founding of SPC/AUB and with similar religious soft power objectives towards the local population. Unlike the American missionaries, the Jesuits had a significant local Catholic constituency, the Maronites. The Jesuits also had the wider ‘denationalizing’ soft power agenda of turning the locals to France and adopting the French language, to create ‘Franco-Arabs’. This soft power strategy profoundly impacted the relations of USJ with France, Lebanon and the wider region (Bashshur 1964, Qubain 1979).

The Jesuits like the Americans succeeded in creating an academically prestigious university, but with less appeal (university soft power) outside Maronites and Lebanon because of its Catholic and French-speaking identity (Bashshur 1964, Interviews 2008-2010, UNESCO Assemblée générale au Liban 1948, Eddé 2000). The student population at USJ became increasingly Lebanese under the French mandate (1918-1943/1946), for instance, 36% of first year medical students were Lebanese between 1904 and 1923, rising to 50% between 1924 and 1953 (Eddé 2000). After Lebanese independence, the student body became overwhelmingly Lebanese and Maronite and the foreign students were predominantly Syrian Christians. This development illustrated the limitations to university soft power of the Catholic and French-speaking identity of the university in the region (Bashshur 1964, Eddé 2000). Today the university pursues university soft power through an identity based on academic excellence and Lebanese national
integration, but Christians are still overrepresented at about 2/3 of the student population (Interviews 2008-2010, Abou 2003).

USJ’s relationship with the Ottoman Empire was characterized by cautious acceptance of the French connection in peace time and rejection during war, showing the extent and limitations of university soft power with the Ottoman Empire. After long negotiations, the Ottoman authorities recognized in 1898 the French government-sponsored French Medical School at USJ (established in 1883), and Ottoman examiners joined the official French ones to issue double degrees of the French state and the Ottoman Empire (UNESCO Assemblée générale au Liban 1948, Eddé 2000). During WWI, USJ did not have the university soft power to remain open unlike SPC. USJ’s facilities were confiscated and its foreign faculty was expelled at the outbreak of the war (UNESCO Assemblée générale au Liban 1948, Eddé 2000).

Under the French mandate and after independence of Lebanon, USJ enjoyed full recognition of its degrees by the Lebanese state unlike AUB. USJ was influential with the mandate and later Lebanese state due to its establishment of the first faculty of law and its supplying jurists and judges. Its school of political science supplied civil servants, and its engineering school trained the engineers for utilities and infrastructure work (Bashshur 1964, Eddé 2000).

The Lebanese civil war also exposed USJ to extreme pressures and dangers and illustrated the extent and limitations of its attractiveness (university soft power). USJ suffered much greater material damage than AUB and did not enjoy the protection of its campuses by factions in the civil war as AUB did. This damage reflected collateral damage as a result of being on or close to the Green Line frontline of the civil war. However the university was also directly targeted,
possibly as a message to France, showing limitations to both university soft power and French national soft power. According to Carla Eddé (Interviews 2008-2010, 2000), the fact that USJ survived the civil war at all was a testimony to its sensitivity to and engagement with the local society and a measure of university soft power. USJ also lost most of its foreign faculty because of the civil war becoming overwhelmingly Lebanese.

**Reverse University Soft Power in the American and French Societies of Origin**

A surprising finding of this study is how these universities hold unintended reverse soft power on their own behalf and that of Lebanon and the Middle East in their Western societies of origin. Reverse university soft power is desired behavior from the Western society of origin based on attraction. This behavior has mostly been in the form of academic, moral, political and financial support of the universities and their contributions to education, healthcare and development in their Middle East host societies. These universities have also often been advocates of Middle East host society interests and political positions, even against those of the Western societies of origin.

This reverse university soft power was originally based on the proselytizing mission, which mobilized Western missionaries, missionary societies and philanthropies. However, this mission was ultimately unsuccessful in the Middle East. The universities adapted, secularized with missions of education, development and bridge-building and attracted new private and public support in the West for this mission. This development reflects the secularization of Western society, the discovery of educational soft power policy by the USA (which had been conducted for a long time by France, see The Universities and the US and French State) and the emergence
of the international development agenda. This reverse university soft power also benefitted from the strong American sense of mission in the late 1800s and early 1900s to modernize traditional overseas societies through the transfer for scholarship, science and technology. First missionaries and later philanthropic foundations played key roles in this mission (Ekbladh 2010).

This reverse university soft power has had its limits, which is reflected in refusal of moral, political or financial support. The limitations of reverse university soft power have been particularly clear concerning possession goals of influencing US foreign policy, when AUB has been a voice for Lebanese and Palestinian interests. Here, the university communities were never able to influence US Middle East policy despite academic prominence and addressing US political leaders and influential media. Equally, USJ could not influence unpopular French policy on maintaining control over the Levant, even if the university saw this policy as a threat to itself. Reverse soft power mirrors soft power in its limitations concerning policy-specific possession goals.

The reverse university soft power concerning the milieu goal of raising support from the Western societies of origin and informing these societies about the Middle East has been much greater, but also not without limitations. The financial histories of the universities show their often precarious financial situation and their continuous struggles to raise sufficient funds to survive and develop (Khalaf 1977, Murphy 1987). The ability of these universities to educate and inform American and French society about the Middle East has largely been limited to
academic, business and government elites already concerned with the Middle East and with little reach to the broad populace.

The reverse university soft power is illustrated by, how Lebanon and the Middle East have attained elite connections to the USA and France. Lebanon has also obtained alternative, quality university systems and hospitals heavily subsidized by the Western societies of origin and more recently by Gulf societies. The universities have built long-lasting, prominent bridges and networks between the American and French societies of origin and Lebanon and the wider Middle East through their Board of Trustees or Strategic Council, sponsors, and alumni organizations. In competitive marketplaces for attention, these universities have mobilized resourceful and wealthy individuals, which illustrate reverse university soft power. In particular from the Board of Trustees and the US and French governments, and more recently from Gulf societies, they have raised large sums of money for research, higher education, healthcare and development in Lebanon and the Middle East.

To understand reverse university soft power, it is also important to notice that information travels in both directions between society of origin and host society through these universities and not only from the society of origin. The universities in Beirut became part of an international invisible college (Crane 1971, Price, Derek J. de Solla 1963). They have developed academic reputations that attract scholars and students from the societies of origin and elsewhere on a significant scale studying and learning about the host societies. They have also placed graduates and faculty at prominent Western universities and in Western labor markets. Bibliographies of the faculties at AUB (American University of Beirut 1967) and the USJ
(Université Saint-Joseph 1951) together with long-running journals and university presses make it clear that these institutions have produced and disseminated large amounts of knowledge about Lebanon and the Middle East for the wider world. This knowledge has been certified by these American- and French-standard universities and in Western languages.

**AUB: From Proselytizer to Spokes-Institution for the Middle East**

The founding of SPC/AUB in 1866 illustrated the reverse soft power of overseas missionary universities. Even before it was founded, SPC/AUB was successful in raising awareness and large amounts of money in the USA and Britain for its activities in its Levantine host society. This reverse university soft power was based on Protestant missionary aims shared by the early supporters in the USA and Britain. Between 1862 and 1864, Bliss travelled 16,993 miles in the US, addressed 279 meetings and raised 100,000 USD. A New York-based Board of Trustees was formed, which has throughout history included prominent and wealthy individuals and donated and raised large sums of money. In addition, Bliss raised 4,000 GBP in Britain. In the 1870s and 1880s, the Board of Trustees raised funding for buying the land and for building the campus and, around WWI, hospital facilities. In the interwar years, the campus doubled and endowment grew six-fold based on American fundraising (Dodge 1958, American University of Beirut 2005, Bliss, Coon & Bliss 1989, Munro 1977, Penrose 1970, Makdisi 2008, Hanna 1979, Burns 1965).

With the secularization of AUB in the early 1900s, its reverse university soft power changed and the university managed to attract support from philanthropies and business for education, research and development. In the late 1920s, the Rockefeller Foundation generously supported
and advised especially the medical school, and AUB together with the Near East Foundation developed large rural development programs. After Lebanese independence, Rockefeller and Ford Foundations continued to be generous donors joined by American and British industry as well as oil companies (Dodge 1958, Munro 1977, Penrose 1970, Khalaf 1977, Murphy 1987). This philanthropic support for science-based development and modernization clearly reflected, what David Ekbladh has termed, ‘the great American mission’ to modernize developing societies through the transfer of scholarship, science and technology (Ekbladh 2010).

AUB held and holds reverse university soft power with leading American academia, which is reflected in its ability to recruit faculty and administrators from prominent American universities and place graduate students and faculty there. This reverse university soft power has contributed to American research and teaching interest in the Middle East. This contribution is illustrated, for instance, by Lebanese-born Philip Khuri Hitti (1886-1978), who was educated at SPC/AUB, where he taught before and after a PhD from Columbia University. In 1926, Hitti received a chair at Princeton University where he created a department of Near Eastern studies and became a driving force in the creation of Arabic studies in the USA (Starkey 1971). The attractiveness of AUB (reverse university soft power) to American academia is also clear from its ability to recruit prominent professors from the University of California, Los Angeles (Malcolm Kerr), Princeton (John Waterbury) and the University of Chicago (Peter Dorman) and other highly qualified individuals as presidents (Interviews 2008-2010, American University of Beirut 2009).
In the post-WWII years, AUB was a pro-Arab/Palestinian voice, where America was increasingly pro-Israeli and anti-Arab. AUB had to balance carefully to maintain both local acceptance and continued US public and private support. The attraction of AUB waned in the USA before the civil war because of widely reported anti-American student disturbances and affiliations with Palestinian militant organizations fighting Israel. The university lost much attention and recognition in the USA during the civil war, which it is working to recover (Munro 1977, Interviews 2008-2010, Hanna 1979, Khalaf 1977). Today, the university attracts US public and private funding, along with Lebanese funding and private support from the wider Middle East based on its long time academic standing. It has recently raised a record sum in excess of 170 million USD. Lebanon and the Gulf have greatly increased their share in the support, accounting now for over half of fundraising, which shows the regional university soft power of AUB (Interviews 2008-2010).

USJ: Jesuit Reverse University Soft Power even in Republican France

From the outset, the Jesuit founders of USJ held substantial reverse university soft power with state and non-state actors in the West and raised large scale funding from the outside. To fund their future university, the Jesuits received papal permission in the early 1870s to collect among Catholics in Britain and the USA which raised 300,000 French Francs (FF) (Bashshur 1964, UNESCO Assemblée générale au Liban 1948, Eddé 2000).

The reverse university soft power of the USJ was also clear in raising attention and informing the West about the Middle East through scholarship. In 1902, the Oriental Faculty started teaching the growing number of foreigners attracted to Beirut to study Arab history, languages
and literature. The university has published the journals *Al-Machriq* since 1893 and *Les Mélanges de la Faculté orientale* since 1906. In 1925, USJ’s *Bibliothèque orientale* was exchanging *Al-Machriq* with 59 outside journals and *Les Mélanges* with 94, which indicated the spread of these journals (UNESCO Assemblée générale au Liban 1948, Eddé 2000, Levenq s.j. 1925).

USJ was also able to mobilize influential and resourceful actors in its society of origin, France, illustrating reverse university soft power. In 1910, the idea of a university hospital was born, and the medical dean toured French parliamentarians, banks, big business and important individuals in 1911-1912 sponsored by the *Comité de l’Asie française* to raise interest. French commercial, political and linguistic interests all went hand in hand and were supported by the national soft power policy of Catholic, French-speaking higher education. In May 1911, a national collection was organized by the committee, the newspaper *Le Temps* and the French press association, which had raised 673.000 FF by 1914. The hospital grounds were acquired in 1912 with French public funds, and the hospital opened in 1923 after WWI (UNESCO Assemblée générale au Liban 1948, Eddé 2000).

Convergence of interests among the Jesuit mission and public and private interests in France led in 1912 to an agreement between the University of Lyon, Lyon business interests in Lebanese silk and the Jesuits to jointly fund and manage schools of law and engineering. This agreement was similar to the French government sponsorship of the medical school from 1883. However, this time the French partners had serious reservations working with the Jesuits,
which threatened the project and demonstrated the limits of Jesuit reverse university soft power in Republican France (UNESCO Assemblée générale au Liban 1948, Eddé 2000).

**The Universities and the US and French State**

The universities held and hold significant reverse university soft power vis-à-vis the US and French government and have attracted significant financial and academic support. At the same time, the USA and France have supported these universities for development and national soft power in the Middle East. University soft power has contributed to US and French national soft power in the Middle East, not the other way around. US and French foreign policy has been detrimental to university soft power. University soft power is distinct from US and French national soft power, a contribution to US and French national soft power and not an extension of the latter. It is not a case of the US or French state ‘exercising’ soft power through the universities as discussed in *Introduction: Soft Power of Transnational Actors*.

To understand reverse university soft power with the US and French state, it is important to remember, that the USA and France could have used their resources differently to pursue development and soft power goals, and strong bureaucratic voices have suggested so. The competition for such state funds and the lobbying efforts expended by the universities highlight their reverse university soft power.

Reverse university soft power vis-à-vis the US and French government and US and French pursuit of national soft power through these universities are intertwined and not contradictory (see Scott-Smith 2005 for example of complementary US and European public diplomacy policies). The USA and France have sought and continue to seek access to and socialization of
future leaders (national soft power). The universities can supply that socialization based on their academic quality, which is the basis of their reverse university soft power vis-à-vis the USA and France. If the universities did not have that educational quality and, thus, socialized future leaders, they would not receive this government support.

Too close relations with the US and French governments have threatened university soft power when those governments pursued policies rejected by the Middle East host society. French Levant policy under the mandate and WWII was a liability for USJ, which defended it independence with clear reference to safeguarding its university soft power. US Middle East policy and especially support for Israel has been a huge liability for AUB and has threatened to taint the large-scale US financial support. Student political activism at AUB clearly shows how the educational mission of the university was embraced *despite* US foreign policy.

The French policy of support for USJ since the 1880s reflects a long tradition of using both religious and *laïque* French-language education at all levels as a foreign policy tool to promote French language and orientation toward France. The US support for AUB from the 1950s reflects a much more recent public diplomacy policy. The different historical starting points of US and French university soft power policy in the Middle East reflects that France has been a major power with global reach and interests for centuries pursuing soft power through education. USA has been faced with such considerations much later and especially after WWII. It also reflects the difference between historically public higher education in France and historically private higher education in the USA with later federal involvement.
AUB: Late Discovery of the University as a Soft Power and Development Agent by the US Government

AUB pursued US financial support at its founding, when Bliss met President Abraham Lincoln, who only offered moral support (Bliss, Coon & Bliss 1989, Burns 1965). Unlike the French government, it would take almost a century before the US government would support American universities in the Middle East for development and national soft power reasons. However, the US government sought SPC/AUB’s advice, when in January 1919, SPC/AUB President Howard Bliss was summoned to the Paris peace conference to advice on the Levant. Here, he urged holding plebiscites in Lebanon and Syria on mandate rule, which was an example of advocacy on behalf of the host society (reverse university soft power) (Dodge 1958, Penrose 1970).

WWII caused financial crisis for AUB as WWI had, but this time the US government supported the AUB for the first time through the Division of Cultural Relations of the Department of State (directed by a former AUC professor, William A. Eddy) (Dodge 1958, Penrose 1970, Murphy 1987). In the 1950s and 1960s, AUB was highly successful in attracting US government support. AUB was in a unique position to further American development and national soft power aims as a prestigious American university with regional reach. This government support became AUB’s largest source of income. This income together with unpopular US Middle East policies was a great political liability for student acceptance as was clear from the intense student political protests. However, as mentioned, students distinguished between unacceptable US Middle East policy and the quality of AUB education and intellectual freedom which they embraced (Munro 1977, Hanna 1979, Khalaf 1977, )
Faced with the acute financial crisis during the civil war, AUB again demonstrated reverse university soft power toward the US government in securing extensive financial support. The US government and Congress perceived existential risk to AUB and increased support especially after the mid-1980s, which accounted for a third of the AUB budget. For the US Government and Congress, the work of the American Medical Center was an important humanitarian mission for Lebanese perceptions of the US. More broadly, there was acknowledgement of the contribution of American education to the region and to the socialization of future leaders. AUB represented the best American values, had a long and respected history in the region, and was perceived by Arabs as their own institution. AUB and its contribution to US national soft power could not be recreated, if it was lost (Interviews 2008-2010, Hanna 1979).

AUB lobby the US Congress intensely for financial support and appropriations. The university is successful in getting Congress to direct the Administration to specifically support it. This policy is despite the desire of agencies for the flexibility to support indigenous Lebanese universities for development reasons. The support in Congress is based on that AUB are perceived to promote American values in the Middle East, to form alumni who are understanding of and knowledgeable about and connected to the USA. AUB both create a positive image of the USA and builds relationships between the Middle East and the USA (Interviews 2008-2010).

*USJ: “The Republic Educates, the Jesuits Adminstrate”*

A stark contrast between AUB and USJ was in the close relationship between the Jesuits and the French Republic. The desire of France to use French-language Catholic education abroad as a soft power tool was clear and contrasted with the absence of early US government relations
with SPC or AUC. Since 1835, French consuls in Beirut had complained about the presence and influence of Anglo-Saxon Protestant missionaries and education and asked the Jesuits to expand their educational activities. In 1846, the Jesuit mission in Lebanon was attached to Lyon Province of the Jesuit Order in France, making the recruitment and language of the mission essentially French and thus ensuring French government support (UNESCO Assemblée générale au Liban 1948, Eddé 2000).

In 1883, only eight years after founding the university, the Jesuits and the French Republic started a very close collaboration, despite their strong ideological differences. The French Medical School at USJ was inaugurated based on a 150,000 FF government grant as well as agreement on regular subsidies, recruitment of professors, validation of degrees etc. Exams were judged by professors sent from Paris, and the diplomas issued by the French state, illustrated by the saying that “the Republic educates and the Jesuits administrate” (UNESCO Assemblée générale au Liban 1948, Eddé 2000).

The French mandate authorities regarded the USJ as the national university, referring to it as the ‘French university’, and did not seek to establish new institutions unlike in Syria. The French government strategy of pursuing national soft power through the USJ was clear from the relations between the university, the local French mandate authorities and the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The French High Commission in Lebanon tried to maximize control over ‘their’ ‘French University’. The Jesuits opposed these attempts, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Paris on several occasions called the mandate authorities to order. The ministry was clear about the greater contribution to French national soft power from an independent
university and the importance of this university for France securing the Mandate in the first place (Eddé 2000). This policy reflected understanding by the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs of independence as a basis of university soft power and its contribution to national soft power, which is also the conclusion of this paper.

The struggle of USJ with French authorities would repeat itself in 1941-1946. Free French authorities sought to ensure the ‘Frenchness’ of higher education in Lebanon and to assert control over USJ. The university was aware that its soft power was distinct from that of France (in the same way that AUB university soft power later was distinct from US foreign policy). So the USJ leadership pointed out the French interest in maintaining USJ’s independence in the light of the great uncertainties ahead for French control and influence in the Levant. For these reasons, after WWII, USJ emphasized its private and Lebanese character while maintaining very close ties to France and French universities (UNESCO Assemblée générale au Liban 1948, Eddé 2000).

After Lebanese independence, the French government and French universities continued to support USJ generously both financially and academically. The faculties of USJ were mainly branches of the University of Lyon and academic leadership was supplied by faculty committees from Paris (medicine) or Lyon (other faculties). During the civil war, USJ took over the faculties as its own and started issuing its own degrees recognized in Lebanon and France rather than French public degrees (Bashshur 1964, UNESCO Assemblée générale au Liban 1948, Eddé 2000).

USJ continues to attract French development assistance and other public funding for its activities often connecting the Middle East and the wider French-speaking world. France funds
French professors visiting USJ and further training in France for USJ faculty members. This support is based on a high French awareness of the importance of USJ for promoting French language and elite-level ties to France. In the words of interviewees, USJ is the institutional ‘flagship’ of the Lebanese francophonie (Interviews 2008-2010).

*University Soft Power and National Soft Power*

The two universities in this study show how successful transnational actors can contribute to the national soft power of their country of origin, here the USA and France. (They also contribute to the national soft power of their host countries, but that is outside the scope of this paper.) The universities contribute to milieu goals of attraction to norms, skills and knowledge beneficial to the USA and France. These universities have contributed to the educational attractiveness of the USA and France, and they have socialized and educated local and regional elites according to American and French educational norms and traditions. They have ensured English and French language professional proficiency among elites and understanding of American and French society as well as elite connections with American and French societies. This contribution to national soft power is enhanced by arms-length government support, but it is not dependent on this support if there is sufficient private support.

It is also important to be clear about the limitations to the national soft power contributions of these universities. These private foreign-affiliated universities have not contributed to creating acceptance for unpopular foreign policies in their host societies, which has also not been the aim of the universities or the states and is judged unrealistic. AUB has not created Middle
Eastern acceptance of US Middle East policy, which has continued to be a liability for the university. Equally, USJ did not create support for continuation of the French mandate over Lebanon, a rule which the university distanced itself from.

AUB became academically perhaps the most prominent university in the Middle East. It held university soft power even among the strongest opponents of US Middle East policy, Palestinians, based on its educational quality and its successful merger of American and Arab culture and identity. It is clear that AUB contributed significantly to the attractiveness of American education in particular and American society in general and, therefore, to US national soft power. The university has educated elites who become fluent in English, knowledgeable about American society and steeped in American educational philosophy and tradition. The extent and limitations of the contribution of AUB to US national soft power was particularly clear from the student activism in the post-WWII years. Students, including many Palestinian militants, sought and embraced AUB education and liberal norms as individualism, secularity, democracy, critical thinking and gender equality, while strongly opposing US Middle East policy.

USJ as a distinctively French-style and French-language university is the biggest private university in Lebanon today, which demonstrates the attractiveness or soft power of French education and language. The university plays a central role in maintaining the attractiveness of the French language in Lebanon and ensuring high levels of professional proficiency in that language among the elite as well as elite networks with France and other French-speaking societies. These results are in line with national soft power goals of France, and it is therefore clear that USJ contributes in important ways to the attainment of these goals.
This attractiveness has historically been limited to Lebanese Maronites by the Catholic and French-language identity of the university with less attractiveness for Muslims and non-Lebanese in the English-speaking Eastern Mediterranean. It is more recently being broadened by the ambition of the university to be a pole of academic excellence and contribute to national Lebanese integration.

**Conclusion**

Nye and other authors have pointed out how the soft power of nations available to their governments is to a large extent produced by non-state actors beyond the control of the state. However, literature on soft power has not sufficiently analyzed the soft power of non-state actors and how it interacts with the state and contributes to national soft power. This paper addresses these questions through a structured, focused comparison of AUB and USJ. The two universities are crucial cases for transnational actor soft power and contributions to national soft power: they are leading universities in the Middle East of distinctively American and French origin and have received support from the US government (since the 1950s) and French government (since the 1880s).

The comparison shows the extent and limitations of the university soft power with the Middle Eastern students and host states. This soft power and its basis have been remarkably stable throughout the existence of the universities. Students and their families have been attracted to quality education and language skills for better life opportunities. Students and society have embraced the universities for their intellectual freedom, as mutually respectful meeting places of Arab and Western culture and for their important contributions to healthcare, development
and state-building. Host states have tolerated the universities because of their contributions as elite bridges to the USA and France and to human resources, healthcare, development and state-building.

It is equally clear how the original missions of religious proselytizing severely limited the attractiveness or soft power of the universities in their host societies. Students and their families rejected conversion to American Protestantism. USJ with its Catholic and French-speaking identity became limited to its Maronite constituency. Unpopular US and French Middle East policies have also been great liabilities for the universities, whether support for Israel or seeking continued mandate rule over the Levant.

A surprising finding in this paper is the unintended reverse university soft power in the Western societies of origin on behalf of their Middle Eastern host societies as opposed to the originally intended university soft power in the Middle East. University faculty and leadership have defended Middle East positions and interests against especially US policy. The universities have attracted important moral, political and financial support for education, healthcare and development in the Middle East from private and public American supporters and the French state. This reverse soft power was originally based on their proselytizing mission and later on their secular missions of education, development and intercultural bridge-building.

University relations with the US and French state have both significantly contributed to university soft power and threatened this university soft power. US and French financial support has contributed significantly to the academic quality, and healthcare and development efforts of the universities at the basis of university soft power. Too close an association with the
US and French states and unpopular Middle East policies have tainted government support for the universities and threatened university soft power.

The USA and France have supported these universities for development and national soft power reasons. Reverse university soft power vis-à-vis the US and French government and US and French national soft power use of these universities are intertwined and not contradictory. The USA and France seek access to and socialization of future leaders (national soft power). The universities can offer this access based on their academic quality, which is the basis of their reverse university soft power vis-à-vis the US and French government.

It is clear that the two universities contribute to the national soft power of their countries of origin concerning milieu goals of norms, skills and knowledge. The universities have attracted Lebanese and wider Middle Eastern elites to liberal norms of American and French education, such as, individualism, critical thinking, gender equality and personal and political freedoms. They have equipped these elites with English or French proficiency as well as familiarity and connections with American or French society. The limits to the university contribution to national soft power are also clear: the universities did not create support for unpopular US or French foreign policy, which was also never a goal for the universities. University soft power has been despite unpopular policies such as French mandate rule over the Levant or later US support for Israel.

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