

CANADA'S INFORMATION EDGE

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Introduction

A year ago, Canada's tallest structure became a mere signpost for the American domination of information. A giant banner advertising Microsoft Corporation's *Windows 95* hung from Toronto's CN Tower.

The Cold War is over — the New War is underway. It is not a Cyber War, because it is not about technology and wires and chips. It is about information and cultural conquest. It is about values, monetary systems, theories of governance and education. It is about "Presidential" styles of government, about smart bombs, and televised legal systems. It is about hamburgers and running shoes. It is about standards of ethics and standards of living. Above all, it is about expectations and dreams. At stake is the protection of ideas.

In such a war, you can try and construct your own information shelter. You can erect walls, and rules to keep the invading forces out. Canada tried that and, for a while, it worked. But now the "attacks" are from all directions: from the skies, from the movie theatres, and they creep into your homes through your televisions, radios and computers... even through the Olympics where *Nike* banners told competitors "You don't win a silver, you lose the gold." Whether you're Canadian, Chinese, Cuban or American, you are being steered toward a value, an agenda.

It's called "soft power."¹ Hard power was, obviously, the military might of missiles, navies, tanks, and bombs. Soft power deals with knowledge and ideas and the technologies that can transmit them further, faster, and with greater effect. Although Canada was not one of the superpowers during the Cold War, it has the potential to play a major role in this new test of strength.

It has to. In the coming decade — starting now — make no mistake about it, that is what will give us a seat at the table. That is what will give us our ticket to the Group of Seven (G7) equivalent of the Information Age.

There are two major challenges facing Canada if it wants to be a major player in the New War, and they are closely tied together. First, we must decide how to position and promote our values — the values that push us to be who we are and to do what we do. Second, when we enter the ring we must be confident of who we are and the values we want to defend. The first challenge is the subject of this arti-

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1. Joseph Nye defines "soft power" as "convincing others to follow, or getting them to agree to norms and institutions that produce the desired behavior. Soft power can rest on the appeal of one's ideas or the ability to set the agenda in ways that shape the preference of others." See Joseph S. Nye and William A. Owens, "America's Information Edge," *Foreign Affairs*, (March/April 1996), 21.