

“Soft power” concept

Introduction

One of the main notions in international relations since the earliest political writings of Thucydides and Machiavelli has been power and it remains perhaps among the most important and least understood concepts in political theory¹. According to Robert A.Dahl, power is the ability for one actor to influence the actions of another actor that would not have occurred otherwise². In other words, power is the ability to effect the outcomes you want, and if necessary, to change the behavior of others to make this happen. The ability to gain the results one wants is usually associated with the scope of different resources such as territory, population, natural resources, military force, strength of economy, political stability³. During the years various types of power have been examined, however the realist point of view on this concept prevailed. The school of realism considers power in terms of military and economic force (or “hard power”), therefore, the only test of “great power” could be “strength for war”⁴. While realists have traditionally looked at the nation’s ability to influence as well as at the function of the tangible and coercive sources of power (threat and force), Joseph S. Nye Jr. has elaborated the concept of the influence that derives from intangible sources, like culture, basic principles and values, public diplomacy defined by him as “soft power”⁵.

“Soft power” was first coined by Nye in 1990 in his book “Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power”⁶, and since that time the significance of this concept has risen dramatically, as well as the interest in it of many scholars,

¹ Nye, Joseph S. Jr. 2002. *The paradox of American Power: why the world’s only superpower can’t go it alone*. Oxford University Press, Inc., p.2

² Dahl, Robert A., *The Concept of Power*. / Behavioral Science, 2:3, July, 1957, p.201

³ Nye, Joseph S. Jr. 2002. *The paradox of American Power: why the world’s only superpower can’t go it alone*. Oxford University Press, Inc., p.4

⁴ Taylor A.J. 1971. *The struggle for Mastery in Europe, 1848-1918*. Oxford Paperbacks, p.547

⁵ Nye, Joseph S. Jr. 1991. *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power*. NY: Basic Books, p.330

⁶ Ibid

for example, M.Fraser⁷, J.Melissen⁸, J.Kurlantzick⁹, J.Kynge¹⁰. However, it was not a brand new means of impact, nor was the US government first to try to utilize its culture¹¹.

Though, as Nye claims, “soft power” is an important reality today¹², implementation of its tools does not guarantee absolute success and incredible power or authority as other states can render cultural resistance and unacceptance of imposed norms, values and institutions. In other words, it is not a comprehensive one-fits-all solution as there are limitations to its application and effectiveness.

⁷ Fraser M. 2005. *Weapons of mass distraction: soft power and American empire*. NY: THOMAS DUNNE BOOKS, p.288

⁸ *The New Public Diplomacy: Soft Power in International Relations / Studies in diplomacy and international relations*. edited by Jan Melissen. 2007. NY:PALGRAVE MACMILLAN, p.221

⁹ Kurlantzick J. 2007. *Charm Offensive: How China's Soft Power Is Transforming the World*. New Haven & London: Yale University Press, p.306

¹⁰ Kynge J. 2007. *China shakes the world: a titan's rise and troubled future – and the challenge for America*. NY: Mariner Books, p.288

¹¹ Nye, Joseph S. Jr. 2002. *The paradox of American Power: why the world's only superpower can't go it alone*. Oxford University Press, Inc., p.69

¹² Nye, Joseph S. Jr. 1991. *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power*”, NY: Basic Books, p.25

The concept of “soft power” and its components

Joseph Nye was the first to talk about fragility and short life of the results reached by “rigid methods”, and about acute need to change the ways of the US foreign policy implementation. According to his views, for many decades the USA have pursued their policy from a position of “hard power” when the economic and military potential are used. The book “Confessions of an economic hit man” by J.Perkins is an impressive illustration of this thesis¹³. It is hard to say how the situations described in this book correspond to the facts, but it is quite possible that violence and coercion were nevertheless used by the American authorities in order to shift “unfriendly” regimes in the Middle East and Latin America. Till a certain moment the US foreign policy department could achieve prescribed purposes at the international arena, but the fragility of the outcomes complicated performance of the tasks. Considering the changed situation in the world, Nye suggested to take into account resources of “soft power” which could be more efficient in new conditions¹⁴.

According to Nye, soft power is an indirect way to exercise power as a state can obtain the results it wants because other countries’ willing to follow it and borrow its experiences and techniques; they emulate its example, admire its values and traditions, seek to achieve its level of development and prosperity¹⁵. An ability to co-opt people, to achieve political ends through attraction rather than coercion or payment was defined by Nye as “soft power”. While “hard power” rests on threats (sticks) and inducements (carrots), “soft power” relies on the ability to shape the agenda in world politics, based on one’s principles and ideas. Using “soft” instruments, it is possible to solve problems regarding which resources of “hard power” are powerless. Moreover, results of violent intervention are always short-

¹³ Perkins, John. 2005. *Confessions of an Economic Hit Man*. Plume, p.303

¹⁴ Nye, Joseph S. Jr. 1991. *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power*. NY: Basic Books, p.23

¹⁵ Nye, Joseph S. Jr. 2002. *The paradox of American Power: why the world’s only superpower can’t go it alone*. Oxford University Press, Inc., pp.8-11

lived, therefore it is necessary to spend large sums on their retention or repeated achievement¹⁶. Describing this situation, J. Nye represents world politics as “a chess game conducted at three levels while the player can win only in case he moves not only horizontally, but also vertically”¹⁷. In other words, traditional international relations with the states as main actors are constructed in the horizontal plane, while world politics focuses on vertical interactions between multinational corporations, non-governmental organizations and other actors. Thus, the three levels mentioned above represent the relations in military, economic and transnational spheres. For the efficient implementation of different actions and policies at the first two levels it is enough to possess military or economic power, however, in order to solve problems concerning active involvement in the world politics of new actors, “soft power” is required.

“Soft power” arises from the attractiveness of a country’s culture, political ideals, and policies. When the implemented policies are seen as legitimate in the eyes of others, the “soft power” is enhanced¹⁸. Thereby, the main sources of “soft power” are culture, political institutions and values expressed in the policies that state follows within its boundaries and in the way it handles itself internationally.

Giulio M. Gallarotti, Professor of Government at Wesleyan University, USA, marks out two general sources of “soft power”: international sources that are foreign policies and actions and domestic sources (domestic policies and actions), with multiple sub-sources within each¹⁹. All of them promote a positive image of the state that attracts other nations, and consequently, the influence of such state in the world politics increases. As to the international sources, they include a fundamental reliance on international law, norms, and institutions; respect for

¹⁶ Bohorquez, Tysha, *Soft Power -The Means to Success in World Politics*. / UCLA International Institute. Mode of access: <http://www.international.ucla.edu/>

¹⁷ Nye, Joseph S. Jr. 2005. *Soft Power: The means to success in world politics*. Public Affairs, p.72

¹⁸ Rothman, Steven B., *Revising the soft power concept: what are the means and mechanisms of soft power?*. / *Journal of Political Power*, 4:1, March, 2011, p.50

¹⁹ Gallarotti, Giulio M., *Soft Power: What it is, why it’s important, and the conditions under which it can be effectively used*. / Division II Faculty Publications, Paper 57, 2011, pp.20-25. Mode of access: <http://wescholar.wesleyan.edu/div2facpubs/57>

alliance commitments and treaties; disposition against excessive unilateralism; willingness to sacrifice short-run particularistic interests so as to contribute toward substantive collaborative schemes that address acute multilateral issues; adherence to the liberal economic policy.

Among domestic sources of “soft power” Gallarotti discerns the power inherent in culture and in political institutions. With respect to the cultural aspects, “soft power” is formed by social cohesion, freedom, an elevated quality of life, sufficient opportunities for individuals, tolerance, and the alluring characteristics of a lifestyle that can enhance the image and perceived legitimacy of the state, and that in turn can help further its foreign policy objectives²⁰. As regards political institutions, they must adhere to the principles of democracy, constitutionalism, pluralism and liberalism, while the government bureaucracy must be well-functioning²¹.

Alexander L. Vuving, a member of American Political Science Association, highlights in his work “How the soft power works?”²² three generic power currencies from which both power and its “softness” are evoked, and he calls them “beauty, brilliance, and benignity”. *Beauty* is an aspect of state’s relations with ideals, values and visions; it generates “soft power” through the production of inspiration, sense of security, identity and community, hope and self-extension, support and praise. As a result, credibility, legitimacy and moral authority of the state increase. *Beauty* is the pivotal power currency that makes charismatic leaders (not only individuals but states as well). For instance, in the 20th century the United States of America, the Soviet Union, and the People’s Republic of China were considered the most charismatic countries; as for the individuals, Fidel Castro

²⁰ Nye, Joseph S. Jr. 2002. *The paradox of American Power: why the world’s only superpower can’t go it alone*. Oxford University Press, Inc., pp.113-115

²¹ Gallarotti, Giulio M., *Soft Power: What it is, why it’s important, and the conditions under which it can be effectively used*. / Division II Faculty Publications, Paper 57, 2011, pp.20-25. Mode of access: <http://wescholar.wesleyan.edu/div2facpubs/57>

²² Vuving, Alexander L., *How the soft power works?*. / Paper presented at the panel “Soft Power and Smart Power,” American Political Science Association annual meeting, September, 2009, pp.8-12. Mode of access: <http://www.apcss.org/Publications/Vuving%20How%20soft%20power%20works%20APSA%202009.pdf>

and Hugo Chavez can be mentioned. *Brilliance* is an aspect of the state's relations with its work and it results from the tendency of human beings to learn from the successes of others. In other words, its mechanism bases on the admiration and desire of other countries to adopt part or whole of the successful state's practices, policies, institutions, ideology, values, or vision. *Brilliance* can manifest itself in various forms, for example, strong military force, sound and vibrant economy, rich culture, peaceful and well-run society, advanced science and technology. The admiration generated by *brilliance* can lead to imitation, or emulation, respect, reverence, and even fear. *Benignity* is an aspect of the state's relations with others, especially with the client of "soft power", which is based on the mechanism of reciprocal altruism. It refers to the positive attitudes that a country expresses when treating people, it produces gratitude and sympathy, as well as reassures others of the state's peaceful or benevolent intentions, and consequently, invites to cooperate. *Benignity* includes a wide spectrum of behaviors, ranging from doing no harm to others to actively protecting and supporting them.

Thus, while "hard power" is associated with reliance on tangible power resources (or physical coercion), on the ability to affect the behavior of others by changing their circumstances, "soft power" is the ability to affect the behavior of others by influencing their preferences through a variety of policies, actions and qualities that endear nations to other nations²³. The resources of "hard power" are more easily quantified, and the outcomes can be seen in a short period of time, whereas "soft power" is difficult to measure and its influence becomes apparent long after. However, the concepts of "hard" and "soft power" are related and can reinforce each other. Though a lot of examples concerning the usage of only one source of power can be cited, like Hitler's reliance on military forces, or an incredible attractiveness of Scandinavian countries and Switzerland due to their social systems and peacekeeping with modest political and economic weigh, nowadays countries have to implement both these concepts at the same time so as

²³ Rothman, Steven B., *Revising the soft power concept: what are the means and mechanisms of soft power?*. / *Journal of Political Power*, 4:1, March, 2011, pp.49-52

to remain strong, competitive and powerful. And in terms of these facts Joseph Nye argues that no country is more endowed than the USA in military, economic and “soft” power²⁴.

Indeed, taking into consideration the American strength and the fact that the main tools of “soft power” are presented by mass media, film industry, Internet, cultural events, mode of life, exchange programs, education, music, literature, sport, fast food, national languages and public diplomacy, the United States have incredible potential and advantage over other countries. Nevertheless, it is not the only state to exercise direct and indirect influence through means of “soft power”.

Among the main instruments of “soft power” can be mentioned such sources as film industry and television, public diplomacy, fast food. The analysis of their influence and utilization by different states is presented below.

Film industry and television. Film industry presents a considerable part of “soft power” of such states, as the USA (Hollywood), India (Bollywood) and France. France is acknowledged to be a cradle of the cinema; India has been the present giant of the world film industry since the establishment of Bollywood in 1899. Only 11 years later, in America, the district of Los Angeles named Hollywood, sprang up, and afterwards the largest movie companies from all over the world were united there. If we compare the number of films that are released every year in Bollywood and in Hollywood, the Indian giant turns out to be the absolute leader with more than 800 films per year²⁵, while America occupies the second place with 500-600 movies per year²⁶. Although Bollywood films exert insignificant influence on foreign audiences since they spread mostly on developing countries of the Middle East, Southern and South-East Asia, great powers like China witness how “Bollywood scales its Great Wall”²⁷.

²⁴ Nye, Joseph S. Jr. 2002. *The paradox of American Power: why the world's only superpower can't go it alone*. Oxford University Press, Inc., pp.9-12

²⁵ *India's Movie Industry Known as Bollywood*. Mode of access:

<http://geography.about.com/od/culturalgeography/a/bollywood.htm>

²⁶ *Hollywood International: the Film Industry by the Numbers*. Mode of access:

<http://musicmovielist.com/movies/hollywood-international-the-film-industry-by-the-numbers>

²⁷ Kaushik, Narendra, *Bollywood Scales the Great Wall of China*. Mode of access:

<http://www.tribuneindia.com/2012/20121125/spectrum/main1.htm>

It is necessary to note that films were often shot for promotion of some ideas or propaganda, especially during the Cold War²⁸. For instance, during the Second World War Hollywood released pro-Soviet films like “Mission to Moscow” (1943) in order to bring rapprochement with the Soviet Union against Nazi Germany, whereas with the beginning of the Cold War films tended to have completely opposite context. Thereby, it was an attempt to rally the countries of the Western bloc around America so as to confront the USSR which was presented in these films from a negative side. Nowadays the USA export their film production to almost all countries in the world, and consequently, they promote values of American culture, ideas of freedom and democracy, American lifestyle which many people admire.

As to the television, it is not only universal way of translating of country’s language, culture and traditions, but also a means of propaganda and pressure on people. Thomas de Zengotita, professor of the Colombian University describes the television’s impact on everyday life of a person in the following way: “You are completely free to choose because it doesn’t matter what you choose. That’s why you are so free. Because it doesn’t matter.”²⁹. Thus, the television sets standards of behavior, a frame within which it is possible to choose, and therefore, even choosing, a person starts to act according to certain samples.

Public diplomacy. For the first time coined in the mid-1960s by the former U.S. diplomat Edmund Gullion, public diplomacy was developed partly to distance overseas governmental information activities from the term “propaganda”³⁰. According to Gullion, it is a discipline that “deals with the influence of public attitudes on the formation and execution of foreign policies ... encompasses dimensions of foreign relations beyond traditional diplomacy; the cultivation by governments of public opinion in other countries; the interaction of private groups

²⁸ Fraser, M. 2005. *Weapons of mass distraction: soft power and American empire*. NY: THOMAS DUNNE BOOKS, p.61

²⁹ Zengotita, T. 2005. *Mediated: how the media shapes your world and the way you live in it*. NY: BLOOMSBURY, p.17

³⁰ *What is public diplomacy?*. / USC Center on Public Diplomacy at the Annenberg School. Mode of access: http://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/index.php/about/what_is_pd/

and interests in one country with those of another; the reporting of foreign affairs and its impact on policy; communication between those whose job is communication, as between diplomats and foreign correspondents; and the processes of inter-cultural communications. Central to public diplomacy is the transformational flow of information and ideas”³¹. In 1990 Hans Tuch defined public diplomacy as a government’s process of communication with foreign publics in an attempt to bring about understanding of its nation’s ideas and ideals, its institutions and culture, as well as its national goals and policies³². Since that time the sense of this notion has slightly changed, so now it can be said that public diplomacy is a process by which direct relations with people in a state are pursued to advance the interests and extend the values of those being represented, or it is an activity of state and non-governmental organizations aimed at communication with populations of foreign countries so as to explain cultural features, ideals and pursued policies. What is important is the fact that public diplomacy emerged as the reaction to the appearance of new actors in international relations – NGOs, TNCs, interstate institutions – that were beyond the framework of traditional diplomacy³³.

It is necessary to distinguish public diplomacy from propaganda, creation of state’s image and international cultural relations. According to Melissen, public diplomacy do consider people’s opinion, in other words, it is a two-way exchange³⁴. Furthermore, the main aim of public diplomacy is not self-advertisement. On the contrary, it was elaborated to show and explain national policy or culture to people in other country. As for the cultural relations, they are carried out at the level of NGOs and civil society but not at the level of states.

³¹ Snow, Crocker, *Public diplomacy practitioners: a changing cast of characters*. / *The Journal of Business Strategy*, Vol.27, No.3, 2006, p.19

³² *The New Public Diplomacy: Soft Power in International Relations / Studies in diplomacy and international relations*. edited by Jan Melissen. 2007. NY:PALGRAVE MACMILLAN, p. 11

³³ Langhorne, Richard, *The Diplomacy of Non-State Actors*. / *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, Vol.16, No.2, 2005, p.332

³⁴ *The New Public Diplomacy: Soft Power in International Relations / Studies in diplomacy and international relations*. edited by Jan Melissen. 2007. NY:PALGRAVE MACMILLAN, pp. 12-15

The main ideologist of “soft power” concept, talking about public diplomacy, emphasizes the role of information and control over it³⁵. He highlights three dimensions of public diplomacy:

- everyday coverage of foreign policy actions;
- pointed discussion of the most important political subjects for the USA;
- development of contacts with foreign audience through the system of exchanges and scientific grants.

Fast food. Soon after terrorist attacks on September, 11 the USA led extensive anti-terrorist operation in Afghanistan where the insurgents resisting the American military forces attacked in the first place symbols of US influence - McDonald's and KFC restaurants³⁶. This indicates how closely these brands are closely associated in people's mind with America. Indeed, the majority of companies working in food industry were created in the USA, therefore, there is no doubt in the scale of American influence in this sphere.

The most significant role belongs to such brands, as “Coca-Cola” and “Pepsi” that bring soft drinks to the world markets³⁷. These companies were established at the end of the 19th century and by leaps and bounds they gained popularity not only in the United States, but also in other countries. At the time of Nazi Germany one of its official representatives declared that “America didn't bring any contribution to the world civilization, except chewing gum and Coca-Cola”. That is why the popularity of certain food, as well as the other components of “soft power”, could make a valuable contribution to the promotion of positive state's image.

³⁵ Nye, Joseph S. Jr. 2005. *Soft Power: The means to success in world politics*. Public Affairs, p.112

³⁶ Walt, Stephen M. 2005. *Taming American Power: the global response to U.S. primacy*. NY: W.W.Norton&Company, Inc., p.115

³⁷ Fraser, M. 2005. *Weapons of mass distraction: soft power and American empire*. NY: THOMAS DUNNE BOOKS, p.198

Conclusion

The complex structure of international relations alongside evolving nature of states cooperation make its actors employ various instruments and approaches in order to deal with the new challenges and threats effectively. One of the phenomena that states have been paying attention to for several decades turned out to be the “soft power” concept. Even politically conservative countries like China admitted the importance of “soft” instruments. In 2007 the chairman of the People's Republic of China Hu Jintao used the term coined by J. Nye in his speech to the Communist Party of China³⁸ and stressed the urgency of building China’s cultural “soft power” in order to meet domestic needs and increase international competitiveness. It means that the concept in whole is vital as it can bring significant results, though there are also certain cultural restrictions which affect its efficiency.

Nowadays states spend a huge amount of resources in order to achieve their objectives on the international scene, resorting to various tools of “hard” and “soft power”, despite the fact that they do not always obtain desirable outcomes. All in all, each country independently defines what kind of foreign policy to pursue and how to interact with other actors of world politics, nevertheless, “soft power” has already become an integral part of their political arsenal.

³⁸ Nye, Joseph S. Jr. *The Olympics and Chinese Soft Power*. / The Huffington Post. Mode of access: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/joseph-nye/the-olympics-and-chinese_b_120909.html