



New Dimensions of Soft Power in the 21st Century

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Abstract

Joseph S. Nye, who is considered one of the most influential scholars on the US politics, has attracted a great attention with his concept of "soft power" in the 1980s. Since then, the term of "soft power" has been used by many academics and politicians with different emphasis. Based on the claim that hard power elements are insufficient alone to reach the goals in modern age, the soft power theory needs to be reinterpreted with the addition of new dimensions in the 21st century. Now it is possible to discuss the use of soft power as a necessity, rather than just a preference for influencing different societies by creating admiration. The 21st century has brought up many new problems and practices to the international agenda. Although the pandemic Covid-19 is the most striking among them, the intertwining of regional wars and cooperations, global warming, environmental issues, migrations and terrorism have both changed the traditional ways of establishing relations between states and created global areas of struggle outside the states. Now the international community and the world public opinion have started to determine their admirable preferences based on the extent of support given to global cooperation and solidarity rather than strong armies or good movies. Using a literature review, this paper aims to draw attention to the new dimensions of soft power in the changing image of the 21st century.

Keywords: 21st century, global actors, international community, soft power

1. Introduction

In the post-Cold War era, the globalization process has left its mark on the international system. Meanwhile, this process has no longer limited to the international system and interstate relations, but affected everyone, albeit at different levels. The process has continued at full speed and international relations experts have tried to reflect on the extent to which the process will continue and/or how it will evolve, and to establish theories. However, the pandemic COVID -19 has ushered in a new period as "deglobalization," which is an unexpected new phenomenon to which neither individuals nor states are accustomed. The pandemic period has been followed by the Russian-Ukrainian war. This situation has further highlighted the unstable and multipolar outlook in the post-Cold War international system. In such an environment has increased the need for different and diverse instruments for shaping interstate relations in foreign policy.

The use of traditional power tools in contemporary international politics, in which non-state actors are active as well as states, may not often achieve the desired goal. In this sense, the American political scientist Joseph Nye has

evaluated power on two different grounds. Presenting a new concept in the foreign policy literature at the end of the 1980s, Nye has named this concept "soft power" in the framework of defining the post-Cold War era. The Nye's concept of "soft power" has not only opened a new field of discussion in international relations studies, but also has laid the theoretical foundation of new methods and tools used in the conduct of existing interstate relations.

Meanwhile, the expansion of international political economy and security studies has helped bring Nye's concept of "soft power" to the fore. In addition to traditional security issues, the environment, climate change, natural disasters, pandemics, accidents, hunger, famine and economic sanctions threaten all countries and societies in the world, regardless of their level of development, and this has revealed new dimensions of the use of "soft power".

This paper aims to expose the new dimensions of the soft power as a tool to influence the actions and behaviors of others – both societies and states – in the transforming world. Following the introduction part, the first section of the study tries to explain the evolving nature of international relations in the light of recent developments. The second section focuses on the usage of the soft power by the states in the contemporary international relations, defining the types and attributes of it. The study ends with conclusion part.

2. The Transforming Nature of International Relations

In the second half of the 20th century, two important issues draw attention in the international system. One of them is related to the increase in the number of actors in the international system. The rise in significance of economic interactions between states in the 1960s and 1970s broadened the focus of International Relations beyond military power politics to incorporate economic power issues. It has also eroded the state dominance in international relations.

J.Nye in his book "The Future of Power" made some arguments about the two large power shifts going on in 21st century. The first is a power transition, which is a shift of power among states, which is largely from West to East. The second is a shift of power from states, West or East, to non-state actors (Nye, 2011).

Both the IGOs and NGOs, MNCs have become significant players on the world stage. These developments were making the interactions of politics in the world more complex and varied. With these developments, although the state still remains an important actor in the international system, the existence of non-state actors that have the power to influence the system has also been accepted.

Another important point is that the perception of security began to change during this period. Increased economic activity, international trade, and cooperation have brought with them a number of security threats. As a result, "low" politics issues, such as environmental change, health, migration or economic development, were becoming international as well as domestic political issues. Many non-military issues have begun to be accepted as the legitimate concerns of international relations that might be contended over without reference to military power on an increasingly busy world stage (Hough, 2008:3-5). "A new world order" has started to be discussed among scholars. The way in which the Cold War ended drew attention to the cultural dimension of policy making by viewing it from a more sociological perspective.

In the 1990s, a new approach called the "Copenhagen School" has developed an argument for a more profound expansion of the concept of security than the inclusion of some non-military aspects in the spectrum of threats to states. Buzan pioneered this approach in the early 1990s, but it did not crystallize until later in the decade, when he co-authored the seminal work *On Security* with Waever and de Wilde ((Hough, 2008:8). The study argues that "the threats and vulnerabilities can arise in many different areas, military and non-military, but to count as security issues they have to meet strictly defined criteria that distinguish them from the normal run of the merely political. They have to be staged as existential threats to a referent object by a securitizing actor who thereby generates endorsement of emergency measures beyond rules that would otherwise bind" (Buzan et al. 1998:5). Beyond the Copenhagen School, the field of security studies is broadened by the 'deepening' approach taken by pluralists and social constructivists. The deepening theorists advocate the concept of 'human security' and argue that the primary object of security should not be the state or particular sub-state groups such as stateless nations, but rather the individual people who make up these institutions/groups (Falk 1995: 147).

Adopting the human security framework reframes the notion of security as a social construct so that analysts no longer need to speculate about which of the myriad issues on the current international policy agenda they believe are most threatening, but can instead focus on analysing how and why certain issues are actually perceived as vital and addressed in extraordinary ways by decision makers. This approach is appropriate because opinion polls show that people think differently about their security today than they did during the Cold War. Moreover, in a number of ways, the international policy agenda has become much more diverse since 1990, with governments giving greater priority to issues such as environmental threats, drugs, and public health. Even explicitly military organisations such as NATO are

increasingly focused on non-military activities (Hough, 2008:11).

Since the beginning of the new millennium, the international security environment has changed dramatically. The world faces a complex and growing list of shared challenges. Although the threat of major armed conflicts and interstate wars is now diminishing, the world increasingly faces a range of security challenges that are non-military in nature. Examples of these non-military security challenges that threaten the well-being and security of states and societies include climate change, food and water scarcity, environmental degradation, energy supply, pandemics, irregular movements of people, and transnational crimes such as cybersecurity. These threats are proving to be more serious and have the potential to cause more harm to a greater number of people than the traditional threats of interstate war and conflict. As a result, states' security concerns have changed, forcing them to find new and innovative ways to address these new challenges. This, in turn, has profound implications for the nature of security cooperation among states as well as for global governance (Caballero-Anthony, 2016:5). The globalization of trade, investment, and commerce has left the humanity with a world that is more integrated than ever, but has also led to the rise of transnational threats that undermine security and economic prosperity. Many of the major challenges of the 21st century are global in range and indeed exacerbated by globalisation and technological progress (Dubber & Donaldson, 2015). Now more than ever, the task of upholding global security and facilitating economic and social development requires the cooperation of likeminded nations capable of harnessing military, diplomatic, and economic tools in coordination to achieve positive outcomes. Foreign assistance, when deployed effectively, is a big part of this picture (Runde, 2016:123). In other words, global challenges need global solutions.

The world is increasingly multipolar and hyperconnected, with wealth, power, and information becoming more widespread. The rise of democracy, social media, and direct action means that governments must increasingly respond to national and global public opinion. Mass cultural contacts at eye level are increasing and changing the nature of cultural relations. The increasing spread of information and opportunity through the Internet and digitization is leading to a greater diffusion of influence and thus a greater role for soft power, which is largely outside the direct control of governments ((Dubber & Donaldson, 2015).

3. Power Without Hardness: "Soft Power"

Despite all these transformation processes in the international system, modern states still claim to be the dominant force. In order to obtain and keep its place as the highest and most encompassing 'community', a state must be in charge: that is, it must be more powerful than any of the 'communities' it incorporates. This characterisation immediately suggests that power is vital for any discussion of states and politics. Like many fundamental ideas in social science, power is a challenged concept. There is no single definition accepted by all who use the word, and the definition people choose reflects their interests and values. To make a general definition in this context, power is the ability to apply force (Newton & Van Deth, 2010). Power is the capacity to influence the behavior of others with or without resistance by using a variety of tactics to push or prompt action (Nye, 2004:2). In international relations, power is associated with population, area, natural resources, economic size, military capacity and political stability. However, according to Nye, the direct use of force for economic gain is generally too costly and dangerous for modern great powers. Even short of aggression, the translation of economic into military power resources may be very costly (Nye, 1990:159).

To evaluate power in the post-Cold War period, it is necessary to recognize the tools and strategies of balance of power required for successful policy. However, new elements in the modern world are moving power away from all major powers.

Therefore, any successful strategy must take into account both continuity and change. Today's great powers are less able to use their traditional power resources to achieve their goals than in the past. On many issues, private actors and small states have become more powerful. At least five trends have contributed to this diffusion of power: economic interdependence, transnational actors, nationalism in weak states, the spread of technology, and changing political issues (Nye, 1990:160). Power has thus passed from the "capital rich" to the "information rich" (Nye, 1990: 164). These tendencies suggested a second, more attractive way of exercising power than the traditional means. Emphasizing the role of the information revolution, Nye has drawn attention to the importance of soft power that is the ability to get what is wanted through a traction and persuasion (Nye, 2011).

Nye has divided the powers of countries into two as hard and soft power, arguing that the ability to affect what other countries want tends to be associated with intangible power resources such as culture, ideology, and institutions (Nye, 1990:166-167). According to Nye, a country's culture contributes to that country's soft power capacity insofar as it inspires admiration among foreign peoples. Similarly, a country's democratic political system, the importance it attaches

to international cooperation, its contribution to peace and human rights increase its soft power potential. Finally, a country can come to a decisive position on global politics by combining its institutions with universal values. Countries that take peaceful steps in foreign policy fortify their soft powers by increasing their self-confidence.

As mentioned in the previous part of the study, security problems such as environmental and climate change, natural disasters, women's and social identity conflicts, and health problems threaten societies promiscuously. The non-traditional security threats experienced in last decade and an increasing number of issues in the 21st century shows that war is not the ultimate arbiter, as the traditional realists view. Military resources are not the solution to climate change or pandemics. The COVID-19 virus killed more Americans than all its wars since 1945 – and the 1918 influenza pandemic killed more people than died in all four years of World War I (Nye, 2021:3).

Considering that soft power is a relationship development method that aims to understand the needs, cultures, and peoples of other countries, convey messages, correct misperceptions, and determine appropriate grounds for common goals, it should be accepted as an effective tool for solving common global problems. Soft power ensures that misunderstandings and prejudices are dispelled, common denominators are found, and an atmosphere of reconciliation between societies is created (Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye Directorate of Communications, 2022).

As Nye has argued, soft power is only one component of power in international relations and rarely sufficient by itself. The ability to combine hard and soft power into successful strategies where they reinforce rather than undercut each other could be considered “smart power” (Nye, 2004). He has developed these concepts further in *The Future of Power*, including in the cyber domain (Nye, 2011).

Although his central definition of soft power has remained constant – the ability to affect others and obtain preferred outcomes by attraction and persuasion rather than coercion or payment – he has highlighted that states should realize that most of a country's soft power comes from its civil society rather than from its government. Propaganda is not credible and thus often does not attract. States need to give more leeway to the talents of their civil society (Nye, 2021). Unconventional security threats requires states to use both traditional and non-traditional instruments in the fight against them. States have to support civil society in order to develop their capacity to inform individuals about the problems regarding security issues and to increase the awareness.

Soft power and influence are key to building the global coalitions needed to address these challenges and ensure respect for the rules-based international system in general. Prevention-which works particularly well through the persuasive power of soft power-is usually better than cure. Given the nature of current challenges, soft power is more important than ever to safeguard national interests. Building friendship and understanding among peoples enhances a state's security and supports peaceful coexistence. It supports the deepening of diplomatic relations, the exchange of knowledge and expertise, the smooth conduct of trade, and cooperation in areas of common interest. It can also play a practical role in strengthening institutions and civil society and promoting economic prosperity, which is essential for the development of fragile states (Dubber & Donaldson, 2015).

4. Conclusion

Countries use many fields of application in order to influence the peoples of other countries in the international arena and to build relations with foreign societies. Developments in communication technologies with globalization have led to comprehensive transformations in diplomacy and interstate relations. In the new international order, media, public opinion, NGOs, IGOs, universities, and individuals have emerged as actors and have begun to directly affect decision makers. On the other hand, widened context of the security issues and increased number of the threat types have required to diversify the tools of the international relations. Usage of the soft power tools has emerged as a result of this transformation.

Soft power is sometimes seen as a substitute for dwindling hard power. But precisely because it is not coercive, soft power alone will not always be sufficient, nor should it be seen as sufficient, to replace reduced hard power. The nature and magnitude of current security challenges in the world usually require the use of both hard and soft power. For these reasons, policy-makers are increasingly focusing on the benefits of combining and aligning soft and hard power into what is often referred to as “smart power.”

Individuals trust the discourse and actions of the NGOs and more easily accept their messages and respond positively to calls for cooperation. The prominence of the NGO as soft power actors is important in terms of penetrating the inaccessible points of the society.

The ongoing developments have and will have consequences not only for the future of particular states, societies or geographies, but for the entire world. So, the global changes and their consequences require global initiatives and

cooperations. Progress can be made in eliminating global threats if all stakeholders participate in the process. No longer are terrorism, pandemic or natural disaster problems that one country or society can handle alone. The interconnectedness that has reached its peak with globalization requires shared responsibility and cooperation. The pandemic COVID -19, terrorist attacks in different parts of the world, forest fires in Australia, the refugee crisis after the Arab Spring, the earthquake in Turkiye or the melting of glaciers in Antarctica, which have been experienced in the recent past, are not problems that only one society or host country can deal with. In this sense, soft power can be considered as a method that can bring together all stakeholders, from individuals to state and non-state actors.

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