

## Comparative Analysis:

Hard and Soft Powers

ILyea Shanz

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## ***Introduction***

The concept of power in international relations is multifaceted, with hard power and soft power emerging as distinct yet interconnected approaches. This paper contends that the complex nature of international relations necessitates a nuanced understanding of power, encompassing both hard power and soft power. It argues that while these power forms differ in approach and application, their effectiveness in achieving international influence depends on specific objectives and contexts, rendering one form neither universally superior nor inferior to the other. This thesis is substantiated through a comprehensive analysis of the definitions, components, historical evolution, and contextual applications of hard and soft power, emphasizing their interconnectedness in shaping the global landscape and the need for a balanced approach in statecraft.

### ***Part I: Defining Hard and Soft Power***

#### **Hard Power**

“It appears to be generally agreed that *Hard Power* consists of the capacity, displayed by a country, to reach specific objectives through the use of physical force or economic influence, often recurring to military force, in an uncertain, though eventually effective manner” (Brito 2010). Basically, the use of coercive tactics and tangible assets are what define hard power in international relations. This approach is characterized by its reliance on quantifiable measures to exert influence abroad. Key components include:

- Nations with powerful military capabilities can leverage force as a means to pursue their objectives or deter potential adversaries. The United States' military supremacy is an integral component of its hard power strategy.

- Economic power is a critical component of hard power and can be leveraged to exert influence. China has demonstrated this through its impressive economic growth rates as well as the Belt and Road Initiative which highlights how it uses economic might for strategic gain. The impact of these efforts cannot be ignored by those seeking global dominance in today's world order.
- Nations can enhance their hard power by establishing strategic alliances and diplomatic partnerships. NATO serves as an example of how collective security approaches bolster a nation's military prowess through collaboration with other countries.

## **Soft Power**

In stark contrast to hard power, soft power "anticipates action through mediation and persuasion, which implies the adoption of strategic principles that combine symbolic or cultural reference elements with political or ideological values that reinforce leadership" (Brito 2010). It harnesses attraction, persuasion, and cultural influence as its primary tools for shaping international preferences and behaviors. The term "soft power" was originally coined by Joseph Nye in the 1980s, and he defined it as the "ability to affect others through cooperative means, such as framing the agenda, persuading, and eliciting positive attraction, to obtain preferred outcomes" (Nye 2011). Nye's approach to soft power comprises several key components:

Cultural Exportation: A nation's soft power is significantly enhanced through the exportation of its culture via mediums such as music, film, literature, and art. Hollywood's global dominance stands as a testament to America's cultural influence on a worldwide scale.

Promotion of Ideals: Soft power can be bolstered by the promotion of democratic values, human rights, and freedom. The European Union's emphasis on liberal democracy serves as a prime example, demonstrating how shared ideals can be potent tools for increasing soft power.

Effective Diplomacy and Public Diplomacy: Building a nation's soft power hinges on effective diplomacy and public diplomacy efforts. Initiatives such as exchange programs and international aid can play a pivotal role in achieving this objective. The Fulbright program in the United States exemplifies how these initiatives work towards strengthening national influence globally.

While both hard and soft power strategies aim to influence others in pursuit of a nation's interests, they exhibit notable differences and share certain similarities:

### **Similarities:**

Common Goal: Both hard and soft power are employed by states with the ultimate objective of gaining influence over others while advancing their own interests. They may employ different methods, but the underlying goal remains consistent.

Shaping International Agendas: Individuals wielding hard and soft power can shape international agendas and outcomes through their actions and interactions on the global stage.

Balance of Strategies: Successful statecraft often requires a balanced approach, blending elements of hard and soft power strategies. Striking the right equilibrium between these two approaches can yield maximum impact on global affairs.

### **Differences:**

Nature of Influence: Hard power relies on coercion and tangible assets, while soft power hinges on attraction and intangible assets. This fundamental distinction underscores their divergent approaches to influence.

Temporality: Hard power is often characterized by immediacy and directness, whereas soft power's long-term investments may demand patience. These differences underscore their distinct strategies for achieving desired outcomes.

Response and Alignment: Hard power can lead to resistance and backlash, whereas soft power seeks voluntary alignment. This divergence highlights the distinct nature of these approaches. While hard power employs force or coercion, soft power is centered on cultivating relationships founded on shared values and interests.

### ***Part II: The Evolution of Hard and Soft Power***

Historical Evolution: The evolution of hard and soft power has been shaped by changing global dynamics over time. The following are some examples of how these two types of power have evolved.

Historically, military conquest and territorial expansion were seen as the primary means of exerting power. In addition to this, the concept of hard and soft power has been around for as long as war has existed. Even in the United States (U.S.), before Nye developed the concept of soft power, the idea of mixing soft and hard power was evident. For example, the 26<sup>th</sup> president of the U.S. Theodore Roosevelt had a foreign policy that was summarized by his quote, “Speak softly and carry a big stick.” This quote is a perfect example of using both hard and soft power. The ‘speak softly’ would be in soft power of diplomacy, and the ‘big stick’ would be representative of his hard power ideas. Now with advancements in technology such as nuclear weapons along with modern warfare's complexities, states have begun exploring alternative avenues for achieving their objectives including economic coercion and alliance building, examples of hard and soft power combined. These new methods have become increasingly

important over time as they offer more effective ways to achieve desired outcomes without resorting to violence or conflict.

The concept of soft power emerged as a prominent force in the latter half of twentieth century due to increased cultural exchange and information dissemination brought about by globalization. The Cold War rivalry between America and Russia highlighted how ideological attraction could be used effectively as an instrument for wielding influence without resorting to military might or coercion - ultimately giving rise to what we now know today as "soft power". This trend continues even today with nations across the world leveraging their cultural heritage, values, and ideas to shape public opinion around them globally.

**Contemporary Dynamics:** In today's international landscape, the balance between hard and soft power has shifted in response to emerging challenges. This shift is crucial for understanding how countries navigate complex issues like climate change or cybersecurity threats.

In the modern era hard power is still heavily reliant on military force. However, economic instruments have emerged as an equally significant aspect of this form of influence. Nations like China are utilizing their financial might to expand their global reach through such measures.

The digital age has revolutionized the scope of soft power by allowing cultural and ideological influence to spread more easily through social media platforms. Additionally global challenges like climate change require international cooperation efforts that highlight the significance of diplomacy as a means for addressing these issues effectively. This underscores how crucial it is for nations to harness their softer powers in order to make progress on pressing worldwide concerns.

### ***Part III: Contextual Application of Hard and Soft Power***

Scenarios Favoring Hard Power: In certain situations, hard power may prove more effective than soft power due to its ability to exert control through force or coercion. These scenarios include:

In times of immediate security threats or aggression facing a state, having an effective military posture can be the most suitable response. This robustness helps in addressing such situations efficiently and effectively.

When economic interests are on the line, hard power strategies such as sanctions or trade restrictions can be an effective way to leverage one's position. These measures provide a potent means of exerting influence over others and securing desired outcomes in situations where traditional diplomacy may not suffice.

Scenarios Favoring Soft Power: There are particular situations where soft power can thrive such as:

Soft power is a powerful tool for promoting cultural diplomacy and creating positive perceptions of nations. Its ability to foster goodwill between people from different backgrounds makes it an effective way to build bridges across cultures. By using soft power tactics such as art exhibitions or music festivals countries can highlight their unique heritage while also building relationships with other nations on the global stage. Ultimately, this leads towards greater understanding and cooperation among diverse societies around the world.

Tackling global challenges such as climate change and pandemics requires collaboration and diplomacy, areas where soft power can excel. By leveraging this form of influence, countries are better equipped to address these complex issues effectively. With the right approach international cooperation becomes more achievable than ever before.

#### ***Part IV: The Universality of Hard and Soft Power***

The effectiveness of hard or soft power is dependent on the specific objectives and circumstances that a state faces. There is not one definitive answer as to which form works best for every situation; rather it requires careful consideration before deciding upon an approach. A judicious combination of both forms often proves most effective in achieving desired outcomes.

The interconnectedness of hard power and soft power in international relations cannot be overstated. Their historical evolutions, contemporary dynamics, as well as contextual applications demonstrate how complex the concept of power is within global politics. Instead of prioritizing one form over another, recognizing their complementary nature allows states to navigate this ever-changing landscape effectively. Understanding when each type should be utilized is crucial for nations seeking success on an international level. Looking at events in history can show how the importance of using both hard and soft power is factual and incredibly important.

One such example can be seen in the events that inspired the movie, “Charlie Wilson’s War.” The award-winning movie, “Charlie Wilson’s War” stared Tom Hanks and Julia Roberts, and it showcased this failure of the U.S. neglecting soft power better than I have ever seen it explained. The movie depicted both the longest and most expensive covert operation the CIA had ever run, which ran from 1979-92. This covert operation helped the people of the Middle East fight off the Russian invasion and win back their country by sending the Mujahideen logistical aid and monetary aid between 6-12 billion dollars. However, we did it secretly. This aid utilized U.S. hard power, our military weaponry, tactical knowledge, and financial assistance in a covert manner. The U.S. did not wish Russia to know they were interfering in their invasion. The majority of the people did not know about the actions of the U.S. Other than those involved in

the planning and secret operations, the people thought they did it on their own. Once Russia was expelled and the mission was a success, the U.S. failed to utilize their soft power by rendering support in rebuilding. They failed to come in like Charlie Wilson wanted and help the people of Afghanistan to rebuild from the damage that Russia had caused. This helped fuel the hate that they had built up against Russia to be used against the U.S., and the U.S. has been fighting that hatred ever since then. The U.S. also enabled them to use the military equipment that was given them, and the training and skills used against Russia to be used against the U.S. when fighting al-Qaida (Neikirk 2022). As Charlie stated in the film, “This is what we always do. We always go in with our ideals and we change the world and then we leave. We always leave” (Hanks, et al. 2007). Then he begged for Congress to approve sending aid. Charlie asked, “Let's spend a million on H.R.118 and rebuild a school” (Hanks, et al. 2007). And he was met with the response of, “Charlie, nobody gives a shit about a school in Pakistan” (Hanks, et al. 2007). At which point Charlie corrected him and stated Afghanistan (Neikirk 2022). However, his pleading fell on deaf ears. The U.S. does what Charlie stated they always do, they left without using “Soft Power” to influence their culture and values to not see the U.S. as an enemy. And Afghanistan became a breeding ground for terrorists against the United States.

### ***Bibliography***

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