The Effectiveness of Soft & Hard Power in Contemporary International Relations

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The first part of this essay explains the concepts of hard and soft power with referring to their combination, soft power. Then, the effectiveness of the two concepts is assessed by discussing different examples of their use in foreign policy making. This discussion also includes examples for the use of smart power. The essay states that soft power is the more effective and efficient concept in contemporary global politics because of its endurance and sustainability. Hard power, however, is less useful today as the global system changes in its disfavour. In addition to soft power, smart power strategies play an important role in the contemporary international system. The idea to distinguish between hard power and soft power was first introduced by Nye more than two decades ago (1990). In general, he defines power as the "ability to affect others to get the outcomes one wants" (2009, p. 61) and command or hard power as coercive power wielded through inducements or threats (2009, p. 63). Hard power is based on military intervention, coercive diplomacy and economic sanctions (Wilson, 2008, p. 114) and relies on tangible power resources such as armed forces or economic means (Gallarotti, 2011, p. 29). Thus, the German invasion into Poland in 1939 and the UN economic sanctions against Iraq in 1991 following the first Gulf War are examples for the use of hard power.

In contrast, co-optive or "soft power is the capacity to persuade others to do what one wants" (Wilson, 2008, p. 114). According to Nye, persuasive power is based on attraction and emulation and "associated with intangible power resources such as culture, ideology, and institutions" (2009, p. 63). Cooper emphasises the importance of legitimacy for the concept of soft power (2004, p. 173). State activities need to be perceived as legitimate in order to enhance soft power. The dispersion of American culture within the Eastern bloc during the Cold War indicate the existence of American soft power and more recent processes of EU enlargement are indices for soft power possessed by the EU (cf. Nye, 2009, pp. 63-64). The concept of hard and soft power is a continuum with several instruments of different degrees of coercion or persuasion. These instruments are punishment, compulsion, inducement, agenda setting, persuasion and attraction (cf. Smith-Windsor, 2000, p. 52).

The effectiveness of hard and soft power approaches depends on the accessibility of power resources (see Heywood, 2011, Figure 9.1). Large states such as the USA or Russia with a higher national income are financially able to maintain large armed forces and to put other states economically under pressure. For smaller states, these traditional tools of hard power are more difficult to obtain. The accessibility of soft power resources though depends much less on the size of a state. As the example of Norway shows, small states have definitely the ability to build soft power (cf. Nye, 2004, pp. 111-112; and Leonard, 2002, p.53).

Heng, however, explains the importance of the nature of soft power resources in his comparison of Japanese and Chinese soft power strategies. He stresses for example that Japan's war history forms the main limitation to its soft power (2010, p. 299), whereas China's "competitive state-led model and its authoritarian political system" hinder the full utilisation of its soft power potential (ibid., p. 300). Hence, a state's given soft power resources – such as its historical legacy and societal system – determine the strength and therefore the effectiveness of its soft power.

Another important aspect of the hard-soft-power continuum is *time*. It appears that generating hard power requires much less time as its resources are tangible. In contrast, soft power takes relatively long to build as its intangible

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resources develop over a long period of time. Similarly, the temporal dimension of the gain of hard power and soft power strategies differs: while military or economic coercion tends to result in an immediate but short-duration outcome, attraction and persuasion have the tendency to cause long-term change. This is due to an inherent aspect of the concept: as hard power forces one to act in a way different to one's usual behaviour, one does so involuntarily. On the contrary, soft power changes one's attitude to the end that one acts voluntarily in a way different to one's usual behaviour. Gallarotti stresses that hard power evokes compelled action, whereas soft power induces voluntary action. Furthermore, he states that compulsion leads to conflict and voluntariness to consent (2011, p. 30) which explains why soft power solutions tend to last longer than hard power solutions. For example, the repressive measures put onto Germany after the Great War provoked another World War, whereas the soft power used to construct the European Union resulted in almost 70 years of Europe-wide peace.

Smith-Windsor argues that the borders between hard and soft power blur (2000). He stresses that armed forces can also be "called to participate in humanitarian and interposition peacekeeping operations" expressing the attractiveness of military means (2000, p. 53). The use of armed forces is, according to him, therefore not to be seen at the hard power pole of the hard-soft-power continuum.

Indeed, some foreign policy strategies may be perceived as effective combinations of the two poles of the power continuum. This idea was taken up and coined "smart power" by Nossel (cf. Nossel, 2004) and Nye (cf. Nye, 2004). Armitage and Nye state in 2007 that smart power draws from both hard and soft power resources (p. 7). They define the concept as "an approach that underscores the necessity of a strong military, but also invests heavily in alliances, partnerships, and institutions" (ibid.). According to Wilson, smart power is "the capacity (…) to combine elements of hard and soft power in ways that are mutually reinforcing" (2008, p. 115).

Moving on from the definitional part of this paper. The characteristics of the contemporary world order weaken the effectiveness of hard power strategies. Based on Nye (1990), Hackbarth defines the following characteristics (2008, pp. 2-3): globalisation-driven economic interdependence; the rise of transnational actors; the resurgence of nationalism in weak states; the spread of military technology; and the changed nature of international political problems. In 2008, Nye added the wide-spread access to information to this list (p. 99) and Gallarotti stresses that also the growth of democracy hinders the effectiveness of hard power (2011, p. 40).

An example for the ineffectiveness of basing foreign policy making solely on hard power strategies is the U.S. invasion into Iraq in 2003. According to Steinberg, "the strategy [of the invasion of Iraq] failed to understand what elements of power were needed most to defeat the emerging threat" from terrorist groups (2008, p. 159). This misunderstanding resulted in ignoring two key elements of soft power: the Bush administration firstly forgot about the USA's dependence on their allies' intelligence and policy forces and on global public support; and secondly, the question of the legitimacy of the invasion was not attributed any importance (ibid., p. 160). In the short term, these mistakes led to the failure of the action. In the long term, they have caused the degradation of American soft power as "the strategy undermined the U.S. global position" (ibid., p. 160) and "global public confidence in U.S. leadership" (ibid., p. 157). The USA felt the endurance of this damage for instance when facing problems of their development aid programs in Africa (cf. Hackbarth, 2008; and see below).

Due to the above mentioned factors limiting the effectiveness of hard power, it is hard to find successful foreign policies solely based on hard power resources. Many states now enact soft power rather than hard in its external relations. India's foreign policy for instance is presently within the process of this transition. Wagner lists two main reasons for this transition: On the one hand, "India's hard power approach of the 1970s and 1980s was not very successful" (Wagner, 2005, p. 2); and on the other hand, the economic advancement after 1991 facilitated the use of economic tools in foreign policy (ibid.). This explanation mirrors some of the above mentioned factors triggering the decline in the use of hard power.

On the other hand, also the concept of soft power has its weak points. Cooper lists three points of weakness. He firstly questions the strength of culture as a soft power resource as cultural influence does not equal political power (2004, p. 170). Secondly, the desirability of the outcomes of soft power strategies depends on particular circumstances which cannot necessarily be influenced by states (ibid., p. 171). Finally, he challenges the actual

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benefit of agenda setting as the positive results of those practices seem to occur long after their originators' demises (ibid., p.171).

The U.S. Africa Command can be seen as an unsuccessful soft power strategy. According to Morrison and Hicks, it was initially set up for three reasons: oil, terrorism and ungoverned spaces in Africa, and China's increased influence in Africa (2007, p. 1). Despite these hard power reasons, AFRICOM was sold as a soft power strategy which resulted in the perception of imperialist intentions the USA might pursue in Africa (Hackbarth, 2008, pp. 9-10). Together with the isochronal Iraq invasion, this perception damaged the American soft power.

Nevertheless, ineffective soft power strategies are usually the exception. The following examples show how soft power can be used effectively. The first example is the European Union and its ability to attract new members. The EU is a leading intergovernmental organisation and its success generates among non-members states the desire to participate in the project of European integration. Based on this promising foundation, the EU's "soft power derives from its readiness to offer a seat at the decision making table" (Cooper, 2004, pp. 179-180). This attractiveness assures peace and safety among European states and the process of EU enlargement further strengthens its position at the global level. Thus, the EU's soft power is beneficial for its member states as well as for the EU itself.

Volunteering and intercultural exchanges appear to be another kind of soft power that is increasingly used in today's global politics. Rieffel and Zalud describe the positive effect of volunteering from an American perspective as follows:

Overseas volunteer work is a form of soft power that contributes measurably to the security and well-being of Americans. Volunteers (…) contribute to institutional capacity building, social capital, democratic governance, and a respect for human rights, all of which help to make the world a safer place for Americans both at home and abroad. (2006, p. 1)

Thus, volunteering is beneficial for both the host and the home countries as it promotes intercultural understanding and therefore conflict prevention.

An example for employed smart power is the US-American effort to strengthen its influence in Africa. According to Hackbarth (2008, pp. 6-10), this strategy embodies three instruments:

(i) the African Growth and Opportunity Act is a program of bilateral trade agreements bound to certain political, economic and social reforms (ibid., pp. 6-7).

(ii) the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, is "the largest commitment ever by a single nation towards an international health initiative" (The President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, 2009, p. 1). The program provides financial means to realise national policies combatting AIDS/HIV (Hackbarth, 2008, pp. 6-7).

(iii) the Millennium Challenge Corporation is a financial aid program "based on the principle that aid is most effective when it reinforces good governance, economic freedom and investments in people" (The MCC 2008 cited in Hackbarth, 2008, p. 8).

These three programs have in common that they combine the attractiveness of money with the demand for political, social and economic development. The underlying principle is simple: in order to be eligible for partaking in the programs, a state has to meet the conditions set by the USA. Because the attractiveness of money is such a strong persuasive tool this type of development aid is a good example for an effective smart power strategy. As Mead states, "the generosity of U.S. humanitarian assistance abroad enhances U.S. soft power" (2004, p. 51).

Hard power is coercive power executed through military threats and economic inducements and based on tangible resources such as the army or economic strength. In contrast, soft power is persuasive power deriving from attraction and emulation and grounded on intangible resources such as culture. Although they are oppositional approaches to power, their combination, smart power, has its place in academic debate and policy making. Overall, it appears that soft power strategies are more effective in the contemporary international system than hard power

strategies. The demise of hard power is caused by changes in the world order, whereas the strength of soft power is based on its endurance and sustainability. As soft power has weaknesses, too, it is worth considering the strength of smart power strategies.

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