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HARD POWER, SOFT POWER AND THE GOALS OF DIPLOMACY

In: David Held/Mathias Koenig-Archibugi (eds), *American Power in the 21st Century*, 2004, pp. 167-180

America seems to be hard power incarnate and Europe the embodiment of soft power. America has military capabilities second to none. It is not just that the US defence budget is equal to the sum of the defence budgets of the next twenty countries – or more since it grows all the time; nor that its supplementary estimates often turn out to be greater than the total defence expenditure of some of its more capable partners. The sum of defence expenditure is always greater than its parts: economies of scale and the ability to focus resources mean that the United States possesses military assets that others cannot dream of. The military world divides neatly into two classes: the USA and everyone else. And the gap between the two is growing.

The US has long had a superior defence capability: since 9/11 it has acquired the will to use it. The approach of the Administration is set out clearly in its National Security Strategy: alliances are important but the central objective is the maintenance of US military superiority. For the moment this does not seem a difficult task. The US is far ahead of all its allies and even further ahead of any possible enemy. During the Afghan campaign of 2001 it was turning assistance from allies away. In the run up to the invasion of Iraq the US Defence Secretary made clear that the US could, if necessary, manage quite well without its most capable ally, the UK.

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The influence of the military also seems greater in the US than in many European countries. The formidable power of the five US Commanders in Chiefs is one aspect: they have budgets and authority that far exceeds that of any Ambassador. The fact that Generals can make political careers in the USA is another. Even in the State Department US officials think far more in military terms than their European counterparts do. The attitude of US policy makers is always “can do”; and often it is the military who do the doing. Moreover the United States’ most important relationships are expressed primarily in military terms: NATO for Europe and the Security Treaty for Japan.

By contrast Europe has been seen as a civilian power. The European Union has no army although this is one of the areas where unity would bring obvious increase in efficiency and influence. It relies on law, on negotiation, on multilateral organisation. Its relationships are often in the form of “contractual agreements”, itself a revealing phrase. It seems a model of soft power, as America is of hard power. These concepts however require a closer look: neither hard power nor soft power is so straightforward as it seems at first glance.

Hard power is coercive force. Soft power (it seems) can be just about anything else. We all know what hard power looks like. We see pictures of it every day in the newspapers and the television. We read about it in our history books and the government spends its defence budget on hard power. Most of us have not encountered it directly. The experience is probably frightening and unpleasant.

Realists have a preference for hard power. Bismarck is famous for the remark that “This policy cannot succeed through speeches ...and songs; it can be carried out only through blood and iron”. Mao Zedong took the view that power grew out of the barrel of a gun. Lyndon B. Johnson

thought that “when you’ve got them by the balls the hearts and minds will follow”. Machiavelli says it is better to be feared than loved, to compel that is rather than to attract: “men love at their own pleasure and fear at the pleasure of the Prince”.

And yet each of these examples contains some irony. Bismarck’s blood and iron was not the solution to the German question. By 1945 Germany had had enough of both: they had undermined Bismarck’s achievement of unification and had led to the ruin of Germany. President Johnson was, to put it simply, wrong. The hearts and minds manifestly did not follow in Vietnam. Indeed the war came to an end not just because of the stubborn military resistance by the North Vietnamese/Vietcong but also because of their superior ability to win hearts and minds in Vietnam, and because of the US government’s inability to do the same in its own home territory. Whereas Johnson seems genuinely to have believed in the efficacy of hard power (perhaps his lack of military experience accounts for his trusting the military more than Kennedy did) the quotation from Mao is something of an aberration. The man who wrote of the guerrilla swimming among the peasants like a fish in the sea had a keen understanding that power did not just grow out the rifle’s mouth. Besides he may have noticed that it was little red books and not guns that his supporters in the Cultural Revolution waved.

A society based solely on hard power never existed: if it did it would not deserve the name of society. It would in the most literal sense amount to Hobbes’ war of all against all. If every relationship depends on coercion or the threat of coercion even alliances would be impossible (not to mention families, religions, corporations or crime syndicates). Taken to its extreme hard power equals anarchy at the level of the individual. This is why, in Hobbes’ state of nature life is solitary as well as nasty

brutish and short. Some collapsing states in Africa have come near to this; but even among the lawless bands there is some order; this rests upon a soft power in which ethnicity, magic and money may all play a part.

Hard power may not be as powerful as it might seem at first sight but we do at least know what it is. Soft power is a more elusive idea. Joe Nye – perhaps the best known authority on the subject - defines power as the ability to obtain the outcomes one wants, and soft power as the ability to do that by attraction and persuasion rather than by coercion. In the terms of Hollywood this sounds like Marilyn Monroe rather than Arnold Schwarzenegger. But is attraction the same thing as power? There are many aspects of the USA that are extremely attractive. Sometimes Hollywood itself is held up as an important source of soft power. But both Saddam Hussein and Kim Jong II are said to have a passion for Hollywood movies without this having done much for American ability to obtain the outcomes it seeks in Iraq or North Korea. If Hollywood put out US propaganda it might do more for American influence; but then if it put out propaganda it would be less popular. Nor can it even be said that in some more subtle way American films and music spread American values. Jaws, Psycho, Some Like it Hot, Animal House II, and the Godfather are all deeply American but all present different views of the world and the viewer is free to make his choice. Where people adopt the values of a particular slice of American output – the rather admirable values preached by Star Trek, for example, had a following in East Germany – they choose the film because of the values not the other way round. As it happens the Godfather is said to be a particular favourite of both Saddam Hussein and Kim Jong II. Perhaps that is because it is about power.

The fact that the USA makes good films is probably good for its image generally just as Germany's reputation for making good cars makes people think well of Germany. Coca Cola and MacDonalDs also stand for America – at least they are targets for anti-American demonstrators – but here too the connection with American influence is not obvious. (Saddam Hussein used to be the licensee for Pepsi Cola). So while the USA can feel good about its widespread cultural impact and American companies almost certainly profit from it is not clear that it amounts to power. The other effect of course that America's attractiveness has is that it brings in lots of immigrants. These may be a source of wealth one day – and ability to compete for workers with key skills may be increasingly important, but this too is not power in the normal sense. Both opinion polls and anecdotes suggest that many people like American values, American society, even American people; but this does not mean they like American policy.

An alternative approach to soft power would be to say that it consists in getting people to do what you want by getting them to want what you want. In this interpretation success itself represents a form of soft power since it encourages imitation. A striking example is the impact that Japan had on East and Southeast Asia. Sometime in the 1960s people noticed that Japan was more of a success story than China and tried to imitate it. In fact they had quite a lot of success and some version of the Japanese model can be seen in a range of countries from South Korea through China, Malaysia and many others in Southeast Asia. This has created a more comfortable environment for Japan than if all its neighbours had taken up Maoist ideas. Japan may not have been powerful in a conventional sense but it has had a powerful influence on its neighbours in a way that has produced desirable outcomes for Japan itself.

The difficulty with describing this as power is that while the influence is undoubted (if unintentional) the desirability of the outcome depends on the particular circumstances. For example if we had been facing acute raw material shortages it might be against Japan's interests to have other countries imitate its high growth economic policies. Would that mean its soft power had suddenly gone (though its influence remained unchanged)? Or, to take a genuine historical case should we consider that the European and American Empires of the early twentieth century were an example of soft power because their success caused Japan to imitate them in seeking an empire aggressively in its region, or that this was a failure of soft power because this outcome was the opposite of what they wanted?

Sometimes those who write about soft power tell you that it is to do with setting the agenda, establishing norms and values, creating rules that suit you. This come closer to the idea of power. But not in every case. For example, in Belgium (where I happen to live at the moment) the rules are set by Roman law overlaid by the Napoleonic code. It is good to know that the soft power of the Roman Empire and of the rather briefer Napoleonic Empire has lasted so well but it hasn't done much for its creators.

Perhaps the best way to clarify the idea of soft power may be to look at a couple of historical examples.

The greatest historical example of soft power must be the Catholic Church. Indeed the distinction between spiritual and temporal power may be more or less the same as that between hard and soft power. Stalin (who was something of an enthusiast for hard power) was right

that the Pope did not have very many divisions - though there were times when, apart from owning gigantic areas of land, the Church could always enlist one or other of the Lords Temporal fight for it. What the Pope did have was perhaps the greatest organisation the world has ever known. And he had potentially at least the obedience of a large part of the population. Above all he was the source of legitimacy at a time when legitimacy came from above rather than below. In fact the Pope was the source of legitimacy in its most literal sense through his power to pronounce marriages legal or illegal – and so their offspring legitimate or illegitimate. This was a critical capability in a world linked by a network of obligations based on kinship. He was in some sense the source of all soft power in the feudal world. Kings went to him to have their cause pronounced just or their marriage invalid. (On the importance of kinship see the way in which Shakespeare’s Henry V seeks to legitimate his claim to the French throne – Act I scene 2 lines 33 onwards).

Eventually this formidable collection of soft power was pushed into the background not so much by the accumulating hard power of the European Nation States as by the weakening of its own monopoly on legitimacy through the split in Christendom. Then came an alternative source of legitimacy offered by the State first through its capacity to protect and organise people and later through its ability to represent them.

A second example, less impressive and more short-lived, but closer to our experience is the British Empire. The tiny quantities of military force used to control the lives of millions of imperial subjects are in retrospect astonishing. It is true that a certain amount of hard power was also available to sustain the Empire when needed; but in every case when the Empire had to be defended with hard power it was the beginning of the end. The survival of the Empire depended first and last on prestige: the

prestige of technology and organisation, perhaps even of a certain kind of justice, but also the prestige supplied by myths of racial superiority. When these were punctured by people who did not believe in white superiority such as the Japanese and Mahatma Ghandi there was nothing for the British to do but to get out.

These two examples concern soft power in its hardest form: when it represents real power, even power over life and death rather than a general good feeling about a country or organisation. Strikingly they are both examples of semi-domestic situations. At the core of soft power is legitimacy. Armies obey civilian governments, junior gangsters obey their bosses and children obey parents because they accept some rules or some authority. The most developed version of soft power is the legal and constitutional order by which most states are governed. It is true that behind this power remains the possibility of using force but for the most part obedience is obtained without this being mentioned or even thought of. People obey the state because that is what you do with a legitimately constituted state. Most power in a domestic context is soft power: authority without force. And if soft power sometimes seems to be a complicated, many-sided and elusive concept that may be because legitimacy, which lies at its heart, is also a complex and elusive concept.

The arguments about soft and hard power have however generally been applied in the international sphere where, it is normally held, might – hard power that is – is right. It is therefore worth considering an example further removed from the internal ordering of a state than those already cited of the Church or an empire.

The Warsaw Pact was a good example of hard power at work. Its continued existence depended on coercion from the Soviet Union; this was demonstrated successively in East Germany, Hungary,

Czechoslovakia and Poland. The attempt to legitimise this in the Brezhnev Doctrine may have been a symptom of the declining conviction with which these interventions were carried out. NATO on the other hand was a kinder, gentler organisation, one which conducted its business through consensus, footnotes and astonishingly boring debates – in other words, soft power. Does the fact that NATO is still there and the Warsaw Pact has gone mean that soft power beats hard power?

It is interesting to consider how the Warsaw Pact failed. It was not through want of hard power. The Soviet Union could undoubtedly have suppressed Solidarity and the Polish Round Table and could have closed the Hungarian border. But it didn't want to. It was not a failure of hard power but a failure of will and confidence. Probably this should be considered as an element of soft power. The Soviet system ultimately lost legitimacy even in the eyes of the people that owned it (that is because in a way, they were rather decent people. "Evil empire" was definitely the wrong phrase. Gorbachev wanted to do the right thing by the Russian people and was honest enough to see the lack of success of the Soviet system. If he had been in the game purely for power or for profit, then he might still be there today). But the Soviet system lost legitimacy because of its lack of success in economic terms and lack of an external threat that might have legitimised the use of hard power. In terms of threat reduction the European Union may also have played a part. NATO certainly did too. What mattered above all Germany was not seen as threatening. But the real drama was on the Soviet side where there was a radical failure of legitimacy – a failure that is of soft power.

In comparison to the Warsaw Pact NATO looks like a soft organisation; but in practice there was quite a lot of hard power involved too. It was after all a military organisation which, right up to the end was seen as a threat, at least by the Soviet military. There must be a good chance that

without the threat of force that NATO, or perhaps the USA, represented the Soviet Union would at some time have taken the opportunity to deal with the Berlin problem. If that had succeeded, or if there had been no security guarantees at all, it might have developed larger ambitions. So NATO's hard power was important too. But the real battles of the Cold War were intra-alliance battles, the attempt to find compromises between different sets of interest and different points of views. Keeping the Alliance together was what mattered, through the long debates on the Harmel report, on the two track decision and many others. These you could say were the devices by which NATO's soft power (its legitimacy) were maintained. On the other side the use of Soviet hard power undermined the Warsaw Pact's legitimacy almost from the beginning.

It is worth noting in passing that it was important that success was defined in terms of prosperity. This was not an achievement for the soft power of the capitalist system; economic success was also the promise of the Soviet system. That, in a way, was one of the things that helped make the Cold war winnable: both sides were playing on the same field. The difficulty in dealing with countries such as North Korea may be precisely that Kim Jong II and we have quite different notions of what success amounts to.

NATO was a success for soft power. It was cheaper for the USA to secure cooperation from West European allies by being friendly and giving them some say in the system than it would have been if it had tried to operate like the Soviet Union. It is also questionable whether the American people would have permitted that. The USA may not have chosen soft power consciously nor did the USSR choose hard power consciously: that is just the way that they were. Within the Soviet Union Stalin's terror came close to achieving the ultimate horror of a pure hard power system – where people were disoriented and even normal social ceased to

function. Earlier, however, it had seemed that the Soviet Union had quite a lot of soft power at its disposal. For a period it seemed to represent some attractive ideals, to be a force for modernisation (“I have seen the future and it works” – a sentence that has outlived the memory of its author Lincoln Steffens) and in the 1930s Communists seemed to be the only people who were resisting Hitler. But in fact it didn't work and just as tanks can break down and aeroplanes can crash if the hardware fails, so states can break down if the software is badly designed. What looked attractive turned out to be a failure.

When you have succeeded with hard power the normal thing to do is to try and turn it to soft power. Endless coercion provokes resistance and is too costly. All conquerors try to set up a new order, following Rousseau's advice: “The strongest is never strong enough always to be master unless he transforms strength into right and obedience into duty” –hard power into soft power he might have said today (with rather less force). The Soviet Union made a mess of the transformation. Hitler's New Order was so unattractive that it could not function without coercion. The order that America set up after the war including both NATO and the European Union, the OECD, the WTO and much else was it simply a more competent job. Perhaps the most competent job anyone has ever done. But this New Order was still based on hard power. The Marshall Plan was important but the American security guarantees were the critical factor. They were vital not just in persuading European countries to take the American side against the Soviet Union but also in enabling them to organise their own relations with each other better. Without American guarantees there would have been a large German army to deal with the Soviet threat and a large French army to deal with the German threat. So the soft power of the European Union is a remarkable success; but ultimately this order was based on hard power.

This case – and there are many others – demonstrates that soft power can play a crucial role in international relations as well as in a domestic order. In both cases it is about establishing legitimacy. Whereas in domestic situations our ideas of legitimacy are well explored and, in the West at least, well established, in the international sphere the position is less clear. There are many sources of legitimacy and so also of soft power.

There is, first and foremost a legitimacy that comes from sustaining the international order. If the USA is seen by others as the guarantor of the international system or the ultimate guarantor of security and if its actions are seen as contributing to sustaining order they will be accepted as legitimate. (Views on this may of course differ, as the Iraq war has made clear). The provision of public goods such as security, or the function of lender of last resort confers a degree of legitimacy internationally just as it does domestically.

It is a mistake however, to think that soft power is a natural strength of Europe although the EU seems in some respects the apotheosis of soft power. Internally it operates by law; externally it uses force largely in peace-keeping mode. But soft power goes with hard power internationally as it does domestically. A country may be respected and trusted, as for example Norway is; this will bring it influence but not, when the chips are down, power. American supremacy in hard power on the other hand gives it equally enormous potential for soft power. If you want to exercise soft power you must have something to offer – a recipe for success, resources to help others get there, and probably armed force to protect them on the way. Hard power begets soft power.

Success is also a great legitimiser. At the end of the Cold War the US had enormous prestige. It was seen as owning the secret of the good life that that everyone wanted and that communism had promised but failed to deliver. All across Central and Eastern Europe people listened to American economists, Baptists, constitutional experts and other gurus. This was the great moment of soft power. There were European voices also but these are always less confident and less clear than those from the United States. Europe is a continent of scepticism, lacking the conviction of the USA. Besides there are always any number of European alternatives while there is one single model of American success. What gives a country influence however is not so much its own achievement, though this will excite admiration, as the conviction that this can be turned into success for someone else. Each wants their own success on their own terms, achieved by their own decisions and not handed to them by someone else (not that this is possible). But if another country is felt to have the recipe and to be willing to share it, that gives them, potentially, a good deal of soft power.

It is in this area that the softer forms of soft power can make a difference. If, through the media, people have the impression that the USA is an ideal society and a disinterested provider of peace and freedom they may respond to its appeals, be willing to provide intelligence about its enemies and even welcome its armies. If its good intentions are undermined by hostile broadcasting they may not. A good public image can be a support for legitimacy.

The third and most important source of legitimacy internationally is participation. The United Nations remains the most important source of legitimacy because of the (sometimes contradictory) aspirations and norms it represents, because of its established place in the international

legal framework but above all because it is a forum in which everyone has a voice. The world cannot be governed by the same kind of representative democracy that has become the norm domestically (though it is still not fully observed in most countries). But the more those affected are seen to be involved in the decision making process the more the decisions taken are likely to be considered legitimate.

Thus America's gigantic soft power on the European continent after the Second World War came not just from the protection it has offered and its role in managing the Western/world order but above all from its willingness to listen to the views of its allies and to involve them in decision making. Legitimising great power rule makes it all the more powerful. It adds soft power to hard. For the US it was worth the sacrifice of speed and decisiveness inherent in the switch to collective decision making if the result was to obtain long term sustainability. Rousseau would have admired the strategy. If NATO should come to be seen either as subservient to the USA or as not really involved in the important decisions its legitimacy will decline – and with it an important instrument of American power.

The European Union's soft power derives from the same range of factors. It offers less in the way of protection than NATO but this dimension is not completely absent. In multinational negotiations, where an increasing number of important decisions are made, EU members are able to defend their interests and to protect themselves better against other big players such as the US than if they operated on their own. And even without the formal setting of a multilateral negotiation EU membership provides some soft protection. Russia is likely to think more carefully about bullying one of the Baltic States when they are members of the EU than if they were on their own. The European Union also appears as a recipe for success in overcoming the historical

problems of peace among the nation states in Europe and its aspirations –peace, prosperity, unity while preserving diversity - are likely to be acceptable to most countries. But above all its soft power derives from its readiness to offer others a seat at the decision making table.

A striking illustration is the case of Turkey where the EU's influence in the core areas of Turkish sovereignty has been far greater than that of the USA in spite of the latter's longstanding military and political links. The massive changes taking place in Turkey, which is undergoing the most dramatic constitutional revision since its foundation (including for example the abolition of the death penalty and language rights for minority populations notably the Kurds), are based on the expectation that, in return, it will secure a place in the European Union. This is regime change without violence, and it is all the more effective for being executed through soft rather than hard power. If Turkey's hopes in this should be disappointed it will be a blow to the EU's credibility from which it will take a long time to recover.

Hard power and soft power are two sides of the same coin. Legitimacy has many sources but the first requirement of legitimate government is that they protect their citizens. That is why revolutions almost always follow lost wars. Behind every law there stands a policeman, willing in the end to use force. And behind every constitution there stands an army willing to defend the state against outside interference or against attempts to overthrow it. The great battles of history – between Catholics and Protestants, Monarchists and Republicans, Liberals and Fascists or Communists, were battles between rival legitimacies. They were fought with hard power to establish what sort of soft power system would govern men's lives. Soft power is the velvet glove, but behind it there is always the iron fist.

On the other hand the policeman does not arrest, the army does not fight or defend the state because someone coerces them. Ultimately they do these things because they accept authority. As Hume points out even Caesar has to command the loyalty of the Praetorian Guard. If that loyalty is to survive and flourish it needs to be based on some generally accepted legitimacy. Weber's definition of the state rightly includes both force and legitimacy. There is no soft power without hard power. But there is also no hard power without soft power. And in the international arena too, even with its supposed anarchy and power politics, lasting change requires legitimacy, soft power that is, as well as hard power.

It is not a surprise that those of us who live in developed countries rarely encounter hard power. One of the objectives of civilisation is precisely to transform hard power into soft power: anarchy into order, force into law, power into legitimate authority. These are the goals for which domestic political orders are established. They are also the goals of diplomacy.