

The Geopolitics of “Soft Power”

The ability of the state authorities to build and maintain international institutions

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If we are taking into consideration the relations between IR and diplomacy, founded on the contractual relations between the states, it can be argued that soft power in this case mostly depends on. From the time after 1945, as consequences of the bloody result of WWII, international, transnational, and supranational multilateral institutions and organizations became valued by the international community more and more primarily as a certain mechanism of the rule of international law for the sake to preserve the stability and functioning of the international system in global policy and IR. State authority can achieve soft power within the framework of institutional power, by designing institutions, agenda-setting, or creating the will of the coalition as a whole – like the policy of the USA within NATO, for instance.

In principle, there are five focal factors on which the soft power of the state authority directly depends within the framework of the international, transnational, and supranational institutions:

- The state authority has to be familiar with the norms and rules of multilateral international, transnational, and supranational institutions. Most of those institutions are today still indispensable factors for the sake of the operation of international communication and IR regardless of the fact that some of them are unfair, corrupted, and unequal.
- The state authority has to learn to set agendas not merely and visibly for its own selfish interest, but as well as for more broader public interest at least concerning the target group of the countries for the very practical reason that only the agenda which represents the greater number of public interest and political aims is having real chances to be accepted by others. Nevertheless, the process of setting the agenda surely reflects a discourse power but at the same time it as well as requires a state authority to have strong communication skills in order to create consensus in a group especially in the case when exists

divergent and/or diametrically opposite views.[i]

- The workable, attractive, and finally successful design solution for a problematic issue that is created by a state authority during the discussion usually attracts the representatives of other states or institutions/organizations to follow it and, consequently, increase its soft power.[ii]
- Credibility-saving is as well as of extreme significance to the soft power of the state authority in any kind of multilateral international institution like the national image in IR is a crucial element or factor of soft power. In practice, for instance, if the state authorities more comply with international rules and norms, usually the reputation of their countries is rising and, therefore and consequently, they can create stronger social and political capital which can enhance the soft power of their governments in the international society.
- An action by the state authority founded rather on inclusive interests than self-interests is increasing its soft power in IR. Contrary, selfish patriotic nationalism is becoming usually a disadvantage concerning the accumulation of soft power.[iii]

The soft power of any state government depends mostly on three fundamental resources:

- 1) The culture of the state, i.e., its people;
- 2) The political system of the state; and
- 3) The foreign policy of the government.

All three of these resources can be more or less attractive or not attractive for others for different political, ethnonational, confessional, or ideological reasons. For instance, soft power founded on the attractiveness of the government's foreign policy can be fruitful only if others see it as legitimate according to the norms and rules of international law and having moral authority.

Nevertheless, there are parenthetical conditions that are the focal factors in determining whether the resources of soft power are going to be translated into the behavior of attraction that can influence others and direct their policies toward favorable outcomes. It has to be clearly noticed that with soft power, what the target thinks is of extreme importance followed by the target matters as much as the agents.

In many practical cases, culture is an important resource of soft power but usually and especially by the countries of Great Powers (GP).[iv] Culture, in general, is the pattern of social behaviors by which certain groups are transmitting knowledge and values to other groups, and it is functioning on multiple levels.[v] However, many cultural aspects are universal, some of them are national or very particular to social strata or small groups (for instance, ethnocultural minorities).

One of the crucial features of culture is that it is never static, and different cultures are interacting in different ways. For Western policymakers, one of the cardinal questions in this matter is: Can Western cultural attraction reduce current extremist appeals in Islamic societies? Many researchers, especially Americans, see in this case an unbridgeable cultural and civilizational divide. However, in Iran, for instance, Western music and films are popular with many youngsters like in some other Islamic states. That is a way how the Western

cultural soft power is promulgated in Islamic culture and society.

However, culture, political values, and foreign policies are not the only resources that are producing soft power but they are cardinal. For instance, military resources are able to produce soft power too like hard power policy. The same is in many practical cases around the world true of economic resources which are used to attract the policy of a certain state.

A successful economy is a very significant and powerful resource of attraction under the umbrella of soft power, like both Japan and China in the case of the Asia-Pacific region, for instance, have each discovered. The economic power is able, at the same time, to provide the resources that are proper to be used as hard power inducements in the form of aid or coercive sanctions. In reality, however, it is very difficult to make difference in what part of an economic or financial relationship is comprised of hard and soft power. For instance, the centralized bureaucratic apparatus in Brussels of the European Union (EU) is keen to describe the desire by other (East European) states to join the EU as a sign of the EU's soft power (primarily seen in financial aid).[vi]

Many realists argue that the difference between hard and soft power is a contrast between realism and idealism, but, in essence, there is no contradiction between realism and soft power. In other words, soft power cannot be considered a form of liberalism or idealism as it is, in essence, a form of power or one way of getting desired results in politics. Nevertheless, legitimacy is a powerful reality and, consequently, competitive struggles over international legitimacy became a significant part of enhancing or depriving actors of soft power.

In soft power policy are no state authorities involved as diplomacy in our time includes a variety of non-state actors like different corporations, organizations, institutions, NGOs, etc. all of them have to a certain degree soft power of their own. In practice, even individual celebrities can use their soft power.

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Notes

[i] The 39th President of the USA, James Earl ("Jimmy") Carter (1977–1981) increased the American soft power and, in general, the image of the USA in IR when in 1978 he achieved the Camp David agreement which established peace between Israel and the leading Arab nation – Egypt. That was the most enduring diplomatic act of reconciliation in the Middle East since the 1940s.

[ii] For example, Chinese authority's constructive role in the 1955 Bandung Conference in seeking common ground while reserving differences to meetings of participants, became a key factor of conference's success and, consequently, the reputation of China and its soft power expanded in the countries of the third world (mainly Africa).

[iii] For instance, today's Chinese very positive and attractive influence in the African continent is partially due to the accumulated soft power in the 1960s as many African nations did not forget China's timely and disinterested aid to them at that time. Nevertheless, the soft power of China in the African emerging market countries is as well as originating in Chinese business activities which are naturally guided mainly by narrow self-interest.

[iv] The fundamental division of the world states according to their impact on global affairs is just into two basic categories:

1. The category of the GP (several top-powerful states).
2. The category of non-GP (middle power and low- or non-influential states).

A GP state is such a state that is considered to be a member of the most powerful and influential group of states in a hierarchical order of the world state-system. Today, this term is related to the state that is regarded to be among the most powerful states in the global political system [Richard W. Mansbach, Kirsten L. Taylor, *Introduction to Global Politics*, Second edition, London–New York: Routledge, 2012, 578].

The most problematic issue in the categorization of the states within the world state-system is applied criteria. Nevertheless, the criteria which define one state to be or not to be a great power is usually, at least from the academic point of view, of the following basic ten-point conditions:

1. A GP state is such a state that is on the top-rank level of military power, having the real capacity to protect and maintain its own security and to influence the politics of other states or other actors in international relations.
2. A GP state is a state that can be defeated militarily only by another member of the GP club or by an alliance of some of the states coming from this club.
3. A GP state is from the economic perspective of a powerful state. This condition is necessary but, however, in some cases (like today Japan or the USA at the time of its isolationist period of foreign policy) is not and sufficient condition for the GP status. This is a quantitative condition for the status of a GP. The other quantitative conditions are a certain level of GDP, GNP or GDI or the size of its armed forces. The economic conditions can be and of qualitative nature like a high level of industrialization or the capability to make and to use nuclear weapons.
4. A GP state has rather global, but not merely regional or continental, spheres of influence and interest. It means that a GP is such a state that possesses, exercises as well as defend its own interest throughout the globe.
5. A GP state has to be at the front rank in regard to its military power and therefore it has to enjoy both certain privileges and duties dealing with global peace and international security.
6. Probably, the most important feature of a GPs states is that they adopt and apply a „forward“ foreign policy having rather actual but not only potential impact on international affairs and other states or groups of them. It practically means that a GP state can not adopt a foreign policy of isolationism [Martin Griffiths, Terry O'Callaghan, Steven C. Roach, *International Relations: The Key Concepts*, Second edition, London–New York, Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2008, 134–135; Andrew Heywood, *Global Politics*, London–New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, 7. On the GP, see more in (Paul M. Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1987). On the historical role of the GP in international relations, see in (Bear F. Braumoeller, *The Great Powers and the International System: Systemic Theory in Empirical Perspective*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012)].

7. The members of the GP club tend to share a global outlook that is founded on their own national interests far from their homes.
8. The GPs have the strongest military forces and strongest economies to support their GP status. However, their strongest economic status is guaranteed by the combination of several inter-related factors: 1. Their large population, 2. Rich natural resources, 3. Most advanced technology, and 4. Highly educated labor force [Joshua S. Goldstein, *International Relations*, Fifth Edition, New York: Longman, 2003, 95].
9. The GP cannot easily lose its status in IR even after heavy military defeat due to its size, manpower, and long-term economic potentials.
10. The GP form alliances with smaller and weaker client (quisling) states.

A GP status to some state can be and formally recognized by the international community as it was the case by the League of Nations in the interwar time or by the United Nations Organization (UNO) after WWII up today (five veto-rights permanent member states of the Security Council – China, Russia, France, the USA, and the United Kingdom). A GP status of these five „extraordinary“ members of the UNSC is guaranteed by their practice of unanimity. In other words, a concept of the GP unanimity holds that on all resolutions and/or proposals before the UNSC, a veto by any one of these five (privileged) states can be used that practically means that one GP state can block further work of the UNSC on a certain issue [Steven L. Spiegel et al, *World Politics in a New Era*, Third Edition, Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning, 2004, 696]. Undoubtedly, one of the critical features of any GP state is its power projection that is a considerable influence, by force or not, beyond state’s borders, i.e. abroad, that less powerful countries could not match (for instance, the NATO military aggression against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1999 conducted in fact by the USA).

The GP states are interconnected within a *Great-Power System* that is the set of special relationships between and among this privileged club of the most powerful global actors in IR. Those special relations are conducted by their own rules and patterns of interaction as the GP have very extraordinary ways of behaving and treating each other. This special way is, however, not applied to other states or other actors in global politics and the system of IR.

[v] About this issue, see more in [Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, Basic Books: New York, 1973].

[vi] See more in [Martin Wolf, “Soft Power: The EU’s Greatest Gift”, *Financial Times*, 2005-02-02].

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