

“Getting Smarter” with Joseph Nye

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Abstract

“Smart Power” is a concept developed by an American political scientist and IR scholar Joseph S. Nye Jr. Over decades international relations was dominated by the notion of hard power, concentrating mainly on military strength and economic growth. However, with the increasing number of concerning issues presented in the 21st century, hard power alone has no chance in solving problems such as climate change and global pandemics. This is where Nye introduces his notion of “Smart Power,”- which he explains as “an ability to combine soft and hard power into a successful strategy where they reinforce rather undercut each other” (2021, p.10). This paper aims to answer the question how Joseph Nye’s notion of smart power successfully explains circumstances between powers since the end of the cold war till today. His Work on “Smart Power” proves the thesis, that among the recent IR scholars and theorists, Joseph Nye is one of the best at explaining the current circumstances between powers. This paper embarks on a content analysis of peer reviewed articles, books, statements, speeches and interviews that support the findings.

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Introduction

Joseph Nye is a former Dean at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government and currently he holds the position of the University Distinguished Service Professor there (Nye, 2021, p.11). He gained various experience through working as an Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, a Deputy under Secretary of State and Chair of the National Intelligence Council. In IR he is most well-known for developing the theory of neoliberalism with Robert Koehane in their book "Power and Interdependence" published in 1977. His contribution to IR and Political Science in general is invaluable. That's why he is often considered as one of the most influential contemporary IR scholars.

Nye developed the concept of "smart power" in 2003. He noted that the reason for the creation of this concept was to counter the misinterpretation that soft power (another concept created by him) could alone successfully produce an effective foreign policy strategy (Nye, 2009). The concept of smart power has gained enormous popularity after Hillary Clinton used it during one of her speeches, when she stated that, the U.S couldn't solve all of its problems on its own, and the world couldn't solve them without the U.S either. She said that the U.S must use what was called "smart power," - meaning the full range of tools at one's disposal (CNN, 2009). Clinton was right indeed. The 21st century is full of new challenges, and states that correctly use smart power have higher chance to succeed in the international arena than the ones that only depend on hard power. In later years, great powers such as U.S (mostly during Obama's administration) and China (during the Presidencies of Hu Jintao and later during Xi Jinping) have tried to combine the notion of smart power in their foreign policy strategies. However, not all of their attempts were successful in conveying the notion right in their foreign policy strategies.

Concepts

Joseph Nye shortly describes smart power as a combination of soft and hard power (2021, p.10). To fully acknowledge the notion of smart power it is important to first discuss how Nye describes power itself and then later explore the ideas around hard and soft powers.

According to Nye, power is a capacity to do things as one of desires. It is an ability to affect others to get the outcomes that one wants. Over centuries in politics resources have been the equivalent of power. However, resources do not always

guarantee that one will always achieve desired outcomes. To support his argument, Nye makes example of the amount of money spent on public and military resources by the U.S in previous decades. Even though, the military funding has always been greater than funding for public health resources, the spread of COVID 19 virus since 2019 killed more Americans than wars since 1945 (Nye, 2021, p.3).

Nye highlights 4 categories of power: structural, coercive, transactional and attractive (Nye, 2021). Hard power uses force, payment and some agenda-setting based on these categories, while soft power is characterized by an agenda-setting that should be regarded as legitimate by the target itself. Positive attraction and persuasion are part of the spectrum of behaviors that are included in soft power. In terms of metaphors, hard power is like the approach of carrots and sticks, while soft power is more like a magnet (Nye, 2021, p.6). Interesting fact about these concepts is that resources that are often associated with hard power in some instances can also produce soft power and vice versa. Some resources can even manifest soft and hard power at the same time. For example, the Marshall Plan had both, soft and hard power.

However, soft power is a tricky concept. The power of attraction completely rests in the "eyes of beholder" (Nye, 2021, p.6). Soft power depends fully on the minds of the audience, that's why during integrating this concept into the foreign policy strategy, it is crucial that the policy maker correctly choose the target audience. To support this argument, Nye makes an example of the influence of Hollywood industry. A Hollywood movie can leave a positive impression on the Brazilian audience, however the same movie can also cause disgust and antipathy in Saudi Arabia.

To achieve a successful smart power strategy, one requires what Nye calls "contextual intelligence," which is the intuitive diagnostic skill (Nye, 2009). This skill helps policymakers to position their tactics with the desired outcomes to generate smart strategies (Nye, 2009, pp. 160-163). Another reason why hard power is no longer enough to achieve one's objectives is that the political arena is no longer one-dimensional, states are required to play "different games" at the same time. Nye compares contemporary world politics to a three-dimensional chess game. At the top level there is military power, which is unipolar (U.S being the main player). Interstate economic relations lie on the middle level. There the world is multipolar. At the bottom level we meet transnational actors (issues such as terrorism, climate change, illegal drugs, pandemics etc.). At this level power is chaotically distributed and non-state actors have

as much influence and power as states. A three-dimensional chess game requires different perspectives and can only be won with the successful integration of hard and soft powers.

Smart Power into an Action

Every notion is tested by how well it explains the real-life situations and events. The greatness of Joseph Nye as an IR scholar and theorist lies in the fact that he can perfectly connect his concepts with the real events in IR and comprehensively prove his point. Nye is able to easily explain the end of the cold war and recent foreign policy strategies of the U.S and China in the frame of the notion of smart power.

The fall of the Berlin wall is often referred to as the beginning point of the Post-Cold War world. According to Nye, despite its numerous errors, US strategy during the cold war involved the right combination of hard and soft power. While the U.S. military was containing the Soviet aggression, American ideas were slowly diminishing communism behind the Iron Curtain. At the end, the Berlin Wall was destroyed by the population of the Soviet Union, who lost faith in communism and not by the American artillery (Nye, 2009, pp. 160-163). To conclude, even though the concept of smart power was only created in 2003, the right combination of hard and soft power still undeniably was one of the factors that had enormous contribution in the creation of the post-cold war world.

At the beginning of the 21st century smart power soon gained the enormous attention and states began to integrate it into their foreign policy strategies. In 2007, as the situation in Iraq continued to worsen and military power was no longer enough, Joseph Nye co-chaired a 'Smart Power Commission' for the Center for Strategic and International Studies to promote the notion of smart power to the American policy community. Soon after that, in 2007 Robert Gates, a Secretary of Defense, publicly stated that he was sure that, it was important for the US to invest more in soft power. After some years, James Mattis, another Defense Secretary, told Congress that if they didn't start investing more in soft power strategies soon, they would have to buy more bullets instead (Nye, 2020). This example perfectly illustrates how the combination of soft and hard power acquired the interest of the policymakers and why smart power was integrated in the foreign policy strategies.

Another state using the Smart power approach is China. However, it had mixed success in achieving its objectives. As China successfully developed its military and economic

resources, leaders of the communist party soon realized that it would be better if they accompanied hard power strategies with soft power (Nye, 2021, pp. 10-11). According to Nye, this was a smart strategy. As China's economic power and hard military grew, it could very easily frighten its neighbors, making them join balancing coalitions. So, in 2007, Chinese President Hu Jintao offered the Chinese Communist Party to invest more in soft power. Years after him President Xi Jinping continued the same approach. China invested billions of dollars to promote soft power. However, the polls indicated that China still lagged behind the U.S in overall attractiveness in most parts of the world ("China and the World," 2020,). Nye explained this situation as Chinese unwillingness to accept the fact that most of a country's soft power generally comes from its civil society rather than from its government. Propaganda is not credible and thus it often does not attract (Nye, 2021, pp. 10-11). Civil society won't be able to generate soft power if the party continues its tight control. For example, the Creation of Confucius Institutes to teach Chinese culture will not be able to generate positive attraction if Chinese navy ships continue to target fishing boats in the disputed waters all around the South China Sea. Hollywood would never be as successful as it is in generating soft power, if it was as controlled by the government as artists in China are. Propaganda is always easily identifiable and once people notice it, it loses its power to attract.

All of these examples illustrate how masterfully Nye explains circumstances between powers from post-cold war till today. He presents the challenges of the 21st century and successfully explains the power politics with the notion of smart power.

Smart Power in the Informational Age

In the information age, success is most of the time defined by stories and not armies (Nye, 2009, pp. 160-163). However, most of the states still lack the right combination of soft and hard power. To illustrate his hypothesis Nye makes the example of the American foreign policy. In his book "The Paradox of American Power: Why the World Only Superpower Can't Go It Alone" he states that the right usage of the mediums such as Hollywood films, student exchanges, and the internet could successfully increase the U.S soft power. In later years, the internet has also played quite a big role in disseminating America's democratic ideas around the world. Nye also argues, that positive immigration policies could also increase America's soft power. He believes that immigration could have a positive effect on the overall image of U.S. Immigrants could spread their culture in United States

and after that American culture would also reflect the culture of the rest of the world (Nye, 2003).

Nye also believes, that the U.S can really practice smart power by investing in global public goods (Nye, 2003). Global problems such as climate change, economic development and global pandemic require a global leadership. A demonstration of smart power would be the U.S increasing investment in policies that would help people and governments (all over the world) to get things that they need, but cannot attain on their own.

Nye makes another example of the current struggle against Islamist terrorism. He believes that the U.S cannot win unless the Muslim mainstream wins. It is clear, that people like Osama bin Laden can never be won over with soft power, however the hearts of the Muslim people can. Many Muslims disagree with U.S values and policies, but that does not mean that they support bin Laden's ideas. Soft power can reduce the number of extremists by attracting the mainstream (Nye, 2009, pp. 160-163).

With the example of U.S politics, Nye illustrated how thoughtful smart power strategy can help any state to achieve its objectives.

Critique of Smart Power

The notion of smart power, like any other idea has also been challenged by Nye's contemporaries. Paul Cammack, Ken Adelman and Anna Mundow have questioned Nye's intentions and notions in regards to smart power.

Paul Cammack, Head of the Department of Politics and Philosophy at the Manchester Metropolitan University stated that Nye's advocacy of soft power, which was recently "rebranded" as smart power, deserves critical scrutiny, and in reality reflects the implications for the desire of US to achieve global leadership (Cammack, 2008 p.4). Cammack insists, that Nye's position is far from multilateralism, because Smart power still depends on hard power and the desire of the U.S to lead. Cammack argues, that Nye's arguments are wrong, both in theory and in practice. In theory, he means the misuse of collective action theory and in practice - the fact that over decades the U.S was trying to present itself as the leader, but was unable to provide constructive and co-operative leadership for the world (Cammack, 2008 p.4).

American diplomat Ken Adelman, in his article "Not-So-Smart Power," argues that there is no correlation between American aid and how attractive the U.S seems. Adelman

criticized smart power and its instruments, such as exchange programs, foreign aid etc. He stated that countries such as Egypt and Pakistan, which received relatively bigger portions of U.S aid, were less in tune with U.S values, than countries that received remarkably less or even no U.S foreign aid at all (Adelman, 2011).

During the interview with Joseph Nye, Anna Mundow has also highlighted the overall public criticism of the concept, being called "the friendly face of American imperialism" (Mundow, 2011). Bush's doctrine was also often criticized for having an "imperialistic" nature, by putting more emphasis on American power over its partner countries (Mundow, 2011).

Joseph Nye defended smart power by noting that the criticism of the concept often comes from a misunderstanding of it. He acknowledged that he designed the theory to apply to any nation of any size, not just the U.S and the concept of smart power was meant to have more of an "enlightening" effect in the method of thinking in the context of the contemporary informational age (Mundow, 2011).

Conclusion

Over the years Joseph Nye has been able to successfully explain power relations between states from the cold war till today. His contribution to the neoliberal theory and the creation of concepts such as "soft" and "smart" power, which became the part of foreign policy strategies of numerous countries, are invaluable for the IR theory. Without hesitation, many identify Nye as one of the best current (post-cold war till today) IR scholars and theorists. With his notion of smart power, he has been able to comprehensively explain contemporary power politics and interestingly illustrate his theories with examples from current world politics. Examples of the U.S and China introducing the notion of smart power into their foreign policy show how the concept gained immediate popularity in policymakers all over the world and later proved successful in practice.

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