

The Factors of Soft Power's Influence on Politics

By [Dr. Vladislav B. Sotirović](#)

Global Research, April 07, 2023

Theme: [History](#)

All Global Research articles can be read in 51 languages by activating the Translate Website button below the author's name.

To receive Global Research's Daily Newsletter (selected articles), [click here](#).

Click the share button above to email/forward this article to your friends and colleagues. Follow us on [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#) and subscribe to our [Telegram Channel](#). Feel free to repost and share widely Global Research articles.

It is already at least two last decades worldwide recognized that soft power became an extremely significant instrument in both politics and diplomacy in the hands of many states but especially those whom we can call as great powers as they are the most influential on global politics and international relations. However, the crucial question arises: What are the focal factors which directly contribute to the increasing impact of soft power in contemporary diplomacy and consequently international relations? Among many such factors, there will be presented the top three concerning their importance of influence.

Top first factor. As the crucial factor, it can be marked the possession of nuclear power that is potentially making a major war which is unpredictable concerning its results and, therefore in essence, unlikely among global great powers.

The point is that with the proliferation of nuclear weapons of mass destruction, human beings profoundly experienced the horror of wars, and state authorities at the same time realized that it is increasingly difficult to achieve main or even any political goals by using only military power or by threatening to use it.[i] Nevertheless, it does not mean that military power no longer is effective, but as a matter of fact its real effects became significantly reduced and undermined in post-WWII international relations and global politics.

Another point of reality is that even though a state can in some cases conquer and occupy another state by the use of military force, it became an obvious problem of the successful ruling over the occupied territory, for instance, clearly shown in the case of the US "War on Terror" in Afghanistan (2001–2021). In addition, there is the prevailing global ethos of non-violence in international relations which has at least some influence on the reduction of the real possibility of using military power especially hard (nuclear) power in order to reach certain geopolitical or other goals. For that reason, for instance, the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) came into force in 1970 and became extended indefinitely in 1995.[ii]

Finally, concerning the question of costs, the use of certain economic, cultural, and other

non-military means in the form of soft power to achieve what the state's authorities want is more effective and viable compared to the classic way of coercive pressure and action. Consequently, and therefore, many states simply prefer to use soft power but not traditional hard power.

Top second factor. The second factor of the popularity and importance of the use of soft power is the popularization of advanced education for the very reason that in many global cases, such education is making very favorable conditions for the use of soft power for the realization of certain aims.[iii] With the extension of advanced education and the rise of literacy rates from the global perspective, it became much easier for the select public and not just elites to access information and, therefore, propaganda. To remind ourselves, in a traditional society, both information and knowledge are more or less monopolized and controlled by certain small groups (it can be, for instance, by religious authorities). However, the civilizational progress of advanced education and information technology was crucially destroying the monopoly on information and, therefore, education and knowledge.

Education is one of the most effective ways to produce and promote soft power. People with advanced education are, in general, more inclined to accept rational knowledge through their own judgment process but as well as attractively packed political-ideological propaganda of soft power as a result of the constant washing of brains by mass media. In principle, their ability to make choices between some suitable and unsuitable information enables people to accept more reasonable values, institutions, and ways of life according to their needs and beliefs based on certain knowledge. Nevertheless, it does not mean that by their own exercise of judgment select public always is making the best choices, but it is, in principle, desirable for them to be allowed to search themselves for better order and a better life.

In addition, together with the global process of democratization, it became very possible that domestic audiences by using their voting power will transform their vision into political reality and consequently force governments to accept their will. The promotion of advanced education, the increasing number of educated people according to the certain education system, and the loosening of social structures are making it possible across the globe that soft power via education and propaganda can produce better political-ideological results than direct use of hard power.

Top third factor. The third factor is the strong, penetrating, and overwhelming influential power of information and knowledge in general but particularly today in the era of the Internet or Information Revolution Age (IRA). Historically, at the time of the Middle Ages, a human could be promoted to the rank of professor just because of his/her exclusive monopoly of a book. To make a comparison, today just in China, for instance, there are more than seven billion published books.

For sure, information and knowledge flow more easily and quickly than weapons, and people's ways of thinking and practical actions are finally influenced by the information and knowledge to which they have access. A state's authorities in certain cases can exclude the physical way of influence, like coercive intervention and trade limitations (quotas), but on another side, it is at least in practice highly unlikely to reject the spread and penetration of public information. This is one of the reasons why the mass media and information industry, in general, have extreme power of influence in contemporary societies across the world.

Among the mediators of information and knowledge, it has to be stressed clearly that global television and the Internet are two of the focally effective instruments that each state prefers to use for the sake of promoting their own ideas and norms. In essence, both instruments are crucial to the use of soft power. As for very good examples, we can name the BBC and CNN as definitely two globally the most influential TV stations in the current post-Cold War mass media order. However, the bipolar mass media system became challenged by the existence of mediators from several emerging market countries, for instance, the Qatar-based Al-Jazeera satellite television, Russian Sputnik and Russia Today, or China's CCTV International Channel. Significantly, today the Chinese Xinhua News Agency is calling for fair global media order.

In an age of growing turbo-globalization, the capacity of some countries to organize information and effective communication can prove more relevant for its accumulation of soft power. As a matter of fact, the world after 1990 appears to be "flat" rather than a "pyramidal" hierarchical system of bureaucracy. Structural power based on a hierarchy system has become largely ineffective with the rapid horizontal diffusion of both information and knowledge based on it. Moreover, the social organizational structure has been forced to adapt to the flat situation, which makes the use of penetrating soft power easier than that of physical hard power.

Knowledge is an asset and a source of soft power for all countries. A country's soft power is highly dependent on its ability to provide thinking and knowledge to its citizens and in some cases the rest of the world. What is of focal importance to remember, historically, the center of knowledge and propaganda is at the same time the center of diffusion of soft power!

The production of soft power is as well as highly related to opinion leaders. It has to be stressed that opinion leaders' power is originating from their credibility, reliability, and resolution of public affairs. In traditional societies, opinion leaders based on their religious duties had great power in affecting the opinion and thinking of the people and, therefore, their behavior.

*

Note to readers: Please click the share button above. Follow us on Instagram and Twitter and subscribe to our Telegram Channel. Feel free to repost and share widely Global Research articles.

Dr. Vladislav B. Sotirović is a former university professor in Vilnius, Lithuania. He is a Research Fellow at the Center for Geostrategic Studies. He is a regular contributor to Global Research.

Notes

[i] The term nuclear proliferation is specifically referring to the spread of nuclear weapons, and, in a more general sense of meaning to the spread of nuclear technology and knowledge that might be put to military use. Nevertheless, if we talk about proliferation, the most concern is given to its horizontal feature what practically means the spread of nuclear weapons to states not yet possessing them. On contrary, the vertical proliferation is one regarding the increase in numbers or dispersion of nuclear weapons by nuclear weapons states. However, the vertical proliferation of nuclear weapons became less regarding since the winding down of the superpower arms race, although slow disarmament is of concern to non-nuclear states.

Nuclear proliferation is, in principle, controlled by the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT). The NPT recognizes five great powers nuclear states but, nevertheless, some states are still outside the NPT having developed nuclear capabilities. Increasingly, the prospect of nuclear weapons in the hands of terrorist organizations (for instance, al-Qaeda), is creating real concern by the international community. Nevertheless, nuclear proliferation is globally regarded to be, in fact, a problem for the very reason of the fear that it will increase the probability of nuclear weapons being used.

There are those experts in international relations who claim that nuclear proliferation could enhance the level of international security by the policy of spreading the paralyzing effects of deterrence in regions that otherwise have a high probability of recurrent conventional war. Because of the close links between civil and military nuclear technology, many states are able to reduce the time necessary to acquire a nuclear weapon by acquiring a range of nuclear technologies for civil purposes. As a matter of fact, there are already several states which achieved the so-called "threshold status" in which they either have unannounced nuclear weapon capabilities or could develop them extremely quickly if necessary.

[ii] It has to be noted that the NPT has two types of signatories: 1) The states that had tested nuclear weapons before 1967 or Nuclear Weapons States (NWS-China, France, Russia, the USA, and the UK); and 2) Non-nuclear weapon states (NNWS). Nevertheless, according to the NPT, NWS keep their nuclear weapons in the short term but commit to disarmament. As well as, they may not assist other states to acquire nuclear weapons. NNWS commit never to receive or develop nuclear weapons, and to accept International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspections to verify this commitment. However, this commitment is not forbidding them to develop nuclear energy capabilities – i.e., nuclear capabilities for civil purposes.

In practice, NNWS are very dissatisfied with the bloc of countries called NWS within the NPT for the reason of slow progress in their nuclear disarmament according to the treaty. The NPT has 187 signatories but four states still did not sign it: Israel, Cuba, Pakistan, and India. North Korea withdrew in 2003 from NPT. With regard to nuclear tests in 1998 by Pakistan and India as well as a real nuclear weapon capability of Israel, this is continuing to diminish the success of NPT and causes security concerns for NNWS. The same can be said regarding North Korea's withdrawal and later nuclear weapons testing as all of such cases are diminishing belief in the effectiveness of the NPT.

[iii] Education is today a major industry in all G7 countries and becoming such in several emerging markets states. During the last 30 years, an increasing proportion of people have obtained high school certificates, followed by advanced professional degrees. Nevertheless, education became a social institution and, therefore, very proper to reach the fundamental goals using soft power within the framework of education. Nevertheless, like with other social institutions, education has both manifest (open, stated, or official) and latent (unofficial, hidden). For sure, the focal manifest function of education is the transmission of knowledge. In other words, schools are teaching students how to read, speak, foreign languages, or do some practical work, etc. However, education has another important manifest: bestowing status. In addition to these manifest functions, schools perform a number of latent functions like transmitting culture and cultural values, promoting certain social and/or political ideas, maintaining social control, or serving as agents of change. Therefore, these latent functions of schools and education are, in fact, the fundamental framework for the promulgation of soft power.

Nevertheless, education as a social institution is performing one very significant function – transmitting the dominant culture. The school system is exposing each generation of young people to the existing official norms, beliefs, standards, and values of certain cultures but usually of the majority group. In many multicultural, multiconfessional, or multiethnic societies, there are two underlying questions raised concerning the education system: 1) Which ideas and values have to be fundamental for

instruction?; and 2) Which culture should be transmitted by the schools and universities?

Education in many countries is directly serving the latent function of promoting social and political integration by transforming a population composed of diverse racial, ethnic, and religious groups into a society whose members share. To some extent, for instance, a common identity based on some principles including pure political as citizenship. The school system in many countries like the USA traditionally has been playing a significant function in socializing the kids of immigrants into the values, norms, and beliefs of the dominant culture – the culture of the majority population. The idea behind such practice is that the common identity and social integration backed by education is fostering societal stability and consensus. In other words, the importance of education from a very sociological point of view is that education, and particularly by learning history, students gain an understanding of the common values in society, uniting a multitude of separate individuals. These common values usually include religious and moral beliefs and a sense of self-discipline. Therefore, education as soft power enables students to internalize the social rules and cultural values that contribute to the functioning of society but in many cases and realization of certain political aims.

However, every contemporary education system has the inhibiting effect that is especially apparent in the so-called “hidden curriculum” which is functioning more or less as soft power. In practice, the school system is very bureaucratic and the majority of the teachers rely on the official rules and regulations of schools in order to maintain order. The need for both control and discipline in many cases is taking precedence over the learning process. However, if teachers are focusing on obedience to the rules and official values promoted by the society and/or state, both students and teachers are, in fact, becoming, victims of the “hidden curriculum” or to the standards of behavior that are deemed proper by society and are taught subtly in schools. A proper education system is the dynamic of innovation and, therefore, it is contributing to the production of new knowledge, which is a necessary requirement for the use of it as soft power. For instance, the US is using its system of education for international students as an instrument of political-ideological soft power to promote American values. However, there is no direct implications that these international students will accept pro-American attitudes and values when they graduate and (if) return to their home countries, but they are really a force that must not be ignored in the process of promoting the US (sub)culture, attitudes, and values.

Finally, the popularization of certain languages is usually regarded as a highly favorable instrument for the accumulation of soft power. Historically, since Ch. Columbus’ discovering of America in 1492, the Spanish language was extremely useful in Europe as a language of commerce. The French language as *lingua franca* was an international language of both diplomacy and law; while after WWII English language became a global language in international communication in general. Today, the English is an official language (or one of the official languages) in 45 states around the world followed by the fact that 1/3 of the world’s population is speaking English. Consequently, today, English language is a *lingua franca* of the world. On another side, more than 1.4 billion people (some 1/5 of the world’s population) is speaking Chinese as their mother tongue but the majority of Chinese speakers are living in China and, therefore, the internationalization of the Chinese language as soft power’s instrument does not, actually, compare to that role of English or French. Nevertheless, it is clear that language and soft power are mutually reinforcing each other existing in a cause-and-effect relationship. In one word, the popularization of certain languages can be very beneficial to the accumulation and/or extension of soft power in the areas of politics, culture, and ideology.

Featured image is from the author

[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)

[Become a Member of Global Research](#)

Articles by: [Dr. Vladislav B. Sotirović](#)

Disclaimer: The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: publications@globalresearch.ca

www.globalresearch.ca contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: publications@globalresearch.ca