The Role of Soft Power in International Security

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Abstract

The paper investigated the Role of Soft Power in International Security. Power is a very fundamental element with which nations can actualize their national interest. The actualization of a nation's national interest to a large extent depends on the available power at its disposal. The use of force in the pursuit of foreign policy has been outlawed as it contravenes international laws. This makes soft power a vital instrument in the pursuit of the national interest of states. The realist theory propounded by Hans J. Morganthau in 1948 was adopted as the theoretical framework. The secondary source of data was deployed for the study; it involves the collection of data from textbooks, magazines and conference papers, amongst others. The study concluded that there are different kinds of power through which countries can deploy in the realization of their national interest. These include natural resources, technological advancement, leadership qualities, military power, etc. The study recommended that states recognize the importance of social media and technological innovations in shaping soft power strategies and the relationship between soft power and democracy.

Keywords: Soft Power, Hard Power, Security, National Interest, Conflict

Introduction

Power is a vital instrument of a state whose legitimacy is derived within the confines of authority. Thus, power becomes meaningful when exercised within the context of authority. Authority according to Weber (1919) is the right to make binding decisions. The notion of power is not new in the international system as nations have relied on power in the pursuit of their national interest. Power can therefore take different dimensions; economic, political, national resources, military and technological power, etc. This can be further categorized into soft and hard power. Soft power has become a critical tool in international relations (Blair, et al., 2022, Yağci, 2018). While the concept was introduced by the Political Scientist, Joseph Nye, the lack of a widely accepted definition and limited empirical research contribute to the gaps in the study of soft power. Nonetheless, the importance of soft power is undeniable, particularly as traditional power structures are challenged, and new actors emerge. Soft power operates through attraction and persuasion, making it a valuable tool in modern diplomacy, alongside hard power (Anlamassova, et al., 2022).

Countries are increasingly employing soft power to build relationships, establish trust, and promote their values and interests through cultural exchange, educational programs, and humanitarian aid. However, critics argue that the concept is vague and difficult to measure, and inconsistent actions can undermine soft power strategies, leading to a loss of credibility and influence (Duarte and Ferreira-Pereira, 2022). Balancing soft power with hard power is essential for effective interaction.

Understanding soft power and its various forms and applications is critical to crafting policies that promote peace, cooperation, and mutual understanding among nations in a fast-changing world. Therefore, recognizing the role of soft power in the contemporary global system is essential for any analysis of international relations (Wilson, 2008).

The study recognizes that while soft power can be a useful tool in the actualization of a nation's national interest, it must be used strategically and in conjunction with other approaches to achieve the desired outcomes.

Statement of the Problem

Soft power, a concept developed by Joseph Nye, refers to the ability to influence others through attraction and persuasion rather than coercion or force. Soft power involves the use of non-coercive factors such as culture, ideology, and diplomacy can play a role in addressing these issues. In the case of Terrorism in Nigeria: Boko Haram, a militant group based in northeastern Nigeria, has been responsible for a significant portion of terrorist activities in the country. Several schools of thought have attributed the activities of Boko Haram insurgents to be rooted in social, economic, and political issues. For instance, Mohammed (2014) has attributed the causes of Boko Haram to poverty and social inequality that ravages the Northern region. This socio-economic disparity makes the people to be vulnerable and easily persuaded to join the deadly sect. As reported by Ali (2016), Boko Haram insurgents often deploy different techniques in recruitment; the promise of cases and virgin women when they get to heaven. This strategy has made it easy to get more members into the group. Soft power also has been helpful in addressing other issues that portend grave danger to international peace and security. A good example is the dispute over Bakassi Peninsula between Nigeria and Cameroon; Nigeria decided to obey the decision of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in the interest of peace and security. Why hard power often require the use of military force and economic sanctions, soft power always emphasizes persuasion and diplomacy in conditioning the behaviour of another in other to actualize set goals/objectives

Aim and Objectives of Study

The aim of this paper is to examine the role of soft power in international security; the specific objectives are as follows:

1.) Examine the nature of soft power and hard power in the global system.
2.) Analyze the relevance of soft power in contemporary diplomacy
3.) Identify the role of soft power in conflict resolution.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework adopted for this study is the realist theory propounded by Hans J. Morgenthau in 1948. The realist theory derives its impulse from the view that the nature of man is sinful and conflictual. Realism holds that political theory must flow from observation of the history and experience of people and states and that these show a pattern of violent and aggressive behaviour (Richard and Sinclair, 1996). Thus, the highest moral duty of the state is its preservation. To accomplish this, states must utilize power. According to Hans J. Morgenthau (1978; p.57), "The interest of the state defined in terms of power, is the primary moral guide by which policies are developed, but prudence in pursuing that interest is the primary ethical guide for policymakers". In the world of power politics, states must increase their power to guarantee their survival. According to Morgenthau (1978, p.56), "Thus, the goal of the state has come to include the search for ways to acquire and keep power, increase power and demonstrate power. In short, in a world of conflicting states seeking power, or a world confirmed by historical experience and by the nature of man, states must engage in power politics to survive, and they should do anything prudent or otherwise to achieve that goal''.

According to Walker (1993:p.33), "There is no single tradition of realism but rather a knot of historically constituted tensions, contradictions and evasions''. There are therefore different types of realism which Timothy (1993, p.33), has classified into three: classical realism (up to the twentieth century), modern realism (1939 – 1979) and neo-realism (1979 to date). Timothy (1993:41), admits that "this periodization does not however overcome the problem of diversity since not all classical writers agree on the causes of war, or whether the balance of power is a natural state or one which must be created for the effective management of global power".

According to Ogonor (2007: p.35), realism is predicated on the following primary assumptions:

1. It assumes that there is no essential harmony of interest among nations and that nation-states often have conflicting national objectives, some of which lead to war.

2. Realism posits that the capabilities of a state are crucial for the outcome of international conflict and for the ability of one state to influence another state's behaviour.
3. Realists posit that there are severe limitations in the extent to which political reforms or education can alter human nature. Man is evil, sinful and power-seeking. According to the realist, human nature is not innately perfect. The task of the statesman lies in fashioning a political system or framework within which the human propensity to engage in conflict can be minimized.
4. Realists assumed that moral principles in their abstract formulation cannot be applied to political actions.

Relevance of the Theoretical Framework to the Study

The relevance of this theory to the study is derived from the fact that power is the determining instrument through which states can actualize their national interest. Power in this sense is not defined only in military terms but involves other elements such as the topography of a state, natural resources, technology, persuasion, diplomacy, economic development, national morale and leadership quality amongst others. Why does hard power emphasize the use of force, and soft power emphasizes persuasion in influencing the behaviour of another actor in the global system.

Conceptual Clarification

Meaning of Soft Power

Power means the ability to do things and control others, to get others to do what they otherwise would not. Because the ability to control others is often associated with the possession of certain resources, authoritative decision-makers often define power as the possession of population, territory, natural resources, economic size, military forces, and political stability. For example, in the agrarian economies of eighteenth-century Europe, the population was a critical power resource since it provided a base for taxes and the recruitment of infantry. Traditionally, the test of a great power was its strength in war. Today, however, the definition of power is losing its emphasis on military force and conquest that marked earlier eras. The factors of technology, education, and economic growth are becoming more significant in international power, while geography,

population, and raw materials are becoming somewhat less important. This makes soft power vital in the actualization of the national interest of states.

The end of the American-Soviet duality that characterized the Cold War paved the way for a completely new balance of power and a new way to exercise that power. It is at this historical turning point, with memories of World Wars and 'Mutually Assured Destruction' still fresh in the minds of people and governments, as well as the lack of a clear enemy in the world, where we first come in contact with 'soft power' (Nye, 2004). While military force remains the ultimate form of power in a self-help system, the use of force has become more costly for modern great powers than it was in earlier centuries. Other instruments such as communications, organizational and institutional skills, and manipulation of interdependence have become important (Nye, 2004). In the 1980s, the Political Scientist, Joseph Nye Jr. coined the term soft power, defining it as a country's ability to influence others without resorting to coercive pressure. In practice, that process entails countries projecting their values, ideals, and culture across borders to foster goodwill and strengthen partnerships (Nye, 2004).

Meaning of International Security

Security is a highly contested concept. Is it at all possible to use it as a scholarly concept? Security is a word in common use, concerning a wide variety of personal and collective activities and conditions. One can distinguish between security in normal daily activities (job, economy, sex, transport, food), security for positive, desirable conditions (democracy, freedom, prosperity, development, a good life), and security against negative conditions (war, pollution, crime, all kinds of threats). Former US Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara conceived security as development. For him, Security policy became an important tool for individual nation-states to further their national interests by attempting to influence the international system. The pursuit of international security policy was the task of the United Nations (UN), which lost much of its influence due to the East-West confrontation. International security therefore can be seen as security among states. This conception of international security belongs to the twentieth century.

In the contemporary global system, threats are no longer primarily coming from states. Threats are coming from ethnic groups obsessed with hyper-nationalism, criminal gangs, epidemics, AIDS, terrorism, dangerous food, poverty, economic

mismanagement, over-population, failed states, flows of refugees, and, most importantly, from pollution and the effects of pollution, the irrigation and destruction of nature, and the diversification of nature (Kaldor, 1999). The victims of the new threats are primarily the single individual (individual or human security), society (societal security), and the globe (global security). The physical and economic survival of the individual is threatened. The survival of societies is threatened, as concerns identity and coherence (Kaldor, 1999). Any conception of international security must take into consideration the aforementioned issues.

Methodology

The secondary source of data was utilized for this study. The secondary source of data refers to the set of data collated or authored by another researcher archives in the form of documents collected for a purpose other than the present one in which it is being used (Asika, 2006). Selltiz et al (1977), have declared that the usefulness of secondary sources of data lies in the fact that information of this sort is collected periodically. Also, gathering information from such sources does not require the cooperation or assistance of the individual about whom information is being sought. The sources of data for this study include magazines, textbooks, journals and seminar papers among others. Content analysis was deployed as the method of data analysis.

Results and Discussions

The Nature of Soft Power and Hard Power in the Global System

Soft power and hard power are two fundamental concepts in the field of international relations that describe distinct means by which countries can exert influence over others (Bae and Lee, 2020). Soft power, which rests upon persuasion and attraction, is often associated with promoting values and ideas, whereas hard power relies on coercion and force and is more focused on achieving specific objectives (Lebedeva, 2017). Also, soft power can be exercised through various channels, including cultural diplomacy, public diplomacy, and international aid and assistance etc.

Notably, one of the key advantages of soft power is its potential for long-term sustainability (Ilgen, 2016, Nye, 2016). By building lasting relationships and fostering trust between nations, soft power can establish a positive image of a

country that attracts foreign investment and tourism. However, assessing the impact of soft power can be challenging, and its outcomes may not be immediately apparent, particularly in situations where there is a direct conflict of interest. In contrast, hard power can be implemented through military intervention, economic sanctions, and trade policies, among other means (Gallarotti, 2011). One of the significant benefits of hard power is its ability to achieve concrete outcomes quickly, such as the removal of a hostile regime or the prevention of a terrorist attack (Kearn, 2011, Barr, et al., 2015). However, hard power can be costly, and it may engender resentment and retaliation from other nations, particularly in cases where there is a shared interest or common goal.

Soft power and hard power are essential tools in international relations and a country that can effectively utilize both is likely to be more successful in achieving its goals in the global arena. While soft power may be more sustainable over the long term, hard power can be more effective in the short term.

The Relevance of Soft Power in Contemporary Diplomacy

The shift towards soft power in international relations represents a significant departure from the traditional reliance on hard power tactics, such as military force or economic coercion. Soft power, by contrast, emphasizes the use of attraction, persuasion, and cultural influence to achieve foreign policy objectives. This shift has been driven in part by the increasing interconnectedness of the world, which has made it more difficult for countries to achieve their objectives through traditional hard power means alone (Ohnesorge, 2019). The rise of digital communication technologies, social media, and other forms of online interaction has greatly increased the visibility and impact of soft power in international relations. This has allowed countries to project their values and ideas on a global scale and to shape the global discourse on important issues.

Soft power has become a critical tool for countries to shape public opinion and build lasting relationships with other nations (Hunter, 2009). Despite the many advantages of soft power, it is important to note that it is not a substitute for hard power. In some cases, hard power may be necessary to achieve foreign policy objectives, particularly in situations where there is a direct conflict of interests or where a country's security is at risk. Moreover, soft power can be difficult to

measure and quantify, and its effects may not be immediately apparent (Fels, 2012).

The shift towards soft power in international relations represents an important recognition of the role that values, ideas, and culture play in shaping global politics. By emphasizing the importance of attraction and persuasion over coercion and force, soft power has the potential to promote greater understanding and cooperation among nations and to build a more stable and peaceful international system. However, it is important to recognize that soft power is not a panacea and that a balanced approach that incorporates both hard and soft power tactics is necessary to achieve foreign policy objectives in a complex and interconnected world.

The Role of Soft Power in Conflict Resolution

Soft power can indeed play an important role in conflict resolution by promoting understanding, trust, and cooperation among conflicting parties. This approach recognizes that conflicts often arise from differences in values, ideologies, and interests and that resolving them requires addressing these underlying issues rather than simply using military or economic force (Antwi-Boateng and Alhashmi, 2022). One key advantage of soft power in conflict resolution is its ability to build trust and understanding between conflicting parties. By promoting a country's values and interests, soft power can help to create a more favourable environment for negotiations and compromise and can encourage conflicting parties to view each other more positively (Sabala, 2019). This can lead to greater cooperation and a greater willingness to find common ground, which is essential for achieving lasting peace and stability.

Moreover, soft power can be used to promote reconciliation and peace in regions of the world that are experiencing political instability or conflict. By emphasizing common values and interests, and by promoting cultural exchange and dialogue, soft power can help to bridge the divides that often fuel conflict and promote greater understanding and empathy among conflicting parties (Bentrovato, 2021). This can be particularly effective in situations where traditional hard power tactics have failed, or where the use of force would only serve to exacerbate the conflict. However, it is important to recognize that soft power is not a panacea for conflict

resolution. In some cases, the use of hard power may be necessary to achieve a resolution, particularly in situations where one or more parties are unwilling to negotiate or compromise.

Moreover, the effectiveness of soft power in conflict resolution depends on several factors, including the nature of the conflict, the interests and values of the parties involved, and the overall geopolitical context. In brief, the role of soft power in conflict resolution is an important area of study in international relations. By promoting trust, understanding and cooperation among conflicting parties, soft power can help to build lasting peace and stability in regions of the world that are experiencing political instability or conflict. However, the effectiveness of soft power in conflict resolution depends on several factors, and a balanced approach that incorporates both soft and hard power tactics is often necessary to achieve successful resolutions.

Examples of Soft Power in Contemporary International Relations

China's Soft Power Strategy: China's soft power strategy has been a key component of its efforts to expand its global influence and achieve its foreign policy objectives. Through investments in cultural and educational exchanges, China has sought to promote its traditional cultural values and enhance its image as a responsible global leader (Li and Xue, 2022). Additionally, China has sought to use its economic power to promote its interests in other countries, particularly through its Belt and Road Initiative, which aims to enhance infrastructure development and connectivity across Asia and beyond. But, China's soft power strategy has faced several challenges and limitations. One major challenge has been the perception of China as an authoritarian regime, which has raised concerns among some countries about the compatibility of Chinese values and norms with their own. This has been particularly evident in the context of China's growing influence in Africa and other parts of the developing world, where some have expressed concern about the potential risks of China's economic and political influence (Sun, 2023, Yağci, 2018).

China's soft power efforts have also faced criticism for being too heavily focused on propaganda and state-controlled media, rather than on genuine cultural exchange and dialogue (Repnikova, 2022). Some have argued that China's efforts

to promote its cultural values are largely driven by a desire to enhance its global influence and power, rather than by a genuine interest in promoting cross-cultural understanding and cooperation. While China's soft power strategy has been an important component of its foreign policy objectives, it has faced several challenges and limitations (Islam, 2022). While some countries have embraced China's influence, others have been more sceptical, raising concerns about the compatibility of Chinese values and norms with their own (Wang, 2008). Additionally, China's soft power efforts have faced criticism for being too heavily focused on propaganda and state-controlled media, rather than on genuine cultural exchange and dialogue.

The European Union's Soft Power Strategy: The European Union's soft power strategy has been a cornerstone of its foreign policy objectives and has helped to enhance its global influence and reputation. By promoting its values of human rights, democracy, and the rule of law, the EU has been able to foster a positive image and build trust among countries around the world (Duarte and Ferreira-Pereira, 2022). The EU's soft power strategy has also faced many challenges and limitations. One challenge has been the increasing polarization within Europe, which has undermined the EU's ability to project a united front and promote its values effectively. In addition, the EU's soft power efforts have sometimes been criticized for being too focused on moralism and idealism, rather than on pragmatic solutions to pressing global issues (Arifon, 2018). The EU's soft power strategy has also been limited by its internal constraints, such as budgetary limitations and bureaucratic inefficiencies. This has sometimes undermined the effectiveness of its development aid programs and other initiatives aimed at promoting its soft power (Van Langenhove, 2017).

Notwithstanding these challenges and limitations, the EU's soft power strategy has been largely successful in promoting cooperation and collaboration among European countries and with other countries around the world. The EU has been able to build strong partnerships and alliances, particularly in the areas of trade and development, and has been able to exert significant influence on global issues such as climate change and migration (Ferreira-Pereira and Pinto, 2021). The European Union's soft power strategy has been an important component of its foreign policy objectives and has helped to enhance its global influence and

reputation. While the EU's soft power efforts have faced some challenges and limitations, they have largely been successful in promoting cooperation and collaboration among European countries and with other countries around the world.

The United States' Soft Power Strategy: The United States' soft power strategy has been a key component of its foreign policy for decades. However, in recent years, the effectiveness of the United States' soft power has been called into question (Parmar, and Cox, 2010). The United States' decision to withdraw from key international agreements, such as the Paris Climate Agreement and the Iran Nuclear Deal, has damaged its reputation as a reliable partner in global affairs (Nye, 2004). Also, the United States' use of military force in the Middle East has undermined its soft power strategy. The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as the ongoing conflict in Syria, have been widely criticized and have tarnished the United States' image as a promoter of democracy and human rights (Petersen and Jones, 2022).

The United States' soft power efforts have also been criticized for being too focused on American exceptionalism and promoting its interests rather than on building genuine partnerships and promoting shared values. This has led to a perception that the United States is more interested in asserting its power than in promoting global stability and prosperity (Smith, 2011). The United States' soft power strategy has been weakened in recent years by its foreign policy decisions and military interventions (Matheson, 2020). However, the United States still possesses significant soft power assets and can play a positive role in promoting global stability and prosperity if it prioritizes building genuine partnerships and promoting shared values (Zahran and Ramos, 2010).

Findings

1.) It was observed in the study that there is a strong relationship between soft power and democracy. Soft power has often been associated with democratic values such as freedom of speech, human rights, and the rule of law. However, authoritarian states have also used soft power to influence other countries, and their models of governance can undermine democratic values.

2.) It was observed in the course of the study that there are different kinds of power through which countries can deploy in the realization of their national interest. These include natural resources, technological advancement, leadership qualities, and military power etc.

Conclusion

The study demonstrates that the effectiveness of soft power in the contemporary global system is a subject of ongoing debate and controversy. While some argue that soft power is a highly effective tool for maintaining international security, others contend that it is often overestimated, and hard power is more effective in achieving tangible results. The role of social media and technology in soft power is also contested, with some viewing it as an advantage, while others see it as a hindrance. A balanced approach that incorporates both soft and hard power strategies is necessary to ensure security and protect strategic interests. Soft power can play a vital role in promoting peace, stability, and cooperation, but it is not a panacea for all foreign policy objectives. In the changing landscape of global politics, policymakers must have a nuanced understanding of the benefits and challenges of soft power.

Soft power has the potential to shape international relations positively, promoting a country's interests and values through cultural and economic exchange, building trust and understanding between countries, and contributing to conflict resolution. Nonetheless, policymakers should be aware of the limitations of soft power and use it strategically, in combination with hard power, to achieve their objectives.

Recommendations

1.) Policymakers must adopt a nuanced approach that balances soft power with hard power to ensure a country's security interests.
2.) States should be aware of the potential downsides of soft power, such as manipulation and masking of underlying motives.
3.) Finally, states must recognize the importance of social media and technological innovations in shaping soft power strategies and the relationship between soft power and democracy.

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