Soft Power and Public Diplomacy: Perspectives of the Global South

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Abstract

In contemporary times, public diplomacy is increasingly regarded as one of the most important means of augmenting one's soft power. The rise of the notion of soft power in turn represents the importance attached to ideas, perceptions and legitimacy by states and non-state actors in today's globalised international system. Public diplomacy divisions are increasingly being set up by many countries: both in the global north and the global south. This article seeks to engage with the following question: do the notion of soft power and the instruments of public diplomacy play out differently in the global south from that in the global north?

Without undermining the importance of such a concept and practice in today's world politics, this paper seeks to scrutinise the notion of soft power and the mechanism of public diplomacy from the perspective of the global south. It argues that the global north has an advantage in terms of wielding this soft power through the means provided by public diplomacy over the global south. This advantage is gained both due to structural reasons as well as reasons of means and resources.

Structurally, the way soft power has been defined and the language of public diplomacy has already been handed down by those who came up with the term specifically: that is the northern countries. Thus the framework and discourses on soft power are hegemonic in nature. What is required is a re-construction of soft power and public diplomacy from the perspective of the south- making it more inclusive.

Keywords- Soft Power; Public Diplomacy; Global South; Hegemony

"...Soft power should not be understood in juxtaposition to hard power but as a continuation of it by different means." – Janice Bially Mattern (2005)

Introduction

What do we mean when we refer to the "South" while "re-imagining global order from the perspective of the South"? The north south divide is based not on geographical demarcations but on socio-economic demarcations. The north consists of the developed countries which mainly includes, what was known as the first world countries during the cold war and some second world countries. The global south includes the less developed countries which was known as the third world during the cold war years. The global south differentiates itself from the north on the basis of economy, development, human security, and technological progress. There have been numerous historical reasons for the present status of the global south. Some of these reasons have been analysed by various theories like the dependency theory, theories of neo-colonialism, modernisation theories and others. These global south countries have grouped together in forms of movements like NAM, NIEO, group of 77, and tried to question the existing order which benefits the countries of the global north. For the past few years, with the rise of some of the countries of the global south like China, India, Brazil and South Africa plus the increasing developmental standards in the Latin American countries, and the recent financial crisis engulfing the US and Europe, there has been a global discussion on a rising global south.

In such a continuously changing international scenario, it becomes necessary to look at the

concepts of soft power and public diplomacy from the perspective of the global south. It argues that the global north has an advantage in terms of wielding this soft power through the means provided by public diplomacy over the global south. However, one can say that, "there is a third world in every first world and a first world in every third world" (Trinh T. Minh-ha 1987), or that the countries in the global south are themselves so diverse that it would be unjust and unfair to group them together as a whole. Therefore for the purpose of the article, the global south has been divided into two categories. One category includes the emerging powers in the global south which includes countries like India, China, Brazil, South Africa and the rising economies of South East Asia like Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Cambodia and others. The rest of the countries in the global south will fall in the second category.

The article is divided into the following sections: the first section will deal with an exposition of the terms soft power and public diplomacy; the second section will be focusing on the importance of the rise of such a concept in today's world and the changing dynamics of the context of its operation; the third section will enumerate the various grounds on which the global north has an advantage to the global south in leveraging its soft power through instruments of public diplomacy; the last section will be the conclusion which will summarise the arguments and dwell on the importance of making this concept and practice more inclusive of the global south history and experiences.

Section I- Definitional Aspects

Soft power is defined by Joseph Nye (2008) as "the ability to affect others to obtain outcomes one wants through attraction rather than coercion or payment." It means "co-opting" people rather than "coercing" them. It aims to change the "actor's underlying interests and preferences". Hence, "soft power rests on the ability to shape the preferences of others." According to D. W. Kearn, Jr (2011),

"Soft Power works by influencing how actors define their ends or goals and the means they employ to achieve those ends."[1] For Nye (2008), the "resources" of soft power are "intangible assets" such as "culture (in places where it is attractive to others), values (when the state lives up to them at home and abroad) and foreign policies that are seen as legitimate or having a moral authority." According to Gallarotti (2011), "while realists have traditionally looked at a nation's influence in the world as a function of these tangible and coercive sources of power, Nye has highlighted the influence that derives from a more intangible and enlightened source: a positive image in world affairs that endears nations to other nations in world polity."[2] Hence, "Soft power is a form of power that has its source in ideas rather than material bases" (J. B. Mattern 2005).

Public diplomacy is a means of promoting an actor's soft power. Public Diplomacy in this study is defined as the use of "monologue, dialogue or collaboration"[3] which are specific terms used by

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[1] D. W. Kearn, Jr. further writes, "The idea of co-opting an actor would thus entail transforming its interests and preferences to be in line with those of the leading state."

[2] Gallarotti (2011) writes that "it should be noted that although there is a tendency to equate hard power with tangible resources and soft power with intangible resources, their principle distinction does not depend on tangibility...Nye's own logic would allow for intangible applications of hard power...For example, a threat is intangible....Furthermore, a large military force can generate attraction effects through 'perceptions of invincibility'." He further writes, "In order to effect soft power, the context of actions (whether tangible or intangible) must be a manifestation of politically liberal principles."

[3] They talk about the three layers of public diplomacy as being- firstly, monologue, secondly, dialogue and lastly, collaboration. They have defined collaboration as "initiatives that feature cross national participation in a joint venture or project with a clearly defined goal." Cowan and Arsenault are of the view that depending on the specific context, all three tools of public diplomacy are essential.

G. Cowan and A. Arsenault (2008) by the government or non-governmental groups with foreign and domestic public, with the aim of creating a favourable image and understanding of the different groups and people in the state- which might help in attainment of further goals. These further goals might be ranging from mere influence to attain a short term goal, to building trusting relationships for long term goals.

Nye (2008) explains public diplomacy as,

> "Public diplomacy is an instrument that the governments use to mobilize these resources (culture, values and policies) to communicate with and attract the public of other countries, rather than merely their governments. Public diplomacy tries to attract by drawing attention to these potential resources through broadcasting, subsidizing cultural exports, arranging exchanges and so forth. But if the content of a country's culture, values and policies are not attractive, public diplomacy that 'broadcasts' them cannot produce soft power."

For M. Kounalakis and A Simonyi (2011),

> "public diplomacy is a government effort to explain the actions of a given country in pursuit of its interests and promoting its values. Soft power, however, incorporates a complex set of instruments including everything from the economy and business to culture and education to the interaction between societies and individual relationships, it is a mindset. It employs public diplomacy whenever necessary. Public diplomacy is an inevitable aspect of soft power, and its importance cannot be ignored-nor should it be exaggerated-as a magic weapon."

Public diplomacy, as a means of augmenting one's soft power is neither propaganda nor mere public relations campaign (Nye, 2008). It involves proactively pursuing a "mix of direct government information with long term cultural relationships" (Nye 2008 and Leonard 2002). As outlined by Leonard (2002), there are three important dimensions of public diplomacy, first, "daily communication" which involves "explaining the context of domestic and foreign policy decisions" to both domestic and foreign public; secondly, "strategic communication" which involves specific "campaign plans" for "symbolic events and communications" over a course of time "to reinforce central themes or to advance a particular government policy"; and lastly, "development of lasting relationship with key individuals over many years through scholarships, exchanges, training, seminars, conferences and access to media channels." [4]

Section Two-Changing context

The rise of the notion of soft power represents the increasing importance attached to ideas, perceptions, and legitimacy by state and non-state actors in the globalised world system today. "It is no co-incidence that such sources of power have been embraced by Neo-liberalism and Constructivism, paradigms that have underscored the changing nature of world politics" (Gallarotti 2011). "Indeed the world has become and is continuing to evolve into a 'softer world'. World politics in the modern age has been undergoing changes that have elevated the importance of soft power to hard power" (Gallarotti 2011).

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[4] Nye (2008) also reiterates that "effective public diplomacy is a two-way street that involves listening as well as talking." Nye (2008) also outlines the benefits of "indirect public diplomacy" (public private co-operation through government co-operation with non-governmental organizations and private companies and media houses) as being able to "take more risks in presenting a range of views" because often a government cannot criticise its own policies. This also includes government cooperation with international organizations for promotion of public international ideas such as promotion of human rights.

With the increasing shift towards lesser and lesser territorial conquests as a basis of war between two states, it is now no longer easy to live in a state of constant coercion because all states are interdependent on each other in this globalized world. In such a scenario, the conventional understanding of power, which came from military might, cannot be used to influence states, especially the common people in a democratic state. Gallarotti (2011) further writes, "In this transformed international system, soft power will be a crucial element in enhancing influence over international outcomes because it has become more difficult to compel nations and non-state actors through the principal levers of hard power (i.e., threats and force)."

Moreover, the rise of the theory and practice of soft power and public diplomacy is linked to two important phenomena. Firstly, the increasing democratization of states, because of which now along with influencing and convincing the leadership of a country, it has also become imperative to have a dialogue and influence the masses of a country and secondly, the spread of information and communications revolutions, which allows the masses to communicate with each other at all levels and in a very large scale. One can see the enormity and impact of this revolution with the increasing influence and role played by social media like facebook and twitter in contemporary day to day politics.

Nye (2008) writes, "Promoting positive images of one's country is not new, but the conditions for projecting soft power have transformed dramatically in recent years." Nye has used Herbert Simon's (1998) phrase to refer to the information revolution, "paradox of plenty" where "government communications are only a small fraction of the total communications among societies in an age that is awash in information". Nye quoting Arquila and Ronfeldt (1999) further writes,

"Politics in an information age may ultimately be about whose story wins....Political struggles occur over the creation and destruction of credibility. Governments compete for credibility not only with other governments but with a broad range of alternatives, including news media, corporations, non-governmental organizations, intergovernmental organizations, and network of scientific communities....Politics has become a contest of competitive credibility."[5]

During the cold war the world was largely divided between the west, the east and the non-aligned. Contemporarily one can say that one of the ways of categorising the countries in this world would be placing them in the two divisions of global north (developed) and global south (developing) countries. During the Cold War, "for the West, soft power was deployable, definable and discreet; its power was that it was rooted in Western liberal democratic values and traditions (unidirectional).....today soft power functions in a vastly different, matrix like, culturally and geographically diverse environment." (M. Kounalakis and A. Simonyi 2011).

The evolution of the term "public diplomacy" has taken several turns. "Traditional public diplomacy has been about governments talking to global publics (G2P), and includes those efforts to inform, influence, and engage those publics in support of national objectives and foreign policies. More recently, public diplomacy involves the way in which both government and private individuals and groups influence directly and indirectly those public attitudes and opinions that bear directly on another government's foreign policy decisions (P2P)" (Snow, Nancy 2009). According to Etyan Gilboa (2008), "the new challenges and needs of

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[5] Nye (2008) writes that, "Skeptics who treat the term public diplomacy as a mere euphemism for propaganda miss the point. Simple propaganda often lacks credibility and thus is counter-productive as public diplomacy."

public diplomacy in the post cold war era...have been influenced by three interrelated revolutions in mass communications (revolution in information and communications technology), politics (with many societies transforming from autocratic to democratic), and international relations (favourable image and reputation around the world, achieved through attraction and persuasion, have become more important than territory...acquired through military and economic measures)."

Section Three-Global North at an Advantage

Focussing on the relationship between hard power and soft power, Nye (2008) advocates a "smart power strategy that combines hard power and soft power resources". He reiterates that the "current over-reliance on hard power alone is not path to success." Gallarotti (2011) has used the term "cosmopolitan power" to describe such a form of power. He writes, "Soft power resources can enhance hard power and vice versa. In fact it will often be the case that each set of power resources require at least some of the other for maximum effectiveness."[6] For Peter van Ham (2009), hard power (based on military might) and soft power (based on attraction and legitimacy) are dependent on each other. He writes that in the case of United States, "without hard power, attractiveness turns into shadow boxing, and at worst, political bimboism" and without moral international legitimacy, any kind of naked show of hard power would invoke outright resentment and be politically too costly.

In this context, the main question that this paper wants to raise is how much public diplomacy as an approach to augment one's soft power is dependent on one's hard power capabilities? [7] If

the dependence is high, then that places the countries in the global south at a disadvantage to the countries in the global north. Also the countries in the global north that are on the rise economically and militarily will be increasingly in a better position to leverage their soft power resources. The resources of soft power as given by Nye (2008) are a country's culture, values and policies. States employ public diplomacy to popularise and leverage these resources at audiences home and abroad. Consequently, the question to be decided is what means and tools are used by practitioners of public diplomacy in order to gain soft power.

The means and tools used by practitioners of public diplomacy depend on what level of public diplomacy the actor in engaging in. A "monologue" requires activities like broadcasting, use of radio, television, cultural shows in other countries and others. A "dialogue" requires an exchange between two actors, where both are trying to popularise their culture, values and policies among each other. Here, both the actors are open to each other's curiosity and questions about each other. "Collaboration" focuses on building long term relationships. This requires activities like long term mutually beneficial joint projects, long term student exchanges and others. The tools used by public diplomacy for all the three levels are to an extent based on how economically strong the countries are. A country has to be economically strong to effectively leverage and popularise itself using public diplomacy. If we take facebook, twitter and other

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[6] Reiterating the same point, M. Kounalakis and A Simonyi (2011) write that "hard power and soft power are the yin and yang of foreign policy, they are complimentary and mutually reinforcing."

[7] Hard power here would mean a country's military and economic potential and overall development. "The traditional vision of power that has prevailed among

scholars of international politics has been a Realist vision" (Gallarotti 2011). For Mearsheimer (2001), "power is based on the particular material capabilities that a state possesses" [military capabilities] and for Waltz (1979), "power is denied in terms of capabilities", that is "size of population and territory, resource endowment, and economic capability." Gallarotti (2011) writes, "for Realists, power also derives from some intangible sources: Waltz' competence (i.e., leadership, policy and decision making)....but ultimately, these intangible measures rely on actual material capabilities to be effective..."

social media as a means of public diplomacy tools for state and non- state actors[8], it is true that even economically weak nations and individuals alone can use it to leverage influence. "Democratization of technology has led to a democratization of the ability to influence." But even in these cases, a basic minimum knowledge and skill is required to use these tools in the first place. Moreover as M. Kounalakis and A. Simonyi (2011) write, "the West still leads in designing and producing cutting edge, decisive technologies." "Powerful nations also have far more equipped delegations in terms of knowledge and information, as well as the ability to disseminate their ideas globally through various media in an effective manner" (Onuma Yasuaki 2012). On the other hand, if the country is still engaged primarily in the process of nation building by securing its borders, with the government trying to gain legitimacy from domestic and foreign public, acquire minimum level of security, or majorly focusing on issues of basic level development of eradicating poverty, hunger and disease, then all its resources would be used up in these activities. The government would be left neither with the resource nor with the energy to engage in public diplomacy activities to popularise its culture and values. This means that for a country to effectively leverage its soft power through public diplomacy, it must have already achieved a certain extent hard power capabilities and stability.

At another level, to analyse how much soft power is dependent on hard power, what needs to be analysed is "under which conditions it [soft power] is likely to be influential?" (D.W. Kearn, Jr 2011). Kearn outlines two conditions under which soft power can be most influential. They are, "a rule governed institutional setting and the presence of underlying mutual interests." "The rules of a given system are essential because states must

have some objective criteria to judge the behaviour of their peers against. Without an accepted set of rules, such judgements would be difficult." Contemporarily all the countries in the world live in an international law framework provided by the United Nations and other regional and multilateral organisations. With regard to "significant shared mutual interests, [they] must exist for states to be concerned with their reputations in a given context and to view institutional rules and norms as valuable. Outside such an interdependent system, soft power is less likely to be a play major role." These two conditions are analysed by Mattern (2005) in terms of the necessity of a "common life-world" among actors for soft power to be successful. Soft power is going to be most influential if both the influencer and the one being influenced belong to the same "life-world" or adhere to the same standards of behaviour in the international system. This is not to say that it would be impossible to leverage one's soft power if the actors do not belong to a "common life-world".

This "common life-world" contemporarily would include certain dimensions such as "respect for international law, norms and institutions, fundamental reliance on multilateralism, liberal economic policies, political institutions of democracy and constitutionalism, cultural institutions of freedom and tolerance" (Gallarotti 2011)[9]. These dimensions which are considered to be universally applicable in contemporary times and the best "life-world" available were not universal until modern times: they were Euro-centric. Starting from there, they have spread to a major part of the globe. Hence euro-centric culture and values have become the universal values which the whole world is expected to follow and adhere to. In such a scenario, the global north countries which mainly consist of such countries who were the initiators of such a "life-world" have an added advantage. They have belonged to this

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[8] "However, some traditional instruments of soft power are also best-if not exclusively-managed by government. For instance, like aid disaster relief and broad or global disease control all require massive infrastructural and government support." (M. Kounalakis and A Simonyi 2011)

[9] Gallarotti (2011) has used the following dimensions as the international and domestic sources of soft power in contemporary times.

"common life-world" for a long enough time so as to have imbibed its way of life and be the agenda setters. Even today, many countries in the global south are still in the process of joining this "life-world". This places them at a disadvantage in terms of trying to leverage their soft power on these nations. In this same context, Gallarotti (2011) has written that "the process of soft power itself represents a subset of Neoliberal logic that more emphatically embraces the convergence of interests among nations."

Yet another way of showing that the countries in the global south are at a disadvantage while compared to the countries in the global north in this scenario would be by focussing on the nature of soft power itself. According to Gallarotti (2011), "soft power represents a form of meta-power." Since soft power is the "power of attraction", the attraction or "endearment" can be "so strong that other nations may even attempt to emulate the policies and/or actions of soft power nations, domestic and/or foreign." Over a period of time, "emulation creates a system of nations that are comporting themselves (actions, policies, goals) in a manner consistent with the interests of the role model nations." In a world where American soft power has been at the high for almost five decades, it would be very difficult for any other country with a different culture, values and policies to overcome such a meta-power structure of the United States[10]. Moreover, such an overtaking becomes all the more impossible if the new country is trying to pursue its culture, values or policies that are not in sync with the current "common life-world" of the international system.

Going further into the different forms of power, Gallarotti (2011) quoting from Barnett and Duvall's (2005) category of power goes on to talk

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[10] This is supported also by the fact that "soft power is unlikely to be lost overnight. Its erosion is more likely to occur with a consistent pattern of violation of norms that undermines the confidence of others or through a fundamental and dramatic break from normal behaviour that shatters the perception of shared goals and values." (Kearn 2011).

about the "four faces of power that have been identified in the power literature," which are first, direct power; second, power over agenda control; third, structural power and last, productive power. The first face of direct power involves "contests between actors where the outcomes from bargaining are reflective of the relative distribution of power (conventional view of power)". The second face of power of "agenda control" where "there remains a strong conflict of interests among bargainers. There are definite winners and losers in these contests over agenda and the losers are cognizant of having lost." The fourth face of productive power relates to Foucault's notion of bio-power which is all pervasive and omnipresent. "Soft power maintains itself in more specific contexts and situations- that is having to do with the relationship between the actions and policy orientations of particular actions on the one hand and the responses to these actions and orientations by other nations on the other hand" (Gallarotti, 2011). The third face of structural power "represents a kind of imposed control which manifests itself through a co-optive indoctrination." "Nye's idea of co-option postulates that influence can be acquired if an actor is able to mould the preferences and interests of other actors so as to converge closer to its own preferences and interests" (Gallarotti, 2011). If the negative connotation of indoctrination and manipulation is disconnected from this view of power, then for Gallarotti (2011), this third face of power comes closest to representing soft power. Only those countries who are themselves highly successful in their domestic development and foreign relations are able to extend such a kind of structural power where one makes the other want what one wants because of one's success. Hence, this again becomes an advantage for the countries in the global north that are economically successful with a much better human development index score. Only if a country is successful, will its culture, values and policies be liked and emulated by others.

There is "no doubt [that] this century will be about the realignment of the tools and means of delivery

of power, reflecting the decreasing likelihood of strategic conflict between nuclear armed nations and the global battlefield increasingly being fought with soft power tools." But "the strength and presence of visible hard-hard power is the underlying and fundamental basis upon which other aspects of power can be built and without which soft power tools are essentially ineffective." (M. Kounalakis and A Simonyi, 2011)

Conclusion-

The countries in the global north have an advantage in leveraging their soft power through public diplomacy. This advantage is gained firstly because of their existing hard power capabilities; secondly because these countries belong to a "common life-world"; thirdly, due to the long lasting effect of soft power which cannot erode overnight and lastly, because of the nature of soft power as a form of "meta-power" which stimulates emulation from others of the values and policies of the country possessing such power.

Despite enumerating the ways in which the global north countries have an edge over the others in the theory and practice of soft power and public diplomacy, one cannot negate the fact that for the countries in the global south, the rise and practice of such a notion is a positive feature. This is because, no matter how exclusive, it still represents a shift in international relations which gives importance to ideas, perceptions and legitimacy. In the contemporary world, one cannot win any more wars by conquest and coercion.

However, the theory and practice of soft power and public diplomacy needs to become more inclusive of all the actors in the international system regardless of their hard power capabilities or their international standing. Can we do this by re-defining the concept of soft power itself? Soft Power has been defined as a power of attraction that seeks to change the interests and preference of others. Instead of making others want what we want, an effort has to be made to have a genuine constructive engagement not with specific policy agenda's but with the overall aim of deepening

societal ties and understanding. If we follow such a model, then we are in a way moving away from the zone of power itself and hence overcoming the trap of the western conceptualization soft power and public diplomacy. This would in turn lead to a greater democratization of the international space. The onus for such a change lies primarily on those countries in the global south that are considered to be the rising powers. Also, the academic discourse and rhetoric needs to focus on the global south history and perspective on soft power and public diplomacy. There needs to be a south-south approach to this concept and practice. Only when the academic space is democratized, can we expect such a democratization taking place in reality.

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