

Notes and Reflections

HARD, SOFT OR SMART POWER: CONCEPTUAL DISCUSSION OR STRATEGIC DEFINITION?

Brígida Rocha Brito

PhD in African Studies by ISCTE-IUL,
Professor in the Department of International Relations of
at *Universidade Autónoma de Lisboa (UAL)*, Deputy Director of *JANUS.NET*.
Researcher at *OBSERVARE (UAL)* and at *Centro de Estudos Africanos (ISCTE-IUL)*

The reflection presented here summarizes the discussions around conceptual differences, advantages, and risks associated with strategies inherent to *Hard Power* and *Soft Power*, as well as the emergent concept of *Smart Power*. The opportunity for this reflection was provided by the participation in the conference "Hard Vs. Soft Power: Foreign Policy Strategies in Contemporary International Relations" organised by the Academy for Cultural Diplomacy, at Cambridge University, in June 2010.

The discussion around the concepts of *Hard* and *Soft Power* (Pamar et Cox, 2010) is not a recent one and has been largely explored by the academic community in Thematic Meetings in the scientific areas of international relations. There are several authors, including the distinguished Professor Joseph Nye, Janice Bailly Mattern, and Judah Grunstein, who have analysed these concepts in great detail based on real examples, and using the United States of America as a common reference.

It appears to be generally agreed that *Hard Power* consists of the capacity, displayed by a country, to reach specific objectives through the use of physical force or economic influence, often recurring to military force, in an uncertain, though eventually effective manner. On the contrary, *Soft Power* (Nye, 2007) anticipates action through mediation and persuasion, which implies the adoption of strategic principles that combine symbolic or cultural reference elements with political or ideological values that reinforce leadership.

According to reference literature, the main difference between the two concepts appears to lie on the appeal to responsible and liable intervention characteristic of *Soft Power*, versus the simple imposition by force of *Hard Power*. *Soft Power* opens the way to new negotiation perspectives according to new horizons: international relations tend to improve from the merging of several factors presented in an interrelated manner by



Ambassador Pekka Huhtaniemi¹ who defines them as the "three Ds" in "*Hard Vs. Soft Power: Foreign Policy Strategies in Contemporary International Relations*", a meeting organized by the Academy for Cultural Diplomacy, held at Cambridge University in June 2010: Diplomacy; Defence; and Development. *Soft Power*, indeed, allows the merging of the three as it promotes: diffusion of social and cultural values that are essential to progress at the international level; the creation of social networks that facilitate exponential increases in human contact and the development of communication at world level; the empowerment of women, by recognizing their power to informally promote peace, prosperity, and security; the activity of civilian organizations in the mediation of conflicts and development of peace.

According to Philip Dodd², *Soft Power* is defined as a way of being tendentially free, democratic, and open, which, naturally, has political and economic implications. This is clearly expressed in Barack Obama's rhetoric. When one speaks of *Soft* and *Hard Power*, the ideas of peace building and peacekeeping are implicit, which gives it a strategic meaning for intervention, rather than a simple conceptual connotation. Jack McConnell³ approaches this topic establishing a difference between peacebuilding and peacekeeping. He recognizes the former essentially as a national strategy, which may be influenced by international forces, and associates the latter, from a methodological perspective, with the involvement of civilian society in the search for stability, a task accomplished by all actors rather than imposed by a few. In that context, *Hard Power* may be, under certain circumstances, an unavoidable resource in peacebuilding⁴. According to Hubertus Hoffman,⁵ the building and keeping of peace follow their own codes, which control the actions of the different players involved in these processes. These codes imply: 1) defining of a cost-success relationship, primarily in situations of tension and conflict; 2) focusing activity on the location, defining partnerships with local players, and reinforcing autonomy; 3) conceiving double strategies, including actions of *Hard* and *Soft Power*, diversifying possibilities through an approach that Hoffman defines as intelligent, close to the idea of what is designated as *Smart Power*; 4) avoiding analysis radicalisation and recognizing prior mistakes as a step to prevent them in the future; 5) opening the dialogue and debate in order to find more solutions on the ground, mainly at the civilian level, of innovative and alternate nature in their *modus operandi*; 6) promoting respect for human beings and valuing human rights through tolerance and respect.

¹ H. E. Ambassador Pekka Huhtaniemi, Finnish Ambassador in the U.K, conference participant who presented "The Finnish Approach to Hard and Soft Power" at the "Hard Vs. Soft Power: Foreign Policy Strategies in Contemporary International Relations", Academy for Cultural Diplomacy (org), Cambridge University, June 2010.

² Professor Philip Dodd, a guest professor from the University of the Arts London, and a participant who presented "A soft power constellation: China, US and India in the 21st century" at the Conference "Hard Vs. Soft Power: Foreign Policy Strategies in Contemporary International Relations", Academy for Cultural Diplomacy (org), Cambridge University, June 2010.

³ Jack McConnell, former Prime Minister of Scotland, who presented the paper "Peacekeeping or Peacebuilding: shifting the balance?" at the conference "Hard Vs. Soft Power: Foreign Policy Strategies in Contemporary International Relations", Academy for Cultural Diplomacy (org), Cambridge University, June 2010.

⁴ Bill Paker, Professor at Kings College London, who presented "The role of military force in the modern world" at the Conference "Hard Vs. Soft Power: Foreign Policy Strategies in Contemporary International Relations", Academy for Cultural Diplomacy (org), Cambridge University, June 2010.

⁵ Dr. Hubertus Hoffmann, President of The World Security Network, who presented "Codes of tolerance as soft factors of peace-making" at the Conference "Hard Vs. Soft Power: Foreign Policy Strategies in Contemporary International Relations", Academy for Cultural Diplomacy (org), Cambridge University, June 2010.



It is in this sense that, in the conceptual discussion, mainly considering the advantages and risks of the above mentioned concepts (*Hard* and *Soft Power*) when strategically applied to specific cases, a new concept emerged: *Smart Power* which, not amounting to the sum of those two prior ones, recognizes their potential, and combines human and knowledge dimensions. This concept is usually identified with the Obama Administration, which, contrary to the policies of the previous Bush administration, clearly dominated by the principles of *Hard Power*, still attempts to reinforce the values of *Soft Power*.

Smart Power, a concept developed in 2003 by Joseph Nye and later adopted by politicians and academics, requires the adoption of intelligent policies which combine in a harmonious, and often subtle, manner, elements of *Hard Power* with actions typical of *Soft Power*, allowing for more effective and successful results (Nye, 2007). This new concept values the importance of acting intelligently, determining action in function of specific needs: national and international context; cultural characteristics, current political system; economic influences. However, more than any other prior model, this one includes a strategic dimension, as it is driven by action that involves all, forces the shaping of partnerships at different levels of intervention, in the concept of *global partner*, and values different participation. Following some of the principles of *Soft Power*, *Smart Power* avoids some of the massive deployments of military forces and follows a diplomatic approach to the resolution of conflicts. It creates conditions for the development of new opportunities and the redefinition of integrated sustainable strategies, as they generate autonomy. At the international level, the concept of *Smart Power* appears to be gaining support and catching the attention of politicians, academics, and strategists.

References

- Bially Mattern, Janice (2007). «Why soft power isn't so soft». In Berenskoetter et al (ed), *Power in World Politics*. London: Routledge
- Nye, Joseph (2007). "Smart Power". In The Huffington Post [online]. [Accessed on 20 July 2010]. Available at http://www.huffingtonpost.com/joseph-nye/smart-power_b_74725.html
- Parmar, Inderjeet et Cox, Michael (ed) (2010). *Soft power and US Foreign Policy. Theoretical, historical and contemporary perspectives*. London: Routledge

How to cite this note

Brito, Brígida (2010) " *Hard, soft or smart power: conceptual discussion or strategic definition?*". Notes and Reflections, *JANUS.NET e-journal of International Relations*, N.º 1, Autumn 2010. Consulted [online] on date of last visit, observare.ual.pt/janus.net/en_vol1_n1_not3