



STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION – ELEMENT OF INFLUENCE ESSENTIAL IN EXERCISING POWER - *SOFT POWER OR SMART POWER?*

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This article proposes, first of all, an analysis of how the concept of power has evolved and is perceived in the 21st century and a conceptual delimitation of hard power, soft power and smart power. Secondly, within the article we will find a description of the importance of strategic communication as an element of influence of power, concrete examples of its manifestation and a classification of this process in a form of use of power as defined in the first part of the material.

Keywords: soft power (SP); hard power (HP); smart power (SmP); strategic communication; power; persuasion; influence.

This article aims to highlight the role of strategic communication as an element of influence essential in exercising power. If before this current century the measurement of the power of a state was a quantitative process that referred to elements such as population size, geographical dimension, volume of military acquisitions, gross domestic product etc., in the 21st century, "power" gained new forms of manifestation. The levers of military power or economic power are either replaced or supplemented by other methods of influencing or obtaining certain behaviours.

The foundation of this article is the hypothesis that strategic communication is an element of influence essential in exercising power. In a complex security environment and in a continuous change, the strategic communication properly used and based on narrative strategies adapted to the cultural characteristics of the target audience, may be the most effective solution to meet internal and external national strategic objectives.

Power in the context of international relations

The concept of power has been long debated by a wide range of disciplines, whether we are talking about sociology, political science, international relations or international politics. The main objective of the political life, be it the internal

environment of a state actor or the international one, has always been to obtain, gain and maintain power. In international relations, power is both a goal in itself and a means of achieving other goals¹.

In his book, entitled *Soft Power – The Means to Success in World Politics*, Joseph Nye associates the concept of power with various other phenomena and processes²:

- power associated with the weather: everyone depends on it, talks about it, but few get to understand the mechanism;
- power seen as having characteristics in common with love: simpler to have had it than to define it or measure it, but not entirely real.

Viewed on a more general level, power represents the ability to achieve and meet certain goals.

Although initially power mainly focused on the military factor, over time the importance of other factors defining the power of a state actor has been ascertained. Barry Buzan, in his paper entitled *Peoples, States and Fear*, distinguishes between strong and weak states, taking into account not only military capacity, but also factors such as economy and the degree of socio-political cohesion³.

Power can be defined as the ability of an actor to achieve certain goals or objectives. The central idea remains the same: obtaining superiority and determining an entity to act in a certain direction established by the entity that has the capacity to impose itself in one form or another⁴. Resources such as population, territory, natural wealth, economic

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potential, armed forces or political stability are key factors that are associated with the ability to obtain certain behaviours from other actors. Reality proves that not always the one who has the greatest power resource in certain areas comes out triumphant from a possible confrontation. A clear example of this is the situation of France and Britain, which, although had considerably more tanks than Germany in 1940, the latter had greater manoeuvrability and a much better military strategy.

Accepting as a starting point the fact that the U.S. is a global player on the international stage, if the power were limited to resources only, then it means that the United States should have prevented the 9/11 attack in relation to the problems in Afghanistan, the US should have had the capacity to handle the situation without too great a loss.

The conversion of resources into the power factor is actually the result of addressing power in terms of resources. However, each actor has his own personal art and the ability to use the resources he has in a certain context. Also, the importance of resources differs from situation to situation. Power conversion represents the ability to convert potential power into realized power. In order to be able to predict correctly the consequences of a particular confrontation, it is necessary to know both the appropriate resources to be used in the respective situation and the ability of a country in the conversion of power⁵.

Soft Power (SP), Hard Power (HP), Smart Power (SmP) – conceptual delimitations

Joseph Nye defines three forms in which power can be expressed:

- HP – obtaining certain behaviours through coercive methods (military, economic, political dimension);

- SP – the ability to persuade, influence and attract another actor to change or choose a certain type of behaviour;

- SmP – includes both HP expressed by coercion and SP highlighted by the power of attraction, influence.

HP and SP have common issues because both represent in fact the ability to meet a certain goal by influencing the behaviour of the targeted partner.

It is worth mentioning that, in certain situations, the resources of a certain type of power may influence the ability to use another type of power. For example, if the People’s Republic of China loses its place as a global economic actor, the window of opportunity of this actor to use specific elements of SP would decrease.

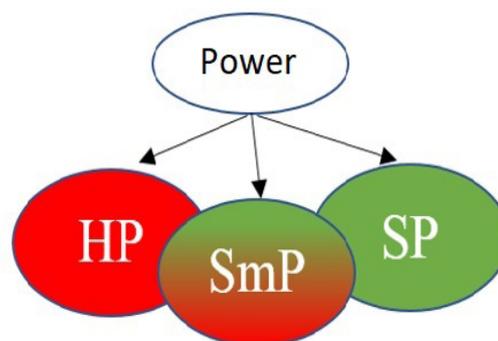


Figure 1 Forms of power expression (author’s design)

SP does not always depend on HP elements. For example, although the Romanian Orthodox Church (BOR) does not have HP elements, uses SP to change perceptions, behaviours and attitudes. Joseph Nye mentions three main resources on which SP is based:

- Cultural factors, cultural power (values, principles accepted by the population);

Table no. 1

HP AND SP – MODALITIES OF INFLUENCING THE BEHAVIOR

	HP	SP
Behavioural spectrum	Coercion, force	Attraction, influence, persuasion
Resources likely to be used	Sanctions, force, repercussions	Values, principles, cultural elements



- Political values;
- External politics.
- Joseph Nye also discusses three types of power specific to the information age⁶:
 - Military power (coercion, threat, force);
 - Economic power (coercion, sanctions, economic dependence, the need for certain services / products, etc.);
 - SP (values, culture).

The difference between SP and HP is in the tools used by each type of power in international relations, to meet certain goals or to create a certain perception. The term *soft power* is used in contrast to *hard power*, the latter referring to the use of military or economic means to directly influence the behaviour or interests of a political entity.

Measuring the power of a state is, according to the supporters of the HP theory, a quantitative process that refers to elements such as population size, geographical size, volume of military procurement, gross domestic product. According to this approach, a state actor may cause another state to adopt a certain behaviour using levers of military or economic power.

The success of SP depends to a large extent on the actor's credibility and reputation within the international community. The more a global actor enjoys a more clearly defined and sustained reputation through examples over time, the greater the chances that SP will help achieve the goals.

A well-known example of efficient use of SP is strategic communication. For example, American cinema, which has promoted US values with remarkable success, has been conducive to American interests not only in Europe, but also in the Far East. SP is a mandatory condition for the success of the war against terrorism because it requires the voluntary cooperation of other people, institutions and nations⁷.

A nation that has the ability to use SP reduces the need for HP. Strategic communication can be defined as a way to influence the perceptions, attitudes, beliefs of a target audience in order to support the achievement of certain objectives⁸. The concept also involves targeting the audience that a certain state actor / organization / institution wants to influence and applying persuasion in the information environment. This can be applied to one's own audience, neutral forces, partners or opponents.

Strategic communication – a power influencing tool

There are many approaches and attempts to define and conceptualize strategic communication. I will refer briefly to the NATO-US approach to StratCom.

In NATO's view, strategic communication is the coordinated and appropriate use of communication activities and capabilities in support of the Alliance's policies, operations and activities in order to promote NATO's objectives. These activities and capabilities are⁹:

- public diplomacy: responsible civilian communication efforts to raise awareness and strengthen understanding and support for NATO policies, operations and activities, in addition to Allied national efforts;

- public affairs: engaging the civilian public through the media in order to inform about NATO policies, operations and activities in a timely, accurate, pro-active manner;

- military public affairs: promoting NATO's military objectives in front of audiences in order to increase the level of understanding of the military aspects of the Alliance;

- intelligence operations: NATO military advice and coordination of military intelligence activities carried out in order to create certain effects on the will, understanding and capacity of adversaries, in support of the Alliance's operations, missions and objectives;

- psychological operations: psychological activities planned using means of communication and not only, performed in order to influence perceptions, attitudes and behaviours, thus supporting the achievement of political and military objectives.

The recent edition of NATO's Strategic Communication Policies considers that, in the context of the Alliance's military activities, strategic communication represents the integration of command and InfoOps command capabilities with other military activities to understand and shape the information environment in support of NATO goals and objectives¹⁰.

In the US view (in the Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms, edited by the US Department of Defence), strategic communication is defined as: "The U.S. Government's focused efforts to understand and engage key audiences to create, strengthen, or maintain conditions favourable



to the promotion of the interests, policies and objectives of the United States Government through the coordinated use of programs, plans, themes, messages and products in sync with the actions of all instruments of national power¹¹.

Strategic communication, regardless of how it is found, aims at social influence. Narrative strategies, themes and lines of persuasion, the use of the vulnerabilities of certain audience segments, are just some of the stages that are part of the complex process of strategic communication.

We start from the idea that people are beings who most of the time act emotionally, are influenced by expectations and personal beliefs and tend to seek information that supports and consolidates already formed opinions¹². In order to be able to influence perceptions, to change attitudes and behaviours, an analysis of the audience that is addressed to formulate appropriate messages to ensure the attainment of the desired effects must be performed. For this, it is necessary to know in detail the targeted audience segment's vulnerabilities, preferences, desires, fears. Also, the economic, religious, cultural, political, military, etc. context must be taken into account. Changing the perceptions, attitudes, behaviours of an audience can be a long-term process¹³.

In the current context, strategic communication has become a necessity in view of the exponential development of social media, the intensification of online misinformation campaigns, the diversification of the means, sources and targets of manipulative influence campaigns. For a state actor, strategic communication is also the process designed to counteract the destructive effects of misinformation and malicious information, targeting not only the external public, in order to promote national interests, but also the internal public, in order to increase its resilience to information attacks¹⁴.

Additionally, special importance must be given to the object on which the strategic communication, with all its components, acts upon: the people, constituted in groups, communities, masses, institutions and organizations. The masses or crowds are also targeted by propaganda, based on favourable events or conjunctions that facilitate the achievement of the purpose precisely by presence. Propaganda usually pursues remnant effects and therefore prefers social formations less ephemeral than masses. The masses are different from the

social formations in that they do not imply any historicity, no safe future.

From my point of view, strategic communication is an activity/tool that aims to obtain certain subsequent effects, at a perceptual, attitudinal or behavioural level. Strategic communication is a neutral tool; it can be used to meet objectives in different categories. Strategic communication is not a new concept, it is found over time in various forms: whether it is propaganda, influence, manipulation, persuasion or information, promotion of values and principles, counteracting the destructive effects of misinformation and malicious information etc.

The Nayirah case

A relevant situation in the context of strategic communication that has generated many media products is the Nayirah case. Nayirah al-Sabah reported as an eyewitness to a commission of the US Congress (October 10, 1990), led by Tom Lantos, on the alleged atrocities committed by the Iraqi military following the invasion of Kuwait. Her testimony had the effect of winning the population's support for the United States intervention in Iraq.

It was later proven that she was actually the daughter of the Kuwaiti ambassador to Washington, the whole story being constructed to influence American public opinion and the United States Congress. The footage was picked up by about 700 TV stations in the United States, totalling an audience of about 40 million viewers on the first evening, with the audience recorded on only two of America's most popular television stations, ABC and NBC.

The case presented above is an example where strategic communication acted as an element of SP used to win the support of the U.S. population. The statement was created and interpreted to activate the sentimental (*pathos*) part of the targeted audience segments to change perceptions – how the people of Kuwait are treated by the Iraqis, and generate behaviours – supporting the U.S. decision to intervene in the conflict between Kuwait and Iraq. The statement called for the cultural values and cultural specificity of Americans to gain support in the desired endeavour.

The strategic communication policy of the People's Republic of China

The People's Republic of China (PRC), an actor with globally recognized military, political



and economic potential, is on an upward slope in terms of the potential strategic impact it can have. Regarding how the PRC chooses to use strategic communication, one can see a difference between the narrative strategies used for internal audiences versus the narrative strategies used for external audiences.

The decision of the People's Republic of China to replace certain television programs with patriotic programs during the period preceding the national day celebration is one of the examples where one can observe the promotion and communication strategy among the internal audience segments¹⁵. The economic evolution of the People's Republic of China reinforces the image of a powerful actor, who reconfigured the global economy. Through this field, by presenting the turnover and innovative results in terms of artificial intelligence, the People's Republic of China is trying to outline its global dominant position¹⁶.

The foreign strategic communication policy of the PRC is working systematically to realign the international order by establishing parallel structures to a wide range of international institutions¹⁷. This state has taken on a key role in financing alternative mechanisms designed to increase its autonomy in relation to institutions dominated by the United States of America and to expand its sphere of influence internationally.

While the crises in Ukraine, Syria, Iraq and West Africa have shifted the focus of global attention, the People's Republic of China is seeking a breakthrough through a restructuring of the international order. While Beijing remains an active player within existing international institutions, it is also promoting the financing of new parallel structures.

The goal of these efforts is obtaining a greater autonomy primarily from the United States of America and an expansion of the Chinese sphere of influence beyond Asia. The People's Republic of China identifies the gaps in the international order and fills them with its own initiatives, through strategic messages that are part of the narrative prepared for external audiences¹⁸.

Tensions at the international level accelerate the expansion of the mechanisms promoted by the People's Republic of China and the interest of developing countries for them. The parallel structures centred on the People's Republic of China

have already reached a broad spectrum: financial and monetary policy, trade and investment, trans-regional infrastructure projects, security policy, technology, diplomatic forums¹⁹.

Chinese initiatives will have the greatest impact where links between large infrastructure projects and new financing modalities can be created. This is the core mission of the Asian Investment Bank for Infrastructure and one of the objectives to which the narrative strategies set by the strategic communication policy are oriented²⁰.

The economic field is a key element in the narrative strategies of the PRC on the international stage. A strategic communication with SmP – specific influences is visibly used by the Chinese actor in terms of communicating with external audience segments.

Conclusions

The world in which we live is transforming at a confusing speed, the reality around us takes on different forms, more complicated, more difficult to understand and described. These developments could not be manifested leaving the old mechanisms of regulating the interests of international political actors intact; in this context, peace and conflict have gained a flexible outline. Thus, risks, vulnerabilities and opportunities on the power market were fractured and multiplied.

Understanding and adapting strategic communication to the cultural characteristics of a certain state actor is an important step in creating the necessary forms of response to contemporary conflicts, specific conflicts of the 21st century. As we can see in the examples presented above, strategic communication has, depending on the state actor who uses it and the proposed objectives, specific inflections SP or SmP. However, regardless of the way in which strategic communication is used, it represents an element used to manifest power, specific to the current century.

Strategic communication, an element of influence essential in exercising power, aims at social influence. Narrative strategies, themes and lines of persuasion, the use of the vulnerabilities of certain audience segments, are just some of the stages that are part of the complex process of strategic communication. Through the examples presented in the material, we can affirm that the inclusion of strategic communication in the SP



or SmP category is made according to the actor who uses it, the moment he chooses to use it, the relations that the respective actor has at international level, the level of credibility, etc. This multitude of variables highlights the multiple forms that strategic communication can take, depending on the proposed objectives.

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