



Sarajevo: Canadian soldier on guard.

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HARD POWER, SOFT POWER RECONSIDERED

Hard power and soft power are vogue terms in Canadian foreign and defence policy circles these days. Whether one is looking at the opinion sections of the national press, surveying the recent musings of academic journals, or walking the corridors of the Departments of Foreign Affairs and National Defence, they are heard with increasing frequency. It seems almost impossible to discuss the current and future state of Canada's foreign and defence policy without making at least a cursory reference to hard and soft power. Commentators and policymakers may have assimilated the same terms, but this prompts the question, are they speaking the same language?

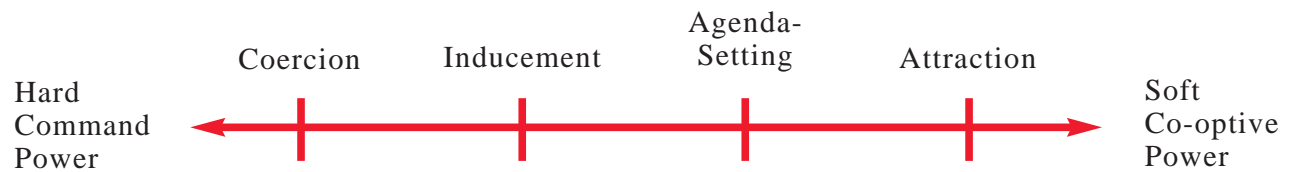
This examination of hard and soft power has been provoked by the many different meanings and definitions of the terms this writer has encountered. It is argued that counterproductive confusion and division

has resulted from the attempt to graft an American-originated concept onto the Canadian political landscape. In view of the intellectual disorder that has arisen, Canadians would do well to leave the talk of soft and hard power behind them.

ORIGINS

As Kim Nossal, Fen Hampson and Dean Oliver have pointed out¹, the origins of the term soft power can be traced to the work of the American academic, Joseph Nye Jr. In the late 1980s, as a counter to those who foresaw the decline of the United States (US) as a great power resulting from rising costs and the apparent diminishing utility of military force, Nye's book, *Bound to Lead*, put forward the idea of soft versus hard power.²

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From J. Nye, *Bound to Lead*, p. 267.

Figure 1: Behavioural Power

The concept, more recently articulated by Nye in *Foreign Affairs*³, first made a distinction between *behavioural* power — “the ability to obtain outcomes you want” — and *resource* power — “the possession of resources that are usually associated with the ability to reach outcomes you want.” Behavioural power was presented as a continuum (Figure 1). At one extreme was hard or command power — the ability to change what others *do* through coercion (followed next on the continuum by inducement). At the other extreme was soft or co-optive power — the ability to shape what others *want*

through attraction (preceded by agenda-setting). Next, Nye addressed the types of resource power needed to exercise hard and soft behavioural power. Tangible economic and military strength was, for the most part, linked to coercive hard power, while the attractiveness of one’s culture and the mastery of institutions and information technologies to disseminate persuasive information was linked to soft power. In this context, Nye argued that as much as military strength, the dominance of US culture and language would sustain American great power status.



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Croatia: Canadian peacekeepers get a briefing on the tasks of the day.

THE RIGHT PARADIGM FOR CANADA?

Before considering how soft and hard power have been variously interpreted in Canada, it is worth reflecting on the originator's definition and asking: Is this concept, developed for an American foreign policy discussion, transferable to a Canadian context, or are there pitfalls? And if there are, can they account for some of the intellectual confusion and division that appears to surround the current Canadian debate?

On first reading of the definition, one is left with the impression that, for many, it risks being convoluted to the point of practical uselessness. As Nye himself acknowledged:

Because the ability to control others is often associated with the possession of certain resources, political leaders commonly define power as the possession of resources.... The virtue of this definition [of power] is that it makes power appear more concrete, measurable, and predictable than does the behavioral definition.⁴

Closer reading of Nye's model, however, reveals how in the American context, this inclination towards a resource-based definition of power was comfortably melded to the behavioural definition, making it less cumbersome for policymakers than might first appear. With the American tendency to view military assets largely as instruments of coercion, it was not difficult to locate such tangible or 'hard' resources firmly at the hard, behavioral power extreme. Thus, it became easy to speak in one breath of hard, military resource power and hard, behavioural power as simply hard power. Fine, perhaps, for a US audience, but does this speak to the Canadian reality? True, Canadian history is replete with examples of the use of the Canadian Forces (CF) as instruments of coercion — Kosovo is only the most recent example. However, a large part of our history, particularly since the Second World War, has also seen our armed forces called to participate in humanitarian and interposition

peacekeeping operations because parties in need or conflict have *wanted* them to become engaged.⁵ Moreover, as Fen Hampson and Dean Oliver rightly point out, Canadians are particularly proud of that peacekeeping



Sarejevo: 3 RCR NCO watches over 'sniper alley' as an armoured personnel carrier leads a convoy of humanitarian aid vehicles.

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and humanitarian tradition.⁶ It is not unreasonable to state that it is an integral part of our cultural identity which, through leading by example and in the interests of international peace and stability, we hope others find attractive enough to follow. Such operations are, in turn, a way in which Canada helps to set and sustain the agenda of institutions such as the United Nations.

These remarks are made to draw into doubt whether or not, in a Canadian context, armed forces can be so neatly located at the hard, coercive pole of the behavioural power continuum. In the interests of simplicity and mirroring the American precedent, however, it is not difficult to see how some commentators might slip into the trap of doing just that, using hard power to refer simultaneously to hard behavioral power and the military resource power of the Canadian Forces. The danger in doing so, of course, is that some who support the armed forces might be tempted to see any talk of soft power as contrary to the rationale of the CF, and by the same token, neglect their peacekeeping and humanitarian role. Some who find soft or non-coercive modes of behavior appealing, might in turn be tempted to see no utility in the Canadian Forces, they being perceived as solely instruments of war. Both groups would be placed



Bosnia: A Canadian helicopter serving with the NATO-led SFOR on patrol.

at odds with those who *are* careful not to link the CF exclusively to the coercive extreme of behavioural power. As the reader will see below, this alas, appears to be what has transpired, contributing significantly to the confusion and division that surrounds the current Canadian soft-hard power debate.

INTELLECTUAL DISORDER

As indicated above, a review of a sampling of texts is useful to illustrate the various definitions of hard and soft power that are circulating in Canada today. They reflect counterproductive division and confusion stemming from the temptation on the part of some to follow the American interpretative precedent, and for other reasons as well.

To gain insight into the current Canadian soft-hard power debate, a 1998 exchange in the Ottawa Citizen between political scientist, Kim Nossal and Foreign Minister Lloyd Axworthy is helpful. Mirroring the US precedent, and not dissimilar to many other analysts, Nossal cast military assets in a uniquely coercive light:

We [Canadians] are also confronted with those ... with whom we have a conflict of interests. In such circumstances, a squishy notion such as soft power is next to useless. There are, manifestly, some folks who will simply refuse to want what we want. In those cases, what you need is not soft power, but power, period; that is means to prevail over others. But that, of course, means summoning not just ideas “to get others to want what we want,” but ideas about how best to prevail over others whose interests clash with ours. For this, you need a full array of “power tools” [including] military forces that can be deployed in peacekeeping missions to Rwanda and Kosovo ...⁷

Because Nossal interpreted hard power as both hard behavioral power and military resource power (“hard power – ... war-ready armed forces ...”), he was led to chastise Foreign Minister Axworthy’s advocacy of soft power as “foreign policy for wimps”, seeing it as a rejection of the use of the Canadian Forces in international affairs. The CF’s humanitarian role was likewise neglected. Mr. Axworthy’s response, however, appeared more closely aligned to an interpretation that did not exclusively link military assets to the hard, coercive power extreme, but saw them as capable of supporting activities along the behavioural power continuum:

... serious is [Nossal’s] misinterpretation of what is meant by the term “soft power” in the Canadian context. The reason I use this phrase in my speeches is that it exemplifies the Canadian talent for drawing upon our skills in negotiating, building coalitions and presenting diplomatic initiatives; in other words for influencing the behaviour of other nations not through military intimidation but through a variety of diplomatic and political tools.... The author grossly misrepresents my remarks when he claims this is foreign policy on the cheap, and does not require improved peacekeeping... resources. Quite the opposite is true.⁸

The Axworthy rebuttal did not stop there, but went so far as to describe Nossal as indicative of “just how out of touch some members of our academic community are in understanding the changing world forces that face Canada.” Thus, a heated exchange and division turned on seemingly different definitions of the same terms. It is not difficult to envision — as this author has regularly witnessed — similar circumstances repeating themselves. In fact, a few months after Nossal’s article appeared (and despite referring to the Axworthy rebuttal), Hampson and Oliver launched much the same criticism of Mr. Axworthy and soft power supporters.

While, as they rightly point out, some soft power advocates neglect or downgrade the role of military resource power (for reasons noted in the previous section), one questions this characterization of all soft power enthusiasts, including the Foreign Minister, in the context of his remarks quoted above.

Where the Foreign Minister is concerned, however, there are two very good reasons why this author is careful to include the qualification, “in the context of his remarks quoted above”. First (and in a point that perhaps speaks to the frustration with Mr. Axworthy expressed by Kim Nossal and others), while the Foreign Minister may on occasion refer to the value of armed forces to Canada’s foreign policy, one is frequently challenged to see such words translating into capabilities that the men and women in uniform need to effectively and safely do their job. The long wait for the replacement of the CF’s maritime helicopters is one issue that comes to mind in this regard. Second, a survey of Mr. Axworthy’s statements finds that there are times when — in contrast to the remarks cited above — he appears to firmly link armed forces to the hard, coercive pole of Nye’s behavioural power continuum. In fact, a speech prepared for his delivery at Harvard University on the same day that the *Ottawa Citizen* rebuttal emerged, seemed to do just that.⁹ Accordingly, in this instance, the strong support that the Foreign Minister’s text lent to soft power appeared to significantly downplay the value of armed forces in the conduct of foreign policy.

When the leading foreign policy spokesperson in the country is inconsistent or unclear with respect to the meaning of soft and hard power for the Canadian Forces, there is little wonder that confusion surrounds these terms. Alongside their varied treatment of military assets, however, current soft and hard power definitions appear contradictory or confused in other ways as well. Take, for instance, the article from *Canada & the World Backgrounder*¹⁰ that referred to economic sanctions and trade embargoes as soft power. Not only was one left perplexed at how such openly coercive instruments could be linked to the co-optive extreme of Nye’s behavioural power continuum — if, in fact, the model was considered at all — such remarks stood in stark contrast to the contribution of Hampson and Oliver, and an additional article in the same *Canada & the World Backgrounder* issue that referred to embargoes and sanctions as hard power¹¹. A similar situation



Ottawa: The Army’s upgraded Leopard C2 tank is paraded.

CF Photo Unit ISD00-1014a

has arisen with respect to diplomacy. While some analyses refer to the “soft option of diplomacy”, references to “highly skilled diplomats” as hard power may also be found, making for little clarity in the Canadian soft-hard power debate.

CONCLUSION

This article has provided a snapshot of the counter-productive division and confusion that surrounds the discussion of soft and hard power in Canada today. While the terms may be the same, the language being spoken is not. Much of the intellectual disorder stems from the temptation of some to follow the American example and firmly link military assets to the coercive extreme of Joseph Nye’s behavioural power continuum, while others choose (at least on occasion) to see the CF as resource power relevant to activities along that continuum. In addition to armed forces, the treatment of other instruments and resources is similarly confused. Canadian academics and policymakers would do well to acknowledge the mess they have gotten themselves into; to recognize that, in this case, the attempt to adopt an American-engendered concept for Canadian policy purposes has resulted in more problems than clarity. Whether one believes in the continued utility of armed forces in the conduct of foreign policy, or whether one wishes to downplay their significance, the terms soft and hard power should now be left behind as a means of articulating the respective positions.



NOTES

1. Nossal, K.R., "Foreign policy for wimps", *Ottawa Citizen*, 23 April 1998, A19, and Hampson, F.O. and Oliver, D., "Pulpit Diplomacy: A Critical Assessment of the Axworthy Doctrine", *International Journal*, Summer 1998, pp. 379-406.
2. Nye, J., *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power*, n.p.: Basic Books, 1990.
3. Keohane, B. and Nye, J., "Power and Independence in the Information Age", *Foreign Affairs* 77.5, pp. 81-94.
4. Nye, J., *Bound to Lead*, p. 26.
5. Classical Peacekeeping missions, starting with United Nations Emergency Force I (UNEF I) in 1956, have involved the deployment of the Canadian armed forces: under UN auspices; *with the consent of the protagonists*; with a right to resort to arms only in self-defence; and on the basis of UN impartiality. Examples of humanitarian disaster relief missions include the deployment of Canadian Forces Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) to Central America following Hurricane Mitch in 1998, and to Turkey following the 1999 earthquake.
6. Hampson and Oliver, p. 379.
7. Nossal, *op. cit.* These missions were referred to as peacekeeping missions, although in the context of Nossal's remarks, and judging from the coercive use of force for which the crises in Kosovo and Rwanda called, one suspects that peace restoration or peace enforcement missions was closer to the intended meaning.
8. Axworthy, L., "Why 'soft power' is the right policy for Canada", *Ottawa Citizen*, 25 April 1998, B6. The concluding phrases of the quotation, which acknowledged a linkage between the term soft power and military peacekeeping resources, appeared to stem from the fact that Axworthy's definition of peacekeeping encompassed missions where the consent of the affected parties and neutrality of intervening forces had been achieved; thus, missions supporting the exercise of behavioural power at a position closer to the soft or co-optive pole of Nye's continuum. For example, reference was subsequently made to the then ongoing peacekeeping mission in Haiti; therefore, MIPONUH (Mission de Police des Nations Unies en Haiti), whose non-coercive training program for local police was duly supported with CF driving instructors, vehicle technicians and armoured personnel carriers. Later, Axworthy's remarks went on to speak favourably of missions that involved the coercive use of force; thus, missions in support of the exercise of behavioural power closer to the hard extreme of Nye's model. In the context, the UN coalition against Iraq was mentioned.
9. DFAIT, Notes for an address by the Honourable Lloyd Axworthy, Minister of Foreign Affairs, to a conference on UN reform at the Kennedy School, Harvard University: "The New Diplomacy: The UN, the International Criminal Court, and the Human Security Agenda", Cambridge, MA, 25 April 1998.
10. *Canada & the World Backgrounder*, Waterloo: 65.1, pp. 18-21.
11. *ibid*, pp. 22-25