

MEMO 1

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POWER – HARD AND SOFT POWER (special emphasis on US)

As defined in the Merriam Webster dictionary, ‘power’ is the ability to act or produce an effect. It is the possession of control, authority, or influence over others.¹ In layman’s words, actor A can make actor B do something actor B would otherwise not do.² A very important feature of power as a concept is its precondition – for power to be exercised, there must be a difference in opinion among the parties involved. For example, rich people donate money to the poor. The rich people use their power and superiority for such donations. They give money to the poor which they otherwise would not take/have.³

Another vital concept is that capability and power are linked depending on the context. Having capability to do something means having a resource. Such capability can make a person powerful depending on the context. For instance, a teacher has knowledge and experience which is his capability. In a classroom, he is powerful, as he is the one teaching the students. Whereas, when he goes to a grocery shop, he doesn’t have any capability. His knowledge isn’t a resource and thus he cannot exercise power.⁴ I believe this way any capability can translate into power.

Examples include military, education system, economic factors like growth, GDP etc.

According to Joseph S. Nye, a political scientist, power can have two faces. Coined by Nye, soft power is the ‘second face of power’ (after hard power) – getting others to want the outcomes that

¹ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/power> accessed on September 24th, 2019

² Jing Sun, lecture notes, September 16th

³ Sun, lecture notes

⁴ Ibid.

you want. It rests on the ability to shape preferences of others - the staple of daily democratic politics.⁵ Intangible assets like behavior, attitudes, cultures, education, diplomacy etc., are considered soft power. The party, or here, the country which exercises soft power makes other countries feel they should be like them, it sets an example of itself.⁶ There have been a lot of countries who have used soft power vis-à-vis another country like United States, Soviet Union, France, United Kingdom, Germany etc. One very important point regarding soft power is that it cannot be spurious. You cannot pretend to be something else when it comes to fighting another nation using such power.⁷

The United States is a norm while we are talking about utilizing soft power. There are various examples that show US is not threatening physical/military force. Firstly, the US is known to be a state where people learn independency. One realizes the importance of being independent and learns how to do their own work rather than pawning it off on others. Self-reliance or being “self-made” is ‘the American Dream’. Examples include children moving out of the house after high school, teenagers working while in middle school, not having servants to clean your rooms etc.⁸ Also, people value time and efficiency – they are very punctual.⁹ Another very common behavior observed is being kind and wishing strangers. They make sure to greet people and ask them about their day. Feelings like freedom, casualness, modernity, youthfulness are being inhibited in non-Americas.¹⁰ Such attractive qualities convince people around the world to be like Americans. Therefore, America is setting a good example for countries to ‘follow’ it. At a ‘national level’, soft power is exerted by leaders like government officials or even the US

⁵ Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, New York: PublicAffairs, 2004, pp. 5-6

⁶ Jing Sun, lecture notes, September 23rd

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ <https://usahello.org/resources/american-values/> accessed on September 24th, 2019

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, New York: PublicAffairs, 2004, pp. 48

presidents. In rain, US President Barack Obama holds his own umbrella unlike leaders from other countries for whom other people hold umbrellas.¹¹

‘Hard’ power, as the name suggests, is the opposite of soft power - an aggressive way of persuasion. It is defined as an ability to reach one's goals through coercive actions or threats, the so-called 'carrots' (inducements) and 'sticks' (threats) of international politics. Historically, hard power has been measured by such criteria as population size, territory, geography, natural resources, military force, and economic strength.¹² Despite former US President Barack Obama pressing on using soft power, the economy still has had a long history of hard power applications. To start with, it plays a major role in both World War I and II. The disastrous invasion of Iraq in 2003 was a display of military force like the world had never seen before, although it was considered illegitimate and ill-advised.¹³ President Donald Trump hinted at using such power during his election campaign in 2017. He said he is planning to increase defense expenditure by \$54 billion.¹⁴ United States used economic hard power when Russia invaded Ukraine in 2014. It stopped US and European banks from doing business with Russian corporates and banks which affected the Russian economy devastatingly.¹⁵ In the recent years, US has actively intervened in the Korean War opposing China, Vietnam War, Syrian Civil War against Russia etc.¹⁶ To conclude, for betterment of the economy, US has a lot of capability to

¹¹ Sun, lecture notes

¹² http://www.culturaldiplomacy.org/academy/content/pdf/participant-papers/2015-12_annual/Power-In-Ir-By-Raimzhanova,-A.pdf Phd candidate, paper pp. 6

¹³ <https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/21372/why-trump-s-emphasis-on-hard-power-will-leave-the-u-s-with-less-power> accessed on September 29th, 2019

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ <https://sites.google.com/site/softhardpower/modern-and-psat-examples-of-soft-and-hard-power> accessed on September 29th, 2019

¹⁶ Sun, lecture notes

use hard and soft power complementarily, given the sound and mindful judgements of authorities.

‘THE WORST CHINA TRADE IDEA’, WSJ EDITORIAL BOARD

THE LIBERALIST VIEW

Liberalism is defined as a political philosophy based on belief in progress, the essential goodness of the human race, and the autonomy of the individual and standing for the protection of political and civil liberties.¹⁷ The basic assumptions of the liberalists are belief in human progress, human reason & rationality, cooperation & sense of sharing, and focus on individuals. They are mostly viewed as optimistic people who say that the shared desire for human survival will lead to peace and not war or destruction.¹⁸ Instead of security dilemma, as seen in the realist view, they say there are security communities that exist with a thinking of “an attack on one is an attack on all”. The states wouldn’t fight with each other knowing that they all have common political values and shared trade. Another concept of liberalism includes interdependence of nations and a cobweb model. All entities within a country are tied to all entities in the other.

The Editorial Board of the Wall Street Journal published an article, ‘The Worst China Trade Idea’ on September 29th, 2019. Word is out that the White House might bann U.S and China bilateral investments completely.¹⁹ The article analyses why such a step might be taken and what changes it could bring in. It also briefs the reader about which parties are involved, who gets affected, how the countries are interlinked, and what are the trade disputes that might come up. I will be explaining this article by using the liberalist view of international relations. As stated earlier, liberalism is an ideology where there exists a security community and the belief that the shared desire for survival does not end with destruction.²⁰ Economic and political

¹⁷ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/liberalism> accessed on October 1st, 2019

¹⁸ Jing Sun, lecture notes, September 23rd, 2019

¹⁹ The Editorial Board, “The Worst China Trade Idea”, *Wall Street Journal*, September 29th, 2019

²⁰ Sun, lecture notes

integration is the key which is visible in how U.S. and China are tied together. I will be highlighting certain features of liberalism through evidences from the article. First, the authors say there are many platforms affected in both nations with a change in trade practices, for example, U.S. stock exchanges, stock prices, capital markets, businesses, the White House or Chinese government etc. The liberalists would view this as the ‘cobweb model’ – countries are not viewed as a unitary actor but as a set of not mutually exclusive, functional groups. The White House might have been the one to take the decision, restricting bilateral U.S-China investment, but the interactions getting affected include all these functional groups.

Second, the vision of a cobweb shows how countries are interdependent – a vital component of liberalism. An important term to note is complex interdependence, where there are not only issues and confrontations but also an underlying shared fate. The evidence is seen when the authors mention U.S. benefiting from Chinese investment and the large U.S. investment in China, when there is a trade war going on simultaneously.²¹ Moreover, nobody confirms to exactly what U.S. and China should be called - ‘friends’ or ‘enemies’? But their names are anyway taken together, as the article quotes – “...Peter Navarro, the White House trade advisor who wants to decouple the U.S. and Chinese economies....”. Here, Mr. Navarro is attempting to decouple the nations which implies that they are already coupled, though in a complex dynamic.

Third, liberalists are optimistic people. They believe humans to have a bright nature and that they have shown progress. So, the interactions between the countries are a positive sum game. The article states explicitly the amounts of investment in U.S and China from each other (over

²¹ Sun, lecture notes

a period of 20 years). Chinese investment in U.S. (\$148.33 bn) is much less than U.S. investment in China (\$276.38 bn). The liberalists would never deny this difference but neither would they be concerned much about it. From the respective countries, they would rather worry about their investment, the growth of their capital and the economy, the jobs created etc. Contrary to the realist view (that China is being ‘smart’, it has an advantage over U.S., they should be careful etc.), the liberalists use a technocratic approach. They are experts and knowledgeable people who care about their own development regardless of what the other might have gained or lost. A very notable reference can be made to Chinese Prime Minister Li Keqiang. He is a technocrat with a doctoral degree. He may be a member of the communist party, but his knowledge is extensive, so much so that he has his own index to calculate growth of the country.²²

Lastly, one of the most important characteristics of liberalism is the democratic peace theory. Liberalists believe that eternal peace can be achieved only if all countries are democracies. Democracies will never fight since they have the same moral values, domestic political culture, and incentive of good commerce. They are known to speak the same language. Democracies will have disputes only with non-democracies. This can be implied from the article as the authors have highlighted this as a background concept. US is a democracy and China is not, which results in 60 years of issues that have existed between them. They are not speaking the same language, their ideologies, their beliefs, their goals are extremely contradictory. As mentioned in the article, President Trump is trying to change China’s predatory trade practices, as they do not align with his nation’s interests.²³

²² Sun, lecture notes

²³ Ibid.

To conclude, the positivity of the liberalists is highlighted in the article. There is hope that even amidst the trade war, there are benefits reaped by both nations. Reading between the lines, it can be said that liberalism shows international relations need not be threatened by negative, harmful forces. Aspects like sharing, security community, soft power, values, democracy, interdependence etc., can be major influences.

In the end, I would like to quote William Ewart Gladstone whose words are inspiring and may also express liberalist view²⁴—

“We look forward to the time when the Power of Love will replace the Love of Power. Then will our world know the blessings of peace.”

²⁴ <https://www.brainyquote.com/authors/william-e-gladstone-quotes> accessed on October 4th, 2019