

**Concept and Application of Smart Power in Promoting India's National Interests and Strategic Objectives\***  
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General PK Singh, Chairman, ladies and gentlemen. I am humbled by being asked to deliver the Major General Samir Sinha Memorial lecture. It's a pleasure and an honour. It's a pity I didn't get to know General Sinha during his lifetime but I'm aware that this institution which has developed a national and international reputation would not have been the one it is but for the hard work done by General PK Singh and his predecessors.

My subject this morning is 'Smart Power and its Applications in Promoting India's National Interests and Strategic Objectives'. As the Chairman quite rightly said that the concept has been around for a long time, although the term has come out only recently. The meaning of the term is that Hard Power should be used in combination with various aspects of Soft Power such as culture, justice, rule of law, benign rule, treating the conquered people with a level of benignity etc. It clearly involves a combination of uses of Hard Power with economic power, cultural power, diplomacy, humanitarian and other steps. The earliest possible example of smart power is that of the Roman Empire.

The Romans were the greatest engineers of their time and if you go through the remains of the Roman Empire as it exists today, Southern Europe and Southern Spain, you would see these great aqueducts – beautiful works of sculpture and engineering where they brought in flowing water into the cities. These were the first cities in the world to have flowing water. In fact, the capital of Rome had piped water coming through lead pipes; but I think the greatest legacy that Rome left behind was that they left the conquered people with pride in saying that they were Roman citizens – in a sense that everyone of the citizens, no matter where he was located, was entitled to take his problem to the Roman Senate where it would be discussed by a group of senators representing that person's interest, no matter where in the empire he came from.

The Greeks of course, before the Romans, were not so hot on civil rights because they had more slaves than they had citizens but they left behind, again a great architectural legacy. If you take Alexander's conquest of Egypt, he found time to lay down the outlines of the great city of Alexandria. So the Greeks left behind a great culture too and also willingness and enthusiasm to be part of the Greek Empire. For me, as an individual, the great Greek legacy to the world was the extraordinary beauty of Gandhara sculptures which combine the best aspects of Greek and Indian sculpture. These were early examples of smart power.

In modern times there is no better example of Smart Power than the British Empire. The way in which the East India Company used Indian soldiers to conquer other Indian territories, and then levied land revenue to finance that expansion, is surely the smartest examples of Smart Power that we can possibly think of. Having in a 100 years conquered most of India, they used India as a springboard to expand their empire all over the world-into Burma, Southeast Asia, Africa and so on. At the height of British rule it was said that the Sun never set on the British Empire. Yet, the total GDP of Great Britain was never more than nine per cent. That is an extraordinary fact. But this brings in certain complexities. The British Empire was established around 1815-1820, after the fall of Napoleon. By 1878, which is barely 58 years later, the American GDP overtook that of Great Britain. Though barely 10 years after the American Civil War, the US by 1878 had not yet incorporated all the territories that today form the USA including California, New Mexico, Arizona etc.

However, when you look at it, the US actually took over from Great Britain as the hegemon of the world only post Second World War after the dropping of atomic bombs on Japan. It took something like 75 years after the US overtook the GDP of Great Britain for it to actually become the hegemon of the world. Now, there is a lesson in this. If you consider economic power as the basis of total power, there are many who would say that the Chinese are going to usher in a new world order by 2025 when they will overtake the US in GDP. But I suspect that it's going to take much longer, if we go by the experience of the takeover of world power from the British Empire by the Americans. As the Chairman rightly said there are many claimants to coining the expression of Smart Power. Two of these are from the US – the first one is Suzanne Nossel, who wrote an article in the Foreign Affairs in 2003 (that was my first exposure to Smart Power) – she was the Deputy to Richard Holbrooke, who was the American representative to Af-Pak. The second, of course, is a more famous claimant – Joseph Nye, former Assistant Secretary for Defence under Clinton. He wrote a book on Soft Power. Now everyone knows that the reference to Smart Power was a reaction to President Bush's decision to the use of American Hard Power unilaterally, both in Iraq and in Afghanistan. Nye argued that Smart Power should ask five questions :-

- (a) What is the desired objective or end state? i.e. How many years would it take for the application of Soft Power to achieve the desired end state?
- (b) What resources are available and by resources he meant diplomatic, military, economical, political, legal and cultural. Of course, what backs them all is finance. He didn't define it as finance but obviously the availability of funds is ultimately the crucial factor.
- (c) What is the targeted audience for which kind of power?
- (d) Which of the six forms of power would most likely succeed in a particular set of circumstances? There are different sets of power that would apply in different sets of circumstances.
- (e) What is the probability of achieving the end state?

In the US, the term Soft Power was brought in officially during the hearing of Hillary Clinton when she was being confirmed by the Congress as the Secretary of State. Hillary Clinton said that she was going to shift American

foreign policy to using Smart Power and by Smart Power she meant that she was going to move from unilateralism to multilateralism, using the UN as the organisation through which the US would thereafter begin to act. Therefore, you see in President Obama's time, although he has been greatly criticised for being soft and vacillating, in his reluctance that the US has been reluctant to use Hard Power in Libya, Syria and Ukraine, this marks a shift towards smart power. Of course, this has been partly brought on by economic difficulties, during the time of an economic downturn. I looked at other cultures to see whether there is a concept of Smart Power. The Chinese have something similar to Smart Power in their theory of what they call the 'Three Warfares'. Three Warfares is something very interesting in the sense that the Chinese have always believed that they must win and 'the best way to win is to win without fighting' and they believed that Hard Power should be held in reserve; and that the use of Hard Power is an admission of the defeat of your strategy. So they hope to win by these three warfares which are Legal, Media and Psychological. Those of you who have followed the Chinese stand on Tibet and on the South China Sea will immediately see the application of these 'Three Warfares.'

Now to the original classic form of the Chinese concept of 'Three Warfares' they have added a fourth i.e. Coercive Economic Inducement. This also starts to ring a bell because they are already applying the 'Three Warfares' together with Coercive Economic Inducements. I also skimmed through Indian history for examples. With Chanakya I found there were references to different applications of power but I didn't find anything so specific as the Chinese or American concept of combining hard and Soft Power. Every idea in the world offers something new, resulting in a sequence of events which lead people to think in a particular way and Smart Power is born of a synergy between force and reconciliation. A great and extraordinary hubris in Washington was the result of three military campaigns from which I think they drew wrong conclusions :-

- (a) They brought Yugoslavia to the negotiating table purely by the use of air power. This is a new kind of warfare where the nations will decide the results of their Hard Power, which is a reasonable conclusion if you execute it like the Kosovo air campaign that brought the Yugoslavs to the negotiating table.
- (b) The first and second Gulf Wars. The first Gulf War saw the first application of the revolution in military affairs (RMA) and the second was the further application of the RMA and the Kosovo air campaign where there was a lightning strike that brought the Iraqi Armed Forces to their knees.
- (c) The War against the Taliban after the attack on the World Trade Centre, where in fact, the Taliban as a fighting force was brought to its knees and Kabul captured purely by the use of air power in conjunction with the Northern Alliance. If you remember that Kabul fell when the total number of American troops on the ground were not more than one regiment strength. So Rumsfeld got to the wrong conclusion that Hard Power was so uniformly and unilaterally successful that other forms of power need not be used. The whole intellectual movement towards Smart Power came as a result of America getting bogged down in Iraq and then ultimately in Afghanistan after that, with no clear outcome.

Let's come to India. How relevant is Hard Power when you are talking about Smart Power? The more basic question as far as India is concerned is that we are not the US. We are not a world power that aims to project our strength globally or influence the world order through the use of Smart Power. We have got a new Government and the new PM articulated something very strong and basic when he said, "give me ten years". What he implied by that was that he needed 10 years to rescue the Indian economy from where it had drifted to, to raise the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), to improve the per capita income, reduce poverty, increase infrastructure and fix the economy. This presumably is his grand vision for India. There are many things very wrong in this country internally, which need to be arrested in the window of opportunity that exists in the coming 10-15 years.

This can be expressed in many ways and one of them is that within the next 10-15 years India is going to overtake China in population, we are going to have a middle class of 300-400 million people who are not going to live in villages but will aspire to move into the cities. They are going to become the new lower middle class. This problem of the future can be expressed in many ways but I would emphasise the fact that - today 57 per cent of the population of India who live in villages produce only 13.8 per cent of GDP. No modern country can have 57 per cent of its people produce 13 per cent of its GDP. Now this is not an indication of a healthy index for a modern State. This massive migration from rural to urban centres of an enormous population must be addressed before the demographic dividend dies out.

So this is at the heart of the internal problem that faces India in the next 15-20 years and in that situation the question can well be asked-what is the role of Smart Power? Why would we want to exert power all over the world? But I think that there are some areas that in spite of this grave internal problem we have to look at— the fact that there is an external world out there. These are the inescapable issues that one cannot get away from, no matter how large the national problem is.

First, of course, are the neighbours. The neighbours are here to stay. They are not going away. You can't imagine that beyond our international borders lies an uninhabited ocean. Because it does not. You have Nepal, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Myanmar. For instance, if you take a country like Bangladesh which is an agrarian economy, the land availability is 12 persons per hectare, whereas it is three for India and 3.5 for Pakistan. In Northeast India it is one person per hectare. So what are we going to do? Make a fence and pretend that Bangladesh is not there? We can't do that. So the fact that we have neighbours is a problem that we have to deal with, no matter how serious our internal problems are.

The second is our relationship with the US. The US is a world power but in a way it's also an Indian Ocean power and in that sense, it is as much a neighbour of India as Pakistan or Bangladesh. Therefore, we have to contend with the US because there is no escaping that the US is a world power right at our door step, geopolitically if not geographically.

The third is Energy. Despite the amount of coal we have, we import 80 per cent of our hydrocarbons, gas and

oil, and we are dependent on this from a very volatile area.

The fourth is the rise of China. We may ignore the rise of China but China is not going to ignore India. The expansion of China is going to make it advance exponentially and make its presence felt through all the areas where it never existed before.

The fifth is the security in the Indian Ocean. Ever since the British and the French fought a series of five naval battles between Madras and Mauritius, for domination of the Indian Ocean, which eventually led to the control of the Indian peninsula, it is clear that we cannot sit isolated in our peninsula, and not care as to who controls the Indian Ocean.

Sixth is political Islam or Jihadism on which I don't want to spend too much time, as it is a very complex issue which at the current moment is evolving rapidly without a clear notion of the outcome of the present turmoil in the Middle East. We now have a Caliphate which has been declared in the parts of Syria and Iraq. You may dismiss it but an Islamic Caliphate is a serious idea for Muslims. They will take a call whether they want to laugh at the idea of a Caliphate being declared through inappropriate means or whether it is a serious issue and momentous event. I am aware that our Ministry of External Affairs is concerned with many more issues. Some will argue it is impossible in a globalised world to sequester six issues only.

My point is that if at this juncture we are not applying Smart Power we've got to start applying it somewhere. We cannot immediately start applying Smart Power globally. So I am reducing the areas in which there is an inescapable necessity to apply Smart Power and these are the six issues I have highlighted above. Many Indian commentators compare our Smart Power unfavourably with China but we lost the contract at Jaffna where the Chinese have built a beautiful harbour, railways and a fine modern highway from Colombo airport to the city. Of course, we have got to realise the fact that this is not a fair competition, in the sense that we are a two trillion economy and we are competing, as far as Smart Power is concerned, with another country whose GDP is nine trillion.

So there are limitations to our Smart Power and this is something we have to look at. So when you look at these six areas where we must apply Smart Power I find that we have not done too badly, particularly in some sectors. I would like to single them out. One of them is 'Energy'. We are dependent upon hydrocarbons, gas and oil from a region that is particularly volatile and we have no control over the geo-politics of that region and geo-politics decides oil prices. If the oil prices go to 120 dollars a barrel it will stymie the growth of our economy, an event that we have no control over. Complicating this issue further is the fact that we have six million Indians living there, sending back 50 billion dollars annually. So we are in a very weak position as far as being able to have a say; in fact that we have assets which are vital to our growth and that we are in a very vulnerable position vis-à-vis our energy needs. Yet, I must say that this country has managed over the last 30-40 years to make sure that energy comes into India. Two or three super tankers being unloaded every day, year on year and that I think is quite a fine example of the use of economic, diplomatic and cultural influence in an area where we are unable to use Hard Power because of our vulnerabilities.

Another area where we have not done too badly is the extraordinarily unfavourable ratios of comparison with China. Much of the military audience here believes that our stand against China has not been robust enough, but if you look at the economic comparison we have not failed entirely. We've engaged China. We've traded with China, cooperated in the Nalanda Project, in the cultural links and at the same time we have allocated as much money as we can for the defence of our country to stand up to a military stand-off with China.

However, where we have not been smart enough with China is in not accepting Chinese money, for reasons I cannot understand. Some believe that we can accept Chinese money only when the border problem is settled. I don't see it that way because China became rich by doing well on the world order being run by its main strategic competitor, which is the US. China grew rich on the US. It's got a 300 billion dollar surplus trade with the US and that's how China has become cash rich. So our reluctance to accept Chinese money, to fix India's infrastructure and create employment is one aspect that is weak as far as our policy with China is concerned.

At the same time, I think, we are blowing up the boundary issue out of proportion because I don't think a long boundary like this can be settled without 'give and take' and I don't think we have the political consensus to be able to 'give'; much less the large exchanges that may have to be necessitated in a border settlement with China.

Looking at the list of inescapable issues, I have reservations on whether we have done smartly as far as Smart Power is concerned, with our neighbours, particularly with Pakistan. I think there are similarities to the Cold War and to our relationship with Pakistan. It is 25 years since the Cold War ended, and it was won by the West without firing a shot. The momentous event in the collapse of the East in the Cold War was when the East Berliners took picks, axes and shovels and knocked down that wall in East Berlin.

The Cold War, in retrospect, was a propaganda war, which was won by the West with the use of Soft Power and in the war of Soft Power, the USSR actually lost. About a decade ago, I met a number of people who ran an organisation called 'Radio Free Europe' that used to broadcast programmes to Eastern Europe and the USSR for almost 50 years. During the later stages of the Cold war, people in Eastern Europe and Soviet Union used to tune in to 'Radio Free Europe' to get the real news, and that is how the propaganda war was won.

In our conflict with Pakistan, by and large there are huge misperceptions. I met a Pakistani senior retired General who says he goes to the Pakistani Staff College to speak to the officers and they ask him "what do the Indians want? Why do they keep firing at us on the border?" This misperception needs to be settled. This is a Media war in many ways. Many people say, Pakistanis watch Indian TV channels in any case. Pakistanis are misled by their history books, they are misled by the press, if there is an attack on the Karachi Airport it is attributed to a foreign country, the euphemism used for India. In fact as far as their Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) is concerned, when it carries out its terrorist attacks, it always says its TTP is funded by a foreign country. So these perceptions need to be corrected perhaps by a smart media.

There are some areas of Hard Power too where we are not matching ends and means. The last war that we fought with Pakistan, apart from the Kargil conflict was 43 years ago. But for 43 years large portions of our military spending has been oriented towards our defence against Pakistan and yet on two occasions, in 2002 after the Parliament attack and after the Mumbai attack, the Armed Forces were frankly unable to give the political authority a military option. Archival literature is deficient in India, but we do know that the Chiefs met the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS), and we know that at this meeting various options were discussed, but eventually it was decided that we did not have a suitable military option as far as dealing with Pakistan was concerned. If that is understandable as far as 2002 is concerned, why was it forgivable six years later in 2008? And why would it be acceptable if Mumbai was to occur again in 2014 and we are still unable to provide a military option? So there are deficiencies as far as the Armed Forces community is concerned when it comes to Hard Power options as part of Smart Power.

We may stop looking at single issues. You may well ask me, what are my recommendations as far as the institutional problems are concerned; are we geared to use Smart Power? I think to use Smart Power, we need to define the area in which we intend to use the same. The world is not standing still. It is evolving. If we have to use Smart Power against Myanmar, for instance, the objective that we define for ourselves would be to bring Aung Sang Su Ki back into power against the Generals. This is going to take eight or 10 years but during these 8-10 years Myanmar is going to change. We need to write a scenario which will track the future evolution of Myanmar particularly with relation to India. Who is going to write the scenarios? We have a lot of institutions and individuals capable of writing scenarios.

I think the best expertise as far as foreign relations are concerned is available today at the desk systems in the MEA. But unfortunately, the desks in the MEA are so tied up running day to day diplomacy that they don't have the time to sit back and dream about creating scenarios ten years down the line. But we have other organisations. We have the Research and Analysis Wing (R&AW) which also has expertise and a database of intelligence, we have the staffers in National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS) who also specialise in certain areas; we have the expertise in the Integrated Defence Staff (IDS) in the military. But who is going to pull this expertise together to create a holistic matrix which in turn will be an important resource for exercise of smart power ?

In the US, it is usually done by the Directorate of Net Assessment, which is tasked by the President to collect inputs from intelligence from the foreign office, from the National Security Council and from the Pentagon and put it together which the Directorate of Net Assessment does in a document that is available on Google called Global Futures. It is available as open literature but the classified Papers which led to the making of Global Futures are not available as open literature. The Global Futures for 2014-18 has something like 64 papers backing it up, including on subjects like space, technology, global warming etc. We don't have a similar process. Institutionally, I think, we lack the ability to write scenarios and then address Soft Power at that scenario.

I have come to the end of my talk. All I want to say is that I don't think there is going to be a state to state conflict in the next quarter century. We are already 43 years from the last war we fought. In the history of man, no democracy has ever declared war on another democracy and as there is a continuous and constant movement towards democratisation of the world, there are arenas of the world where war is not going to occur for a very long period. Brazil fought the last war in 1859 - that's a 179 years ago. So we should start thinking in terms of either, using Hard Power in a smarter way or, using Smart Power, i.e. various aspects of Soft and Hard Power to benefit fully from the application of Smart Power in a future where old definitions are crumbling in the wake of newer strategies for influencing the course of history. With that I thank you all for listening to me. Thank you!

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