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THE MAIN ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF SOFT AND HARD SECURITY POLICIES

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Abstract: The article highlights the main advantages and disadvantages of security policy as the philosophy of national security. It presents the philosophical basis of national security idea in the context of changing international relations in recent decades, largely driven by globalization, technological advancements, and the emergence of new threats. Ensuring national security, which is already a crucial component of modern foreign policy, is achieved through various practical measures. Among these, two opposing approaches stand out: soft security policy and hard security policy. These approaches play an important role in determining how states respond to threats and what kind of relationships they form with other countries. Soft security policy involves the use of diplomacy, economic, and cultural means to exert influence in the international arena. In contrast, hard security policy is traditionally associated with the use of force, sanctions, and the deployment of military resources to eliminate external threats. Both of these approaches have their strengths and weaknesses, making it essential to assess how they interact with each other and their place in contemporary international relations. The main aim of this article is to provide a fundamental comparative analysis of the two approaches by examining their characteristics, advantages, and disadvantages.

Keywords: security, international relations, state politics, system, process, strategy, concept, legislation, challenge, philosophy.

Introduction

Security has been and remains one of the main priorities of states and peoples throughout human history. In the modern globalized world, security policy has become a much more multifaceted and complex system, which includes both the traditional military component and economic dependencies, as well as new phenomena, such as: the spread of influence

through information technologies and cultural influence.

The diversity of challenges in a changing world order affects approaches to ensuring security, as these phenomena requires transformed strategies and policies aimed at guaranteeing it. Political, economic, and technological changes also result in new threats, such as cybersecurity, biological hazards (e.g., pandemics), as well as robots and artificial intelligence. Thus such

changes demand new approaches to security combining technological advancements and international cooperation.

Methodological Foundations

The issue of security is simultaneously a problem of major theoretical significance and one directly related to political practice, state governance, and operations, thus representing a complex, multifaceted and multi-layered phenomenon (Kocharyan, 2012, p. 72). Consequently, trends toward globalization increase coordination between countries, making them more vulnerable to international threats. This in its turn requires the operation of more integrated security systems. As a result, security policy has become a field of strategic importance for modern states. Its aim is to protect national interests, preserving state sovereignty and strengthening their position in international relations. In this context, the coordinated evaluation of two main approaches—hard and soft security policies—becomes even more crucial. To assess the effectiveness of soft and hard security policies, various analytical methods can be employed. One of them is the method of comparative analysis, which allows to reveal the strengths and weaknesses of each approach within the context of specific examples and cases. The comparative analysis of conflicts is emphasized, where specific examples of international practice are studied, examining how each conflict has affected strategic outcomes (Torosyan & Petrosyan, 2015, p. 142).

Another distinct method is the analysis of multipolar relations, which helps to evaluate how different factors, such as economics, politics, and culture, interact within the frameworks of each security approach.

Network analysis methods can also be applied to study how various actors in international relations (states, international organizations, non-state actors) influence security decision-making. This method allows to clarify how each security approach, whether soft or hard, affects not only relations between states but also those formed between international organizations, humanitarian organizations, or even individuals. When applying statistical methods, an attempt is made to avoid conflicting explanations

through, albeit weak, yet valuable statistical control, but even in this case, it is not always possible to collect sufficiently accurate data.³ In such analyses, it is important to consider global conditions, such as the role of international law, economic globalization, and geopolitical changes.

Such a range of methods is especially important for evaluating the effectiveness of soft power policies, as their results are not always obvious and require consideration of a broader context.

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Within the context of comparative assessment,

it is necessary to clarify the main approaches to the institutional differentiation of soft and hard security policies.

Philosophy of Security Policy

Soft security policy, the concept of which was developed by the American scientist Joseph Nye, involves the use of diplomatic, educational, and cultural means to exert influence in the international arena. Nye introduced the term “soft power,” which refers to a state’s ability to attract and persuade rather than coerce (Nye & Joseph, 2005). Soft power is employed through cultural and educational programs, economic initiatives, as well as foreign policy aimed at improving a state’s external image or character.

On the other hand, hard security policy focuses on force or the threat of its use to achieve strategic goals. This approach is linked to the concept of “hard power,” where security is attained through the application of force or the threat thereof. The main instruments of hard policy include armed conflicts, military alliances, economic sanctions, and the use of force to protect state interests. Examples of hard security policy implementation can be seen in the context of NATO activities, conflicts in the Middle East, or interventions by major powers in regional wars. Soft policy aims to strengthen international ties through shared interests and cooperation. One example is the European Union’s foreign policy, which actively utilizes its cultural and economic resources in Eastern Europe and the Balkans to promote democracy, human rights, and sustainable development. Through initiatives like the “Eastern Partnership” program, the EU seeks to establish strong ties with neighboring states by offering them not only economic assistance but also the prospect of integration with the European market (Raik, 2022). Similarly, the European Union often responds to international threats by proposing policies and programs that contribute to conflict resolution globally without the use of force. Thus, soft policy can have a profound and lasting impact, allowing for the prevention of potential tensions. It’s worth noting that in the current phase, parallel to the development of states’ foreign policy concepts, many experts and researchers have introduced into scientific

and practical discourse concepts equivalent to or adjacent to soft power, such as “harmonious development,” “global harmony,” “universal unity,” and others, based on the development of intercultural cooperation.

Soft policy is particularly applied in the field of foreign trade, where states can utilize their economic capabilities to engage partners and protect their interests. For example, China actively uses its economic power to establish mutually beneficial ties with developing countries, particularly through the “Belt and Road Initiative” (McBride et al., n.d.). In this context, China can exert influence by providing loans and infrastructure projects without resorting to military force. Furthermore, soft security policy also encompasses the protection of human rights, support for democratic institutions, and the work of international organizations to create a stable and peaceful world order. It is primarily implemented through long-term cooperation, providing countries or regions with the opportunity to develop economically and become more stable. China itself developed its modern foreign policy concept taking into account several factors. The first relates to that state’s significant involvement in global integration processes.

In addition, in recent decades, there has been a noticeable increase in the PRC’s activity in global geopolitical processes, driven by China’s growing needs as a world power. To address this issue, China, finding itself in a catch-up role with countries that have achieved security success, began to widely implement the “soft power” policy, tested and successfully applied by other developed countries. Currently, China is consistently improving the means and tools of such a policy, widely using the unique characteristics of its ancient civilization, sometimes presenting them to the world as an alternative to the Western way of life and thinking.

Hard security policy is a crucial component of security policy at both the state and international levels. It encompasses security measures such as the protection of state borders, ensuring the security of strategic facilities, strategies for maintaining international peace, and so on. Hard security policy provides “physical” protection and resilience, used in combating wars, conflicts, and terrorist acts. A primary component of hard security policy is border protection.

It requires the application of international standards that clarify how security should be guaranteed (United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs, n.d.). Currently, many countries around the world are confronting interstate conflicts and terrorist threats. Driven by globalization and the development of new technologies, hard security policy is also changing in parallel. In the last few decades, hard security policy has expanded to include new approaches and strategies, such as the use of “smart” technologies, regional security methods, and so on.

It was emphasized that hard security policy, unlike soft policy, is directed at the use of force or the threat thereof to achieve strategic goals. An example of hard security policy is the US participation in armed conflicts, initiating the Iraq War (Lebovic, 2019) or intervening in Afghanistan (Theros, 2023). In both cases, the United States used its military force to protect national interests and fight terrorism. Hard policy tools were also used in other regions – for example, the US military operations in Syria in 2015 when the civil war unfolding within the country became a focus of international pressure.

This type of security policy is also applied in counterterrorism operations to achieve faster results but entails certain losses of human and military resources. In this regard, having a short-term impact, hard policy is more effective for the territorial defense of states. Consequently, hard security policy is based on the use of physical force and threats to neutralize dangers. However, hard policy involves both hot military conflicts and economic, political, and military sanctions to deter adversaries. This form of security unites states pursuing the same interests mainly in military alliances (NATO, CSTO, etc.). For example, the actions taken by NATO (Sperling & Webber, 2018) member countries in the context of the Libyan conflict also demonstrated the impact of hard security policy. The military intervention in Libya aimed to prevent violence and protect civilians.

But the same occurred in the cases of Iran and North Korea, where the US and other countries applied diplomatic and military pressure methods, proceeding from the prism of international security. Another example is NATO’s active military presence in Eastern Europe and the Baltic countries in the context of “deterrence

against the Russian threat”. Military bases have been established in these countries, and military exercises are regularly conducted, which are integral parts of this overall strategy (Mälksoo, 2024).

While having differences, soft and hard security policies have similar or overlapping goals – to ensure security and stability, but they achieve these goals through different means (Tchotchua, 2024). Soft security policy has clear advantages in the long term. It helps build trust, develop mutually beneficial relationships, and reduce conflicts. However, achieving noticeable results in complex political contexts often requires significant time and resources.

On the other hand, hard power is effective in short-term processes and ensures a rapid response to threats. It allows for the quick neutralization of dangers, such as, as already mentioned, terrorism or armed conflicts. But it can also lead to serious consequences on an international scale, such as economic sanctions, deterioration of relations with other states, and increased antagonism. In the long term internationally, hard power can lead to a chain reaction of violence and destabilization.

In the context of comparative analysis of soft and hard security policies, it is emphasized that hard and soft power are two different tools in international relations that states use to achieve their interests, resolve security issues, and pursue geopolitical goals. These two approaches, although different in nature, are often employed together, complementing each other. Hard power refers to the use of force and threats, aiming to coerce or subdue other states or groups, and this is usually carried out through military force or economic sanctions.

The use of hard power tends to yield quick and obvious results, but it can have a negative impact, remains short-term, and often ignores the concerns or disagreements of partners or the international community. The application of soft power is a more long-term strategy aimed at spreading a country’s values and building trust without coercion or force. This is especially important when the goal is to gain influence without using military force. These two approaches can be used together, thus providing a more effective strategy. States often need to combine hard and soft power, creating a more multifaceted approach that incorporates a mix

of force and diplomacy.

This is especially important when a state aims to achieve long-term peace and stability while simultaneously addressing international challenges. For example, US foreign policy often combines military presence with diplomatic efforts and international cooperation. Typically, states are wary of using only one strategy, considering the long-term complexities.

Modern Interpretations of Soft and Hard Power Policies

Studies on modern meanings of soft and hard power are certainly based on the ideology of national security. However, a comparative analysis of the approaches of different authors allows us to draw conclusions about modern interpretations of soft and hard power policies. Thus, De Martino (2020) classifies soft and hard power as the components of national security, according to the following criteria:

- Definitions of soft and hard power in the context of national security,
- Functional interdependence of soft and hard power,
- Correlation of sources of formation of soft and hard power,
- Social actors involved in the security policy of soft and hard power.

Fenenko (2021) pays attention to the problem of identifying, defining and studying phenomena opposing security policies. Thus, he puts forward the term anti-soft power, the manifestations of which can be seen in modern rapidly changing societies, which are characterized by deep globalization and transformation processes. In this case social norms and stratification structures are considered in crisis. In such a situation, the author distinguishes the following criteria that are characteristic of soft and hard powers, in particular:

- The national security system is based on chauvinistic or authoritarian ideas, as a result of which soft power is manifested through the use of hard methods,
- The inclusion of ideological alternatives in the national security system, as a result of which both soft power and hard power can be manifested on an opposing

ideological basis,

- The inclusion of soft power in the national security system is artificially limited, as a result of which the functionality of hard power is perceived as the only viable guarantor of national security.

The security content of the use of soft and hard forces has been addressed by a number of authors who have emphasized the importance of social justification and addressing of security policy (Matlary, 2018; Ilgen, 2016; Wilson, 2008; Lackey, 2015; Barr et al., 2015). In these studies, the concepts of soft and hard power are analyzed in the context of the transformational socio-political and cultural processes of modern societies, and national security policy is formulated mainly as a hybrid system of security policy, where it is not possible to clearly distinguish between soft and hard power policies. On the contrary, the complex, hybrid manifestations of soft and hard power are characterized as smart power policy and are presented as a key feature of national security policy characteristic of contemporary societies.

Security Policy Tools

Hard and soft security policies are applied in many different situations, and their impact is usually assessed not only as expected future outcomes but also as a direct response to current threats. The application of soft policy can be seen in the activities of large international organizations (often extending beyond purely security or military frameworks), such as the UN (Nye & Joseph, 2007) and the EU, which focus on maintaining peace and security, as well as economic and cultural development processes (Ferreira-Pereira & Pinto, 2021). At the same time, there are some limitations, for example, soft policy is effective in conditions where diplomacy can lead to understanding and mutual interests.

Hard policy, being complex, is not ideal in long-term relationships. However, it can be extremely useful when a rapid response to global threats is necessary. Hard policy can also lead to long-term obstacles in global governance, hindering cooperation in the international arena. Consequently, the choice of the approaches dis-

cussed depends on the specific situation and the goals set for the state. Soft policy is effective in the long term and contributes to the development of stable international relations, while hard policy allows for a rapid response to threats. However, in reality, these two strategies often do not contradict each other, and in contemporary international relations, their combination is often observed, which experts also call “smart power” (Norris & Malknecht, 2014). This approach allows states to respond flexibly to security threats by simultaneously combining diplomatic and military tools and maximizing their influence in the international arena.

In other words, bilateral approaches should be used in combination, depending on the specific situation and geopolitical trends. It is also possible that the use of hard power can lead to long-term damage and deterioration of relations; however, the effectiveness of soft policy can also decrease in cases where immediate and strong actions are required.

These two approaches can be used together, thus providing a more effective strategy. States often need to combine hard and soft power, creating a more multifaceted approach that incorporates a mix of force and diplomacy.

Thus, more states are choosing to apply smart power, offsetting the advantages of soft and hard policy, thereby ensuring their national interests and international security stability (Filimon, 2016). When building its security sector, Armenia adopted a concept regarding types of national security that closely aligns with the multi-vectored security theory proposed by the Copenhagen School, formulated by the Conflict and Peace Research Institute. The latter, demonstrating a multi-vector approach to security, distinguishes five categorical forms, touching upon both military (military security) and non-military (political, economic, societal, and environmental security) frameworks. In implementing its security policy, Armenia relies on a toolkit that encompasses the application and combination of “hard” and “soft” powers, creating greater opportunities to build and implement national security policy on a solid foundation.

The “hard” tools of the Republic of Armenia’s security policy relate mainly to military-oriented measures, which are used to protect its national security, prevent potential threats, and defend territorial integrity.

The “hard power” tools of the Republic of Armenia’s security policy are:

- The RA Armed Forces, consisting of ground forces, air defense and air forces, border and police troops, state security, civil defense forces, and other militarized formations. This is the permanent military force of the Republic of Armenia, tasked with protecting the country’s borders, deterring any external aggression, and ensuring national defense (Sargsyan & Kocharyan, 2016).
- Defense alliances, among which we can highlight Armenia’s membership in the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) (Chufrin, 2022), as well as its cooperation with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and participation in NATO’s Partnership for Peace (PfP) program (Ghevondyan, 2018).
- Deployment of border infrastructure, surveillance technologies, and border forces to secure its borders and prevent illegal activities (smuggling, illegal crossings).
- Organization and utilization of law enforcement agencies within the RA’s security policy to neutralize threats directed against internal security (terrorism, riots, coups, unrest, etc.).

Implementation of cybersecurity measures aimed at protecting critical infrastructure and government networks from cyber threats (hackers, espionage, cyber warfare, etc.) and ensuring the resilience of Armenia’s digital infrastructure. In today’s digital age, cybersecurity is a crucial component of Armenia’s security policy.

Organization and development of the military industry to support its armed forces and reduce dependence on military procurements from external sources. The aforementioned tangible and often military-oriented measures are essential components of Armenia’s overall security strategy and defense posture, which provide means to protect Armenia’s national interests and promote peace and security both within the country and in external spheres.

In addition to the aforementioned tools, the security policy of the Republic of Armenia also includes certain “soft power” instruments that are primarily aimed at promoting stability, building trust, and neutralizing factors that contribute to security challenges. These tools, com-

plementing the “hard power” measures of security, focus on areas such as diplomacy, cultural exchanges, and more.

The main “soft power” tools of Armenia’s security policy are as follows:

- organization and implementation of diplomacy and international relations, where Armenia’s involvement plays a crucial role in promoting regional stability,
- conflict resolution, and
- building trust with neighboring countries and international partners.

In this context, Armenia has successfully established diplomatic relations with around 182 countries and is actively engaged in multilateral diplomacy by being a member of international organizations and participating in various events and forums. Armenia is a member of the CIS, the UN, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and other regional and international organizations (Guseletov, 2021). Application of public diplomacy, which plays a significant role in conveying Armenia’s adopted policies, created and inherited values to both external and internal audiences, shaping perceptions about them, and building new relationships in the process.

Involvement in conflict resolution processes and the implementation of mediation efforts imply a series of diplomatic initiatives, including organizing dialogue, strengthening trust between the parties, and implementing measures aimed at restoring peace in the region.

Cultural and educational exchange programs contribute to mutual understanding, cooperation, and goodwill with other nations. By participating in such events and initiatives, Armenia gains a unique opportunity to build bridges and strengthen relationships with neighboring countries and the international community.

The factor of the diaspora and its involvement plays a decisive role in supporting Armenia’s development, preserving Armenian identity, promoting Armenian interests globally, and strengthening the ties between Armenia and the worldwide Armenian community. Through various forms of economic support, political advocacy, humanitarian aid, and engagement, the diaspora contributes to the growth and prosperity of Armenia as a whole.

The tools of “soft power” play a significant

role in Armenia’s security policy. They contribute to overall security and stability by addressing non-traditional security threats and promoting cooperation with other nations. As a conclusion to the presented comparative analysis, it is important to note that soft and hard security policies require two different strategies but are complementary approaches in international relations and security provision. Soft policy is based on cooperation, cultural influence, and informational diplomacy, which fosters long-term stability and strengthens trust. In contrast, hard policy is applied to neutralize immediate threats and ensure physical security, relying on military force, sanctions, and deterrence methods.

Both approaches have their advantages and limitations; soft policy can often be ineffective in the face of immediate threats, while hard policy may lead to tension, losses, and deterioration of relationships. In modern international relations, states increasingly use a combination of these two approaches to create “smart security,” which is more effective for achieving both short-term and long-term goals. The analysis also indicates that the combination of soft and hard policies not only ensures a comprehensive approach to security but also promotes international cooperation, which is vital for addressing global challenges.

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Security Policies Limitations

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The role of a framework that encompasses and combines these two types of measures is invaluable for Armenia’s security policy. While the tools of “hard power” provide means to deter aggression, protect territorial integrity, and respond to security threats, the tools of “soft power” contribute to regional stability, address the root causes of insecurity, and foster cooperation through diplomatic efforts and cultural exchange programs.

Conclusion

As a conclusion to the presented comparative analysis, it is important to note that soft and hard security policies require two different strategies but are complementary approaches in international relations and security provision. Soft policy is based on cooperation, cultural influence, and informational diplomacy, which fosters long-term stability and strengthens trust. In contrast, hard policy is applied to neutralize immediate threats and ensure physical security, relying on military force, sanctions, and deterrence methods.

At the domestic conceptual level, countries that adhere to a hard version of security policy

have normative-legal frameworks for the formation and functioning of their security systems, as well as value-based fundamental issues. Consequently, the role of political power becomes more defined within the framework of ensuring and implementing these norms. In the case of adopting a soft policy, foundational security concepts are established in the country—primarily in the form of strategies and doctrines—without essential normative-legal documentation. The entire array of tools for implementing this policy and its objectives is determined by political leadership and leaders who thereby assume “personalized” responsibility for ensuring security.

Manifestations of soft and hard power policies have certain functions in the context of the concept of national security. Based on the main, consolidating, function of the concept of national security, we can draw some conclusions regarding the functionality of soft and hard power. In particular,

- the use of soft and hard power policies is aimed at preserving the territorial-state integrity of the country,
- the predominance of one or another power policy speaks of the priorities of national security, which can be expressed both in the long-term and in the short-term,
- the manifestation of soft power policy is based on the transformation of the value system and goal-setting in society, which implies, mainly, the internal transformation of society, a change in ideology and a change in educational, behavioral and value attitudes,
- the manifestation of hard power policy is based on the principle of rapid response in connection with the need to ensure national security.

The concepts of soft and hard power policies have multi-level manifestations. The genesis of these policies is directly related to the concept of national security, with the awareness of the need to form and implement protective mechanisms to counter threats to society. In other words, the formation of soft and hard power policies corresponds to the historical, philosophical and social foundations of the formation of the state, and the predominance of one or another policy is due to various, socially signifi-

cant conditions of the existence of the state and society.

Based on the comparative analysis, it can be concluded that the distinction between soft and hard power policies is currently quite arbitrary, since the functionality of the national security system is expressed at the level of practical implementation of countering threats to society, and therefore can include the concept of both soft and hard power policies.

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