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Implications of North's Information 'Soft Power' in the North-South News Flow

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Introduction

At the dawn of the 21st century, serious questions are being raised by governments, academicians and average citizens about the implications of the Information Revolution for the worldwide flow of news and information. For the world long used to an established and predictable pattern of news and information mostly flowing from the developed North to the developing South, the Information Revolution was expected to serve as an equalizer in this unequal flow of information. After all, the most revolutionary component of the new information technologies, the Internet, was seen as a truly democratic medium, allowing anyone to disseminate information worldwide with practically negligible transmission costs. Six years after the Internet seeped into people's consciousness across the globe, it is commonly recognized that while it is greatly easier to transmit one's point of view to the other end of the world, how seriously and credibly that point of view is taken is an altogether different matter. In other words, the mere availability of information previously not within reach is not a sufficient factor for it to compete effectively with other information on a common issue. The new information must also be seen to be competing with existing information within the realm of credibility before it can hope to make any significant impression on the information consumer.

The same argument can be made regarding the competitiveness of news and information purveyed by another major component of the Information Revolution -- international satellite television. The global popularity of Ted Turner's Cable News Network (CNN) ever since its live coverage of the Gulf War in 1990 has spawned scores of satellite television channels by many countries interested in taking their view of events to people regionally and globally. But does China's CCTV, seen in the United States via satellite television dishes, carry the same credibility that, say, the BBC World does across the world? Can the news service of the international channel of Egyptian television compete well with the one provided by Germany's Deutsche Welle TV?

Even when the political factor contributing to credibility problem is removed, can we say that news programs from satellite channels of two democratic countries -- for example, the United States, a superpower, and India, a developing country -- will carry the same credibility to the global audience? If the answer to these questions were to be "no," then we have to ask the question: What are the factors that contribute to the appeal and credibility of information purveyed by international news organizations? This chapter will address this question and examine the implications of the new world of communication unleashed upon us by the Information Revolution.

This revolution began with the introduction of the fax machine in the early 1980s and has progressed through the stages of cable and satellite television, cellular telephony, and the desk top computer-based Internet, with its multi-media appendages such as voice e-mail and digital radio and video. The European Union

has recently done one up on the Americans, the pioneers in information technologies, by pushing forward to introduce Internet-protocol-based devices such as cellular phones with screens and personal digital assistants that, when combined with Internet access services, allow users to effectively manage their communications any time at any place. With the impending severing of the Internet umbilical cord from the desk-top computer, the Information Revolution is about to come of age.

The central proposition explored in this chapter is that because of the ideological and economic appeal of the North, and the established credibility of its news organizations, the new information technologies will provide additional "soft power" to the North to further its ideological objectives in the developing South. This proposition will be examined within the framework of the theories of international news and information flow, and the factors critical to the credibility of information in the international sphere. We will use the definition of "soft power" provided by a Harvard University international relations theorist, Joseph Nye, Jr., who says that "Soft power is the ability to achieve desired outcomes in international affairs through attraction rather than coercion. It works by convincing others to follow, or getting them to agree to, norms and institutions that produce the desired behavior. Soft power can rest on the appeal of one's ideas or the ability to set the agenda in ways that shape the preferences of others."¹

Theories of International News Flow

Several studies have identified and explained the factors that influence the flow of news and information globally. Galtung found that there is a "center-periphery" pattern in the flow of international news. News, he noted, flows mostly from the "center," or dominant countries, to the "periphery," or dependent areas. He relates these theoretical constructs to communication and cultural interactions between nations and points to vertical interaction as the major factor in the inequality of nations, a division reinforced by "feudal networks of international communication" dominated by nations in the "center."²

A study by Kariel and Rosenvall supported this theory by concluding that the "eliteness" of a nation as a news source was the most important criterion for news selection³. The authors referred to Schramm's definition of elite nations as a "group of highly developed countries which are also dominant in world politics."⁴ "Eliteness" was also seen as the relative standing of a nation in the eyes of others⁵. Kariel and Rosenvall found a statistically significant correlation (0.586) between the amount of trade between two countries and the number of news items about the two countries in each other's media. They also found a statistically significant correlation (0.469) between the gross national product of a country and the number of news items appearing about that country in another country's media. But the highest correlation (0.845) was found between the "eliteness" of a country and the number of items about that country appearing in the media of nations ranked lower on the eliteness scale. The authors described this correlation as both statistically significant and substantively important⁶.

A study by Hester concluded that at any given time, the nations of the world have designated places in an international pecking order. Perceptions of positions in that order partially determine the flow, direction and volume of information. This study also noted that strong economic relations or cultural affinities increase the flow of news among nations, as does the perception of threat between any two nations⁷. Another theory says that news flow is vertical from developed countries (North) to developing countries (South), with supplemental horizontal flows within the North and within the South, although flow within the latter is substantially lesser in volume. Also, while there exists a good deal of news flow from South to North, it tends to be significantly less in volume in comparison with the flow from North to South⁸.

These theories would place the United States, the major countries in the European Union -- Germany, Great Britain, France and Italy -- and Japan as the elite countries for political and economic reasons, among others, in the hierarchy of nations. Keohane and Nye, Jr. say that ideological and material success of a country makes its culture and ideology attractive⁹. They note that America's popular culture, with its libertarian and egalitarian currents, dominates film, television and electronic communications. Germany, Britain, France, Italy and Japan reflect the same attributes, although to varying degrees as compared with the United States. When the "language" factor is added to the factor of "eliteness," the United States and Britain acquire particular significance because English is the most widely spoken international language in the world, which would seem to particularly facilitate and promote the spread of values and culture from these two countries. It is not a coincidence, therefore, that the standards and architecture of the new information systems, like the Internet, are built around the English language.

The use of the French language in several parts of the world would similarly enable France, another of the elite nations, to spread its values and culture. The language factor may inhibit the media "soft power" of Germany, Italy and Japan around the world, something that at least Germany is very much aware of in view of the fact that one-third of its daily programming on DW-TV for the global audience is broadcast in English.

Theory of Information Credibility

Much research has been done over the years to determine the factors associated with credible information. In more than 50 experiments done by Yale University's Program of Research on Communication, several factors were identified and explained toward understanding the issue of information credibility¹⁰. They are: a) The communicator, b) The message, c) The audience, d) The interaction. Some of the key findings are as follows.

A credible communicator is one who is seen to be "trustworthy" and "expert." Communicators or information sources perceived to be biased and unfair have low credibility. A credible communicator is also a likeable one. A communicator who is perceived to have had a history of providing credible information will have an edge over a new communicator. In terms of message structure, presenting both sides of an issue is more effective with those who are well educated or initially opposed, and two-sided presentations tend to inoculate against future counterpropaganda. Effectiveness of a communication does not have any clear link with the order in which the pro and con arguments are presented. Fears arousing and threatening communications are effective only in cases when such appeals are not too strong.

The studies of audience found that it is easier to persuade individuals with high intelligence than those with low intellectual ability. This is because the former have more ability to draw valid inferences when exposed to persuasive communications that rely primarily on impressive logical arguments. At the same time, those with high intellectual ability are also more likely to be critical of the arguments presented so there is more of a challenge in persuading them. The research also showed that audience interaction with the communicator is a much more effective way of changing opinions than passive participation, such as merely listening to a program on a radio or reading a news story or editorial in a newspaper.

Other research has looked into the issue of medium effectiveness and found no consistent pattern of advantage in one medium over another. Klapper, in his study on the effects of mass media, concluded that all face-to-face contact is more persuasive than radio, which, in turn, is more effective than print. Television and films probably rank between face-to-face communication and

radio, but this latter point has not been empirically demonstrated¹¹.

Eliteness, Credibility and Media Dominance

It is easy to understand within the framework of these news flow theories and information credibility factors why dominant media players in the world have been, and continue to be, from the major Western countries. The eliteness of the United States, Great Britain and France is clearly a factor in the global dominance of print, audio and video news services from these countries, but what needs to be explained is why other elite nations -- Japan, Germany and Italy -- do not have international news organizations with a similar level of presence. After all, Japan and Germany are stronger economically than Britain and France when measured in per capita income levels, and Italy is economically strong enough to be a member of the G7 group of industrial nations.

One explanation to this anomaly in media presence could be offered within the context of one measure of credibility discussed earlier -- that a communicator with a history of providing credible information will have an edge over a new entrant in the marketplace of ideas. Japan, Germany and Italy had controlled and officially directed media systems, which were known more for the quality, or lack of it, of their propaganda activities globally than for any credible journalistic endeavors. It was not until these countries became democracies at the end of World War II that media were freed of the governmental stranglehold and allowed necessary freedoms to process news and information accurately and objectively. The United States, Britain and France, on the other hand, have had long-standing pluralistic democratic political systems predicated on the values of rule of law, human rights, and religious freedom, among others. The media systems that emerged within the framework of these values were bound to show commitment to the journalistic values of accuracy and objectivity sooner rather than later, thus having a head start toward consolidating their credibility. In the United States, for example, journalistic objectivity has been a tradition for almost 150 years. Amidst propaganda from fascist and Nazi movements in Europe, John Reith, BBC's first director-general, built this world news service in the late 1920s under tenets of objectivity¹² that in early 2000 would be termed as "Britain's gift to the world" by U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Anan.

Since the eliteness of a nation combined with the perception of credibility of a media organization from that nation are the necessary factors to the attractiveness of that news organization globally, we can see why Western news organizations are dominant while those from other major countries are only marginal players. It will take a long time for the media of Russia, a one-time elite nation in the form of the Soviet Union because of its superpower status, to get over the legacy of Marxist propaganda that was the hallmark of the Soviet media, including TASS, its global news agency. China may be an up and coming economic power, but its media are still state owned and used to purvey only the government version of domestic and world affairs, just as the media did in the old days of the Soviet Union. Democratic India's media are doing much better in the realm of objectivity, but India is a developing country so its media do not yet have the appeal or financial resources to compete with the news organizations of "elite" states. Indonesia, another large country, has only recently emerged as a democracy from more than 30 years of authoritarian rule, so it will be a long time before its media make an impression globally.

Indeed, even as the democratic wave has spread around the world since the collapse of the Soviet Union, less than half of the world's nations had democratic political systems in 1999. The New York-based Freedom House, which annually publishes a report on the status of civil liberties and press freedom around the world, said in its 1998-99 report that 88 of the world's 191 countries (46 percent) were rated as "Free," meaning that they

maintain a high degree of such freedoms. Although this is the largest number of free countries on record, the remaining 54 percent continued to deny or substantially limit political and civil rights, and personal and press freedoms to their people¹³.

Given that educated people around the world are interested in accurate and reliable information on domestic and international issues, they are likely to turn to international news providers when their domestic news organizations cannot provide such information because of limited news gathering resources or government controls. Keohane and Nye, Jr., say that news organizations in the United States, Britain and France have capabilities for collecting intelligent information that dwarf those of other nations. "Information power flows to those who can edit and credibly validate information to sort out what is both correct and important.... Brand names and the ability to bestow an international seal of approval will become more important."¹⁴ As we will see, Western news organizations have both the brand names and the international seal of approval because of the eliteness and credibility factors mentioned before. To reach such a status, emerging news agencies will have a lot of catching up to do before they can compete with the established Western news agencies.

Dominant Global News Organizations

Because of the reasons discussed above, the dominant news organizations globally, whether print or broadcast oriented, have been from the United States, Great Britain and France for many decades. We will briefly identify and explain the operations of the major global media players.

Print news agencies: The Associated Press from the United States, Reuters from Britain and Agence France-Presse from France have been the major international news agencies since the 19th century. Using state-of-the-art telecommunications facilities -- telephone, radio, cable, satellite phones and photo uplinks with mobile antennas, laptop computers with wireless satellite uplinks, and the Internet -- these news agencies can transmit up to 10,000 words per minute between any two points on the globe.

The AP says its mission is to provide factual coverage of news to all parts of the globe for use. "News bearing the AP logotype can be counted on to be accurate, balanced and informed."¹⁵ The AP serves 8,500 newspaper, radio and television subscribers in 112 countries, in addition to its subscribers in the United States. The AP sends more than 20 million words and about 1,000 photos each day from its 240 bureaus to its subscribers worldwide. It serves as a source of news, photos, graphics, audio and video for more than one billion people every day. AP Information Services, started in 1990, licenses AP content to online service providers worldwide¹⁶.

Reuters supplies news and financial information services to media subscribers worldwide. Reuters says its premier position as a global news and information group is based on a reputation for speed, accuracy, integrity and impartiality as well as continuous technological innovation. The agency's news service is subscribed to by news organizations in 157 countries either directly or through their national news agencies, which translate the Reuters copy into their own languages for distribution. Over 3 million words of Reuters' copy, supplied by 183 bureaus worldwide, are published daily. News is gathered and edited for both business and media clients in 23 languages. Reuters also provides news and information to over 225 Internet sites reaching an estimated 12 million viewers per month and generating approximately 140 million pageviews¹⁷.

Agence France-Presse, with its bureaus in 165 countries, provides news services in English, French, German, Spanish, Portuguese and Arabic, delivering 2 million words a day. AFP's subscribers include 650 newspapers and periodicals, 400 radio

and television stations, and about 100 national news agencies around the world¹⁸. In March 2000, AFP began to distribute information services in French and English via any fixed or mobile Internet device, including mobile phones, screenphones, and set top boxes for televisions. The new service enables telecommunications carriers to provide their users with access to personalized information services, anywhere, anytime, and on any device. Subscribers can also receive news on pre-selected topics through e-mail¹⁹

Supplemental news agencies: Supplemental news agencies go beyond spot news coverage provided by AP, Reuters and AFP, and offer hard news exclusives, investigative reporting, political commentary and concentrated business coverage. The New York Times News Service is the world's largest supplemental news service, distributing news to 650 clients in more than 50 countries. In addition, the New York Times Syndicate distributes columns, special features, news and other material to more than 2,000 clients worldwide. The service is available in English and Spanish²⁰. The Los Angeles Times-Washington Post News Service has 600 clients in 56 countries²¹. Both of these services are available on the Internet also.

Video news agencies: Reuters is the world's largest television news agency. Updated every six hours, Reuters Reports provides the top 10 to 12 stories of the moment in ready-to-air format, with a total of 60 international news and sports stories each day. Reuters Reports is also designed to serve the needs of Internet sites wishing to offer video news clips. The Reuters network of 184 bureaus in 163 countries forms the backbone of the video agency's news gathering activities. Some 310 subscribers plus their networks and affiliates in 93 countries use Reuters television news coverage²². The Associated Press Television News (APTN), the other major international video news agency, provides video of the day's top news stories by satellite to major news organizations worldwide from 83 AP bureaus in 67 countries. A total of 330 international broadcasters receive AP's global video news service²³.

Global newspapers, magazines and broadcasters: Several Western newspapers, magazines and broadcasting organizations also play a significant role as purveyors of news globally. Four newspapers that are especially valued by opinion leaders around the world are the *New York Times* (Circulation: 1.15 million weekdays); the *Times* (1.3 million) and the *Guardian* (386,942), both from the U.K.; and France's *Le Monde* (382,944). The *New York Times online* had more than 10 million registered users in February 2000, including 13 percent of the users from abroad. This service recorded 92 million page views in November 1999. The *Times*, the *Guardian* and *Le Monde* are available on the Internet also. The International *Herald Tribune*, jointly owned by the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, is printed simultaneously via satellite at 10 locations worldwide. In early 2000, it had a daily circulation of 227,945, with a total readership of more than 600,000 in 181 countries.

Among newsmagazines, three stand out for their global reach -- *TIME*, *Newsweek* and Britain's *Economist*. *TIME*, with its 1999 circulation of 4.10 million in the United States alone, sold an additional million-plus copies to readers overseas. It publishes editions for Canada, Europe, the Middle East, Asia, Africa and Latin America. *Newsweek*, whose 1999 U.S. circulation was just over 3.2 million, sold about a million copies internationally through its editions for Europe, Japan, Latin America, the Pacific and Southeast Asia. *The Economist*, reputed for its comprehensive coverage of global issues and good writing, had a worldwide circulation of 654,214 in 1999.

In international television news broadcasting, CNN International is a global, 24-hour news network, offering news coverage from the CNN News Group's 34 worldwide bureaus since 1985. CNN/US or CNNI can be seen in more than 225 million television

households in 212 countries and territories worldwide, including 82.5 million subscribers for the two services in the United States. The CNN News Group has a newsgathering network of 4,000 staff and 850 global television affiliates²⁴.

CNN International's biggest competitor today is BBC World, the British Broadcasting Corporation's international news and information channel. In operation since 1991, BBC World is available in 71 million 24-hour homes, and in an additional 96 million homes on a part day basis in nearly 200 countries and territories worldwide. BBC claims that it is the world's largest and most trusted news organization. BBC News, which supplies news programming for BBC World, has 50 bureaus worldwide, with over 250 correspondents and a staff of more than 2,000. BBC World provides dedicated local programming for the channel's substantial audiences in Europe and India plus 70 hours per week of Japanese translation. Partly for that reason, BBC World's reach in India, for example, in early 2000 was double that of CNN International's²⁵. BBC World became available on the Internet in 1999 when it dedicated the world's first all digital 24-hour newsroom in London.

Another significant player in international television news broadcasting is Deutsche Welle TV, an international satellite television channel of the German public broadcaster. DW-TV broadcasts news and public affairs programming in German, English and Spanish in rotating two-hour time slots.

In international radio news, two stations have established their credibility as reliable sources of news to listeners worldwide. They are the BBC World Service and the Voice of America. BBC World Service, which went on the air in 1932, has a daily audience of 143 million, including 3.5 million regular listeners in the United States. It was broadcasting in 44 languages in 1999²⁶. The service is also available on the Internet.

The Voice of America, established as the international broadcasting service of the U.S. government in 1942, reached some 91 million listeners worldwide in 1999. VOA puts out more than 900 hours a week of broadcasts in English and 52 other languages. The VOA is now broadcasting over the Internet programs from all 53 of its language services²⁷. Radio France International has a huge following in the Francophone world, including East and North Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. This state-owned radio network has some 30 million listeners worldwide²⁸.

'Soft Power' Factor in North's Media Dominance

At the surface level, it would appear that news organizations from the North are dominant globally because they have the financial, personnel and technological resources to provide news and information services that countries in the South cannot provide. On a more substantive level, however, the dominance of Western news organizations has to do with their coverage of international affairs in a fairly unbiased manner within the context of their countries' pluralistic, liberal and secular values. Conflicts over competing ethnic, religious, or national identities often escalate as a result of propaganda campaign by demagogic leaders around the world, who also go to great lengths to suppress dissident political movements. News organizations from the North typically strive to provide unbiased reportage on these issues and expose false reports. They also promote the values of democracy and market economies, and frame the coverage of international issues in a manner that promotes these ideals and other Western interests. Such coverage historically has been able to engage the suppressed people from the South whenever they have had unrestricted access to Western news organizations. That is where the "soft power" dimension of Western news organizations lies.

For example, Lawrence E. Magne, the editor of *Passport to World Band Radio*, attributed the BBC's "vast international audience" to

its "objective news." He added that "one reason it's [the BBC] so powerful is because it is credible."²⁹ A study sought answer to this question, among others, from a sample of secondary-school educated people in four Egyptian cities: How believable is the BBC's coverage of international issues? Rating categories given to the respondents were: Always, Usually, Seldom, Never, Don't Know. The following results were found: Always: 39 percent; Usually: 58 percent; Seldom: 2 percent³⁰. Even in democratic India, audience research has shown BBC's strong appeal as a news source. A 1986 study in Calcutta found that BBC was considered to be the best source of news, as compared with all home and other foreign stations³¹. Indeed, studies have shown that in several countries BBC news is held in greater credibility than the native radio newscasts. The Voice of America also has a significant credibility abroad. For example, in China, the VOA audience, which is typically about 17 million daily, went up to an estimated 100 million during the 1989 Tiananmen pro-democracy movement because of its extensive and reliable coverage of the movement³².

Western news organizations are also the suppliers of most of the non-local news appearing in the media of the South. The AP, Reuters and AFP control the bulk of the world's news flow, with their daily output of about 25 million words. The next five leading news agencies account for only 1.09 million words daily³³. Several academic and professional studies since the 1960s have shown that the South depends on the news agencies from the North, both print and broadcast, for over 75 percent of the general world news and even news of geopolitical regions in the South³⁴. As a result, people in the South are forced to see each other, and often even themselves, through the medium of news agencies from the North. Many critics in the South say that the North's media dominance confines judgments and decisions on what should be known, and how it should be made known, into the hands of a few news organizations. However, the South's efforts to develop its own viable newsgathering organizations with global appeal have not amounted to much because of a lack of financial and professional resources, as well as political ideologies that are not always conducive to purveying accurate, objective and impartial journalism.

The ability of the North's dominant media to set the agenda on what issues are important and how these issues should be framed has been a source of its soft power for many years. Keohane and Nye, Jr., provide a relatively recent example to establish the significance of this soft power. They say that when Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990, the fact that CNN was an American company helped to frame the issue worldwide as aggression. Had an Arab company been the world's dominant TV channel, perhaps the issue would have been framed as a justified attempt to reverse the colonial humiliation³⁵. The agenda set by the North's media was said to be largely responsible for creating public opinion worldwide, including in practically all of the Arab world, in favor of the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq to reverse the aggression.

By the same token, the Kosovo situation in Yugoslavia was framed by the North's media primarily as a violation of Muslim Kosovars' human rights by Christian Serbs, setting the stage for NATO's unilateral intervention in early 1999 even though no such move was endorsed by the United Nations. The Yugoslav government had viewed the Kosovo Liberation Army as a terrorist separatist movement bent on snatching away a part of its territory. Dr. Cedomir Strbac, Yugoslav ambassador to India, in a clear recognition of the soft power of the North's media, wrote about the influence of the CNN and BBC World news channels. "The very idea of the two channels with the widest reach in the world being the tools in a war game is profoundly disturbing," he said³⁶.

A 1999 research study gives credit to the Voice of America, BBC World Service and, especially, U.S.-sponsored Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty stations for keeping the spirit of democracy

alive during the Cold War in the Eastern European satellite states and the Soviet Union. This study also notes that during the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989, democracy activists hooked VCRs to hotel satellite feeds and taped CNN's images to circulate across the country. Fax machines were used for communication with the outside world despite the efforts of a powerful state apparatus³⁷. The Communist government in Beijing was also concerned enough about the influence of the BBC World news channel on its people that it forced Rupert Murdoch to end this service, provided through his Hong Kong-based STAR-TV, in 1994 in return for a commercial concession. A year earlier, Murdoch had told a shareholder meeting that satellite television was "an unambiguous threat to totalitarian regimes everywhere."³⁸

In January 1998, four days before Pope John Paul was due to leave for a visit to Cuba, both the BBC World and CNN highlighted a story of 15 Cuban dissidents brought to Rome by an Italian human rights organization. The dissident group reminded the Pope to keep Cuba's human rights abuses on his agenda in his talks with President Fidel Castro. Castro released about 300 prisoners, including more than 70 political prisoners, as a goodwill gesture after the pontiff's groundbreaking trip to the island³⁹.

Another example of Western media framing global issues in such a way that advances Western objectives comes from the coverage of President Bill Clinton's trip to South Asia at the time of this writing. Even though in their separate interviews with Newsweek magazine in early March 2000, Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Pakistani leader Gen. Pervez Musharraf ruled out the possibility of nuclear confrontation between the two countries⁴⁰, practically every major Western news organization was warning of such a danger. The lead focus of stories on Clinton's trip, even before the president had made any statement upon his arrival in India, was on the necessity of India and Pakistan to curb their nuclear weapons programs and sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. Such a focus by the news organizations presumably was influenced by the concerns of Western governments ever since the testing of nuclear devices by India and Pakistan in 1998. Meanwhile, U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, who has been one of the major critics of India and Pakistan's nuclear programs, raved about India's knowledge economy in a speech to the Washington, D.C.-based Asia Society on March 14, 2000, four days before Clinton left for India. She went on to describe India as one of the unreported economic success stories of the 1990s⁴¹.

Nye, Jr., and Owens explain what can happen when the North does not actively use its soft power to deal with crisis situations. They say that information campaigns to expose hate propaganda in Rwanda could have prevented the genocide in that country in 1994. Rwanda's genocide, one of the most intense bouts of killing in history, lasted from April to June 1994, as mobs of the Hutu majority led by soldiers and militia systematically put to death up to a million minority Tutsis and politically moderate Hutus. "A few simple measures, such as suppressing extremist Hutu radio broadcasts that called for attacks on civilians, or broadcasting Voice of America reports that exposed the true actions and goals of those who sought to hijack the government and incite genocide, might have contained or averted the killing," they said⁴².

'Soft Power' in the Age of the Internet

The Internet has revolutionized the instrument of soft power and the opportunities to apply it for the elite nations of the North. There are several reasons for this development. First, unlike the traditional mass media, which could be barred from entering countries hostile to information campaigns from the North, the Internet is practically impossible to control. Blocked Web sites can simply change their Web addresses. An Internet user in a country imposing controls can also dial into a server outside the

country and access the desired information. Given the global nature of the Internet, content can be published from anywhere in the world. When a government tries to prosecute a content provider or force the withdrawal of material, there are others around the world prepared to copy or mirror the information on their own sites, in countries where the information is legal.

Secondly, although costs are negligible for anyone wishing to disseminate existing information via the Internet, the collection and production of new information often requires costly investments. The United States, Britain and France have capabilities for collecting quality information and intelligence that are rarely within the grasp of other nations.

Thirdly, the massive amount of information available in cyberspace may not have much credibility for an educated individual unless it is processed and packaged professionally, and has a seal of approval associated with internationally known and valued information suppliers, most of whom are based in the North. Editors, filters, interpreters, and cue-givers become more in demand, and this is a source of power for the North⁴³.

Fourthly, the very low cost of information transmission has opened the field to networks of non-governmental organizations and even individuals. These networks are particularly effective in penetrating states without regard to borders and using domestic constituencies to force political leaders to focus on their preferred agendas. The democratic, elite states of the North find these networks natural allies in promoting their ideological and other objectives abroad⁴⁴.

Finally, whereas the traditional media provided only a one-way communication to the receiver of information, the Internet, as the only true interactive mass medium, allows the receiver to choose information selectively to meet specific needs and provide immediate feedback. Interactivity allows for the development of new virtual communities -- people who imagine themselves as part of a single group regardless of how far apart they are physically from one another -- and helps coordinate action across borders.

These attributes of the Internet combined with its explosive growth over the last several years make it a formidable instrument of soft power for the North, and, to varying degrees, for other countries of the world. In February 2000, about 200 million people worldwide were subscribing to the Internet, including 100 million in the United States.⁴⁵ One billion people -- one-sixth of the humanity -- are expected to be using the Internet by the year 2005, two-thirds of them outside the United States. A key reason for Internet's rapid growth is that countries rightfully see it as an important tool for strengthening their economies and reaching out to their populations in the 21st century. Therefore, it will become difficult for authoritarian regimes to reconcile political controls with the increasing role of the Internet in the future.

It is not surprising then that among the first to use the Internet were human rights organizations in the North. They include Human Rights Watch, Human Rights Internet, Human Rights Interactive Network, the Carter Center, Amnesty International, Institute for Global Communications, and NetAction, among others. These Web sites are powerful tools for increasing human rights awareness around the world and collecting signatures to launch worldwide campaigns. The San Francisco-based Institute for Global Communications, for example, offers to host Web pages and e-mail addresses for human rights activists. Its mission is to advance and inform movements for peace, economic and social justice, human rights and environmental sustainability around the world by promoting the strategic use of appropriate computer networking technology⁴⁶. Another human rights group, New York City-based Human Rights in China, posted a comprehensive report on its Web site in September 1999,

revealing a nationwide system of arbitrary detention in the country. The report made a number of recommendations to the international community, including the U.N., to express concern about the use of arbitrary detention in China⁴⁷. At the time of this writing in March 2000, the United States was getting ready to sponsor a resolution at the U.N. meeting on human rights in Geneva condemning China's human rights record.

Several examples illustrate the support provided by the North-based governmental or non-governmental organizations for activities promoting human rights and democracy around the world. In June 1997, Chinese dissidents founded *Tunnel*, a Chinese language journal of dissent. This journal is managed and edited in China. Once an issue is ready to be published, it is secretly delivered to the United States and then e-mailed back to China from an anonymous address. "Thus its staff remains safely hidden in cyberspace, and all of its contributors, both in China and abroad, write under pseudonyms."⁴⁸ In Indonesia, bypassing the government-controlled television and radio stations, dissidents shared information about protests by e-mail, inundated news groups with stories of President Suharto's corruption, and used chat groups to exchange tips about resisting troops and bringing democracy to the country. After more than 30 years of authoritarian rule, Indonesia finally turned democratic in 1999⁴⁹.

During the Kosovo crisis in 1998-99, a pro-democracy radio station in Belgrade, Radio B92, was shut down by the authorities. The station put its programming on the Internet through RealAudio, using a Dutch service provider. Radio Free Europe, Voice of America, and Deutsche Welle picked up the station off the Internet and rebroadcast it back into Serbia, where it served as the source of independent reporting and a focal point for democratic opposition. Faced with this strategy, the government allowed the station back on the air⁵⁰. This example also illustrates the creative ways available on the Internet to disseminate information around the controls of censors.

U.S.-sponsored Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty, which have long campaigned for democracy via the airwaves, now also use the e-mail to disseminate information to a dispersed audience very inexpensively. In Brazil, when an Indian tribe was threatened, the Internet carried news of the threat and sparked pressure on the Brazilian government that generated a change in policy. Similarly, U.S.-based non-governmental organizations supporting rebels in Chiapas used the Internet to forestall the bloody reprisals they expected from the Mexican government.

Other computer-assisted approaches, such as fax-casting and e-mail, are also being used effectively by individuals and interest groups to engage in political discourse. As of August 1998, one service identified 29,000 IRC (Internet Relay Chat) channels, 30,000 Usenet newsgroups, and 90,095 mailings lists -- each one representing a network of individuals worldwide interested in a particular subject. An overwhelming majority of these discussion groups were conducting their activities through Internet servers in the North⁵¹.

Authoritarian and semi-authoritarian governments, worried about the effects of freewheeling political discussions by Usenet groups on their people, have taken steps to stem the tide of such discourse. *The New York Times* reported in early 1999 that in China, "Hundreds of agents are reportedly being trained to sniff around inside companies and universities for objectionable Web sites and subversive messages."⁵² The government has used firewall technology to try to block access to scores of Web sites it deems objectionable, including the *New York Times* and CNN. "But savvy users here know how to use proxy servers or other techniques for circumventing the firewall," the news story said. On February 1, 2000, the Chinese government strongly criticized a White House report on U.S. global leadership objectives in the 21st century. "To lead the world is the same thing as seeking

global hegemony," a Chinese government spokesman said. He added that "America would achieve its goals through the use of 'soft forces' -- the Internet, film, television, books, capital and consumer products -- which would be backed up by the 'hard forces' of its military seen in the 1991 Gulf War and the bombing of Yugoslavia last year."⁵³

The Singapore government announced in 1996 that it would hold both content providers and access providers accountable for politically objectionable material. As a result, the Socratic Circle, one particularly popular discussion group engaged in animated political discussions about Singapore, was suddenly found out of bound by the Internet users in the country⁵⁴. Other political discussion groups about Singapore, however, quickly made their presence on the Internet.

Conclusion

Two important conclusions emerge from the foregoing discussion. Firstly, a nation's appeal to people around the world and its influence in world affairs is dependent on the level of its eliteness, meaning its ranking in the pecking order of nations. The eliteness itself is dependent on the ideological, economic and military strength of a country. Either because of their inherent appeal or because of their proven success, the ideological and economic values that have emerged as having the strongest appeal around the world are pluralistic democratic political systems and market economies. It is also obvious that strong countries built on these values manifest quite liberal social and cultural values as well, which further add to the attractiveness of such nations.

All of these factors converge to establish the eliteness of a nation, a necessary prerequisite to meet before its say in world affairs can carry a significant weight, or "soft power." The United States, Britain and France have been the pre-eminent large elite nations in view of their long-standing commitment to liberal ideological, economic and socio-cultural values, and their military strength. It is little wonder, then, that the largest export from the United States is its information and cultural products, bringing \$60.2 billion in revenues from abroad in 1996. This writer, having traveled to some 25 countries, has seen first-hand the huge presence of American, British and French information and cultural products. As other countries reach the level of development of "elite" nations, no doubt, there will be greater competition for "soft power."

Secondly, those who had assumed that the Internet will have a leveling effect on the unequal flow of information between the North and the South are finding that it will take more than just a heavier flow of information from the South to the North to address the imbalances. The South must also match the credibility associated with major news and information suppliers from the North before it can hope to see an equitable international communication order it has advocated for years. And, as we have seen, credibility is rooted in a firm discipline of information gathering and packaging, a discipline that can be developed only in democratic nations with press freedoms. Considering that less than half of the world's nations are listed as "Free" by the Freedom House, mentioned earlier, many countries in the South are still a long way from having the political and media environment necessary to produce credible information. Even if they create such an environment, they will have other catching up to do before they can be "elite" enough to be taken seriously by information consumers around the world. Until that time, one can expect to see BBC World or CNN, for example, as having a global appeal, while China's CCTV, as another example, serves mostly the ethnic Chinese diaspora abroad.

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