



THE ROLE OF CYBERSPACE IN THE APPLICATION OF THE SMART POWER CONCEPT

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The retrograde, puritanical and belligerent ideologies may seem anachronistic, related to the specificity of the 21st century. The need for understanding the reality augmented by the emergence of new forms of manifestation in international relations is materialised by transposing novelty elements into strategic models specific to the current century.

A concrete example is the use, within specialised circles, of the concept of "smart power", an intelligent combination of punitive actions with the ability of persuasion. This concept incorporates, in a unitary conception, aimed at identifying the optimal solution to ensure strategic success, the specific elements of soft and hard power.

Another aspect of everyday reality is the significant use of cyberspace as a means of facilitating the process of fulfilling the goals in different areas of activity, respectively at different levels of society. In this regard, in this paper, the role of the cyber environment in achieving the specific objectives of implementing the strategic concept of "smart power" will be addressed.

Keywords: strategic concept; smart power; soft power; hard power; cyberspace;



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INTRODUCTION

The paradigm of current worldly existence encompasses several issues of interest that reveal the inconsistency of international relations. The uninterrupted evolution of the technological field has led (and leads) to the intercalation of spheres of power, the picture of dominant actors at regional or global level integrates more and more roles, and the international geopolitical scene is subject to an extensive process of transformation and continuous updating at the level of emerging technologies that provide individuals/groups with new sources of power.

The concept of *power* is a carefully debated topic since ancient times, the desire to have it representing a personal or collective goal that has been the basis of many conflicts throughout history. Interestingly, although intensely coveted, it has not belonged to anyone except for short periods, representing a real “*philosopher’s stone*” of interpersonal relationships, regardless of the period to which the action relates. In this regard, the beginning of the current century is marked by a series of analyses of this concept, meant to shed light on the obscurity that characterised the global balance of power specific to the previous century. Thus, two master concepts have been developed in international literature: *soft power* and *hard power*. From the combination, in the recent period, in variable proportions, of elements specific to each of the two concepts, the notion of *smart power* resulted.

One of the many resources available to international actors that can be used to gain power, in its various forms, is cyberspace. Being a field characterised by a strong evolution in recent decades, as well as a complexity that generates new security challenges, locally, regionally and internationally, this resource facilitates the acquisition of a certain level of power, regarding certain areas of activity that, more often than not, generates a state of instability that can be materialised later by the appearance of different conflict situations.

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History, since ancient times, offers a vast number of relevant examples that attest to the fact that, through force and punitive actions, a certain individual/group can impose its point of view in front of other individuals/groups against their will. The ability to impose the will of an actor in front of a “target” without its express will characterises the form of hard power.

In this regard, this paper aims to make a brief analysis of how the tools specific to the cyber environment can be and are used to achieve what today is considered to be a strategic model for the current century: *smart power*. The premise from which the proposed analysis starts is that cyberspace (especially the actions conducted here) facilitates, to an overwhelming extent, the emergence of new centres of power that, in other specific situations, can lead to intercalation of areas of influence and, implicitly, to new conflicts. Alternatively, a second premise, derived from the first, is that the puritanical and exclusive use of tools specific to *soft* or *hard* power does not reflect the everyday reality, requiring an intelligent combination of the two forms of power, augmented by the use of cyberspace as a propagation tool.

From a methodological point of view, the analysis method is the most used, followed in second place by the descriptive method, both being used in order to present the main aspects relevant to the subject of the paper. At the same time, the method of bibliographic study was used to identify the most relevant ideas for the central theme of the paper. Last but not least, the case study method was used to reflect on the role that cyberspace plays in the existential forms of today's society, on the one hand, as well as to identify a concrete example of the application of *smart* power through cyberspace on the population from a concrete geographical area and the analysis of the effects generated by this fact, on the other hand.

THE NEED FOR TRANSITION FROM “HARD” AND “SOFT” TO “SMART”

Centuries have been marked by the need of the people to ensure an optimal level (own and subjective) of power, leading to widespread recognition of their oppressive capacity. In this regard, history, since ancient times, offers a vast number of relevant examples that attest to the fact that, through force and punitive actions, a certain individual/group can impose its point of view in front of other individuals/groups against their will. The ability to impose the will of an actor in front of a “target” without its express will characterises the form of *hard* power. On the other hand, the imposition of the will in front of the enemy can also take place through persuasive methods, by determining it to perform various actions as a result of using subconscious-oriented

persuasion tools, actions that are part of the *soft* power concept (Nye, 1990, p. 167).

At a first glance, the two concepts seem to be interdependent but, in essence, they are interconnected and complement each other, so that the final objectives are successfully met. The exhaustive use of *hard* power-specific tools does not guarantee success or hegemony at various levels of daily activity, whether military or civilian. On the other hand, *soft* power is a continuation of *hard* power, an extension with which the application of force can determine the expected result. It is hard to imagine that the resources and tools specific to *soft* power can be used alone, without benefiting from a strong boost given by the *hard* power.

A good example of the above-mentioned fact is the United States of America. In recent decades, much of the world's population has embraced elements of the culture specific to the United States of America, which has generated what is known as the so-called "*American dream*". This emerging culture has become prolific in many parts of the world, but especially on the European continent, as a result of the spread of a large number of symbols through movies, songs, clothing styles, food brands etc. In this way, the *soft* power of the USA has registered an overwhelming increase on different levels, but it is unlikely that these elements can cause a major change in the daily life of a potential US opponent. Even if these cultural resources can become tools of persuasion, in certain contextual situations, they cannot cause major changes in the opponent's decision-making spectrum.

Moreover, *soft* power is a dichotomous element formed by resources specific to the cultural field, on the one hand, and to the ideological sphere, on the other hand. By manoeuvring in the range of human sensations and perceptions, unexpected results can be achieved, even dangerous ones if they are not carefully analysed. For example, the events generated by the death of the American George Floyd in May of this year degenerated, being fuelled by strong racial feelings, in large manifestations that had a major impact on US national security (Meyer, 2020, p. 1). Such perceptions can be used to destabilise certain target states, overthrow governments, change politicians, and so on. Starting from this fact, it is possible to create



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Worldwide, the geopolitical situation is marked by the existence of three major centres of hard power: the USA, China and Russia. Through economic and financial coercive instruments, the USA demonstrates its level of power both over state actors such as North Korea, China, Russia and Iran, and over non-state actors.

certain premises that favour different behaviours of some actors that, analysed from different angles, do not constitute examples to follow in international relations. In the post-Cold War period, a large number of states have turned to the democratic values specific to the West, their population seeing in the USA a model to follow, wanting to vote, to be able to express themselves freely, to have the right to an opinion etc. At the same time, at the economic level, the USA managed to introduce in the collective mentality the concept of the *free market*, which took root and developed exponentially mainly in the European space. All the mentioned elements contribute to the formation of what is called *soft power*.

Although these aspects can change and shape the destinies of some state actors (countries such as Turkey, with a different set of values and cultural-moral beliefs, have adhered to the Western vision) or non-state ones, without the existence of the *hard power* would not have been possible the existence of the *soft* one. The predominant use of *soft power* in recent decades has led to the emergence of hybrid actions whose results have generated surprises at the strategic level. The main weapon specific to *soft power* – the use of the Internet and social media – has become, these days, a kind of boomerang, being currently used by other actors against its originators. Thus, the beginning of the third decade of the current century is marked by a reorientation of the main actors, be they state, non-state or supra-state, towards elements specific to *hard power*.

The current reality shows us that the importance of *hard power* is starting to grow again. The coming to power of iconic leaders revealed their desire for power, especially for the quantifiable, measurable and controllable one. So, worldwide, the geopolitical situation is marked by the existence of three major centres of *hard power*: the USA, China and Russia. Through economic and financial coercive instruments, the USA demonstrates its level of power both over state actors such as North Korea, China, Russia and Iran, and over non-state actors (by using punitive laws in the economic field by which it issues sanctions against companies from different countries that have trade relations with different groups or third countries that act against the US desideratum). On the other hand, the Beijing leadership has shown, over the last decade, a growing desire to use *hard power* on state

actors such as the United States of America or Taiwan. Last but not least, Russia is a concrete example of the use of *hard* instruments to achieve its own goals, by using military force in the Syrian campaign and changing the fate of the country's civil war according to the vision of the Moscow leadership.

At the same time, there are countries whose *hard* power is relatively small but which, in terms of beliefs, declared (and undeclared) objectives, interests and capabilities, can create conflict situations with surprising results both regionally and globally. In the Far East, North Korea remains a noteworthy player, as its leader seems willing to take a wide range of actions so that the country does not have to make concessions on its ballistic missile and nuclear weapons programme. Closer to the European continent, in the immediate vicinity of Romania, another important player, Turkey, displays its capacity and desire to use *hard* power in order to achieve its objectives, especially those related to both energy resources, in front of state actors such as Greece and Cyprus, as well as cultural ones, in front of non-state actors (such as the group called PKK – Kurdistan Workers' Party).

Between *soft* and *hard* power, in addition to their defining aspects, there are several features that, in some places, make a possible interconnection of these two concepts and the tools needed to apply them in the spectrum of current reality. First, the purpose of *hard* power is to obtain a high level of persuasion of the opponent by coercion, by using military capabilities or by threatening to use them; on the other hand, *soft* power has impregnated strong cognitive-affective specificities, seeking to shape perceptions, sensations, attitudes, by using a complex persuasive apparatus. At the same time, the actions specific to *hard* power generate a series of long-term effects that can affect the internal situation within, for example, a state actor, while *soft* power is implemented subtly, gradually, generating inner movements in the cognitive-emotional spectrum of targeted groups.

Concluding the ideas presented above, although *soft* power was perceived as a new tactic, mainly by state and supra-state actors, to achieve their own goals without the use of brute force and large-scale conflicts, reality shows that *hard* power is still used by various states or groups in overwhelming proportions, and this fact does not seem to be changed soon. In the recent past, the western



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part of the world has shown that *hard* power is the main factor that ensures, in the short and medium-term, the success of operations. An example of the above-mentioned idea is represented by the missions carried out by the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation in Afghanistan, which, given the level and specificity of threats in the theatre of operations, have generated the need to use force against the Taliban. Taking into account the past of the Afghan territory, which can be considered a crematorium of occupational ambitions specific to the great powers, it is very unlikely that the problems in this country will be solved by using *soft* power. Therefore, a possible solution for solving security problems on the international agenda is to combine the two types of power intelligently, leading to the so-called *smart power* (Raimzhanova, 2015, p. 14).

The need for transition from the separate use of specific *hard* and *soft* power tools to their use in a unitary, intelligent conception, specific to the 21st century, is based on the following aspects:

❖ Concerning the exclusive use of *hard* power, it is difficult to achieve, given the high level of technology that major players have managed to achieve. Although the fear of using nuclear weapons in the context of a world war remains an element of foreign policy preferred by countries having nuclear warheads to the detriment of those that do not, their use is very unlikely due to the retaliation to which the aggressor state could be subjected. On the other hand, the excessive modernisation of the world's armed forces is a reality that began about a decade ago, when the Russian Federation announced the start of a comprehensive programme to modernise the armed forces, when the People's Republic of China began equipping the armed forces with modern technical elements, when the United States of America publicly recognised the emergence of a new confrontational environment – cyberspace – and the need to improve military structures in the context of conducting operations in the new operational domain. Moreover, other state or non-state actors have embarked on a race to modernise and renew military equipment, to provide combat and combat support elements, which settles the idea that *hard* power is at the heart of actions leading to achieving the proposed goals. However, even the most modern armed forces have encountered problems in the conflicts that marked the beginning of the current century

(the USA in Iraq, NATO in Afghanistan, the Russian Federation in the conflict against Georgia in 2008) against states with limited material resources, technical assets and personnel.

❖ Concerning the exclusive use of *soft* power, the process of implementing actions leading to the achievement of certain strategic level objectives is a long one, which involves a considerable effort and great finesse, in several directions of action, and which does not always generate the expected effects. Secondly, for the results of the actions to be directly proportional to the level of expectations, it is necessary to exert a considerable financial effort to support the steps taken. At the same time, the tools specific to *soft* power must be used on each of the three component categories: cultural, political and foreign policy development (Yavuzaslan, Kyimet, Cetin, Murat, 2016, p. 7). Culture is the primary element around which the main effort must be concentrated, being a particularly valuable resource that can determine the impact the persuasive actions of an actor can have on the target or can generate a level of resilience of the target population to any specific tool of the *soft* power used by one group against another.

❖ Summing up the above, the current reality finds the world in a continuous turmoil and power struggle, in which various actors have embarked on an indefinite race to stop the hegemony of the United States of America, which began at the end of the period specific to the Cold War. In this regard, there is a possibility that the current global geopolitical configuration will change, the balance of power tilting more and more to one side or the other, depending on the new technological discoveries in various fields, the doctrinal and legislative changes that generate new sources of power, the appearance/disappearance/reappearance in other forms of different non-state actors and their temporary introduction at the negotiating table etc. Therefore, as the new specific conflicts demonstrate, the solitary application of the elements specific to *hard* power does not guarantee the achievement of success and the achievement of objectives, being necessary the application with much tact, responsibility and knowledge of *soft* power tools.

The combination of the two forms of power in a unitary, complex and intelligent conception can generate special effects that will lead to the achievement of success with the minimum use of violence



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and the reduction of the loss of financial, human and material resources. An example in this regard, which surprised the whole world, from ordinary people to the best trained politico-military analysts, is the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula by the Russian Federation since 2014. This manoeuvre is a paradigm of how, by intelligently and combined application of tools specific to *soft* (with a sufficiently long period before the onset of physical actions) and *hard* power, it is possible to achieve particularly important geostrategic successes.

THE IMPORTANCE OF USING CYBERSPACE AS A SOFT AND HARD POWER AMPLIFYING TOOL

Cyberspace represents the interaction between people, technology and the processes that take place within these systems. Of these three elements, the actions specific to soft power are performed against the human component, by using manipulation and disinformation techniques related to the particularities of the target groups.

Cyberspace is the environment “*created by the interconnection of millions of computers by a global network such as the Internet; made as a layered construction, in which the physical elements allow a logical interconnection framework; which allows the processing, manipulation, exploitation, augmentation of information and human-information interaction; activated through intermediation and institutional organisation; characterised by decentralisation and interaction between actors, constituencies and interests*”. (Choucri, 2013, p. 4). In this regard, cyberspace represents the interaction between people, technology and the processes that take place within these systems. Of these three elements, the actions specific to *soft* power are performed against the human component, by using manipulation and disinformation techniques related to the particularities of the target groups.

Mass manipulation is a desideratum of different actors on the world geopolitical scene, which can be achieved by using tools specific to cyberspace, in general, and to social media, in particular. The specificity of the cyber environment to allow the processing and manipulation of information, corroborated with the intention of the actors to misinform or manipulate the masses, can lead to a combination of these elements depending on the purpose.

Contemporary society is characterised by the excessive use of technologies that allow connecting with other people through social media. This aspect undoubtedly leads to an excessive connection of the person with the virtual environment which, sometimes, can be altered by other people by injecting false news, on the one hand,

or by hyperbolising different elements, which can lead either to manipulation or to misinformation (between which there is a close connection), on the other hand.

The arbitrary actions performed in cyberspace represent the engine of the “*aggregate*” that supports the *soft* power. One such example is represented by the actions performed by the leadership in states where the communist sentiment is the main axis of development of society. Over the last decades, these types of leadership have registered, from the way of thinking and subjugating the population, two evolutionary stages. In the first stage, characterised by a strong influence of the desire to have elements specific to *hard* power, the population either had no access to information at all, or the information content was so strongly filtered and censored that the state leadership had total control over its population. Over time, the evolving explosion of technology has generated a continuous influx of high-performance communication systems, as well as the emergence of new types of social platforms through which a rich and varied information content could be transmitted. The second evolutionary stage is represented by the notification of the potential manipulation of the population, both their own and the conventional adversary, through socialisation platforms and social media. In this way, the leadership of these states managed to obtain a high level of *soft* power, which they corroborated with the specific tools of *hard* power used until then.

Moreover, cyberspace has several features that increase the importance of its use as a means of implementing the concept of *soft* power. To influence the masses, cyberspace is used as a vector of perpetuation in which, through different technologies, actions that can reverberate and cause different effects in other operational environments are performed, on the one hand, but which have also the ability to shape perceptions, sensations and beliefs, on the other hand. The interconnectivity that characterises the devices that use this global network is a particularly important feature, because a certain type of informational content is created/modified within the cyberspace and then provided to a varied number of users. At the same time, another peculiarity of cyberspace is its stratification. At its base are human beings, who establish both the technological framework and the information core, while also representing the beneficiaries



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When cyberspace is seen as the environment of confrontation between different state, non-state or supra-state actors, it is a tool specific to hard power. Characterised by a concomitant evolution of physical and logical infrastructure with threats, risks and vulnerabilities to it, cyberspace has become the operational environment ruled by people, in which interactions between them generate different conflicts that can lead, depending on the objectives, to cyber-attacks, espionage, sabotage, subversion etc.

of this resource. The second layer is represented by the physical elements that form the existential framework of cyberspace, consisting of both the technological part (equipment, devices, transmission media – cables, optical fibre etc.) and the logical one (the strings of bits in the form of which information is stored). The third layer is represented by the informational content, in different forms of processing and storage (Kuehl, 2009, pp. 7-8). The last two layers are the way of injecting the informational content with fragments whose destination is the manipulation/misinformation of those who form the basis of the cyber pyramid. Through the use of these persuasion tools intelligently, continuously and directly proportional to the level of resilience of the target groups, aiming at achieving well-established objectives, a high level of the triumph of the beliefs and desires of cyber actors over the target groups is ensured.

On the other hand, when cyberspace is seen as the environment of confrontation between different state, non-state or supra-state actors, it is a tool specific to *hard* power. Characterised by a concomitant evolution of physical and logical infrastructure with threats, risks and vulnerabilities to it, cyberspace has become the operational environment ruled by people, in which interactions between them generate different conflicts that can lead, depending on the objectives, to cyber-attacks, espionage, sabotage, subversion etc. By exploiting existing vulnerabilities both physically and logically, the human component generates and implements aspects specific to hard power, including both the human side (internal attacks, insider, human error, social engineering) and hardware (actions against electronic circuits, implementation of viruses leading to overheating, respectively equipment failure) as well as software (viruses, worms, operating scripts etc.).

More often than not, these actions are part of an integrated, complex and varied conception, which can take the form of cyber warfare. Everyday reality shows that cyberspace actions carried out by one state against other states are no longer a novelty, with many such attacks taking place every day, mainly because the physical distance between them, which requires hours/days of travel and early detection of the attack, decreases to the level of seconds, in most cases being almost impossible/very difficult to identify an ongoing

attack, block it and initiate an appropriate response. This can also be seen in the fact that states, as main actors on the cyber scene, invest a wide range of resources (financial, human, temporal) to ensure a sufficient level of protection, related to current cyber threats as well as to create a wide range of offensive options, both for deterrence and for countermeasures in the event of imminent cyber- attacks. In this regard, *“after years of defence, governments are creating their offensive capabilities to attack ... All of this is part of a secret, hidden arms race in which countries spend billions of dollars to create new armies and digital weapon stocks”* (Ranger, 2014, p. 11). The examples of the last decade of using cyber actions in order to achieve certain military or politico-military objectives are the reason why it is quite conclusive that humanity is facing a new technological revolution at the centre of which is cyberspace, which will provide sufficient resources to shape the way future conflicts unfold, on the one hand, and to provide the various cyber actors with a level of *hard, soft* or *smart power* related to their investments, on the other hand.

THE RELATION BETWEEN CYBERSPACE AND SMART POWER – CASE STUDY –

The need for transition from anachronistic forms of power to *“intelligent”* power, respectively its application in current fields of activity that determine different effects in the sphere of international relations, is a desideratum that converges with the desire of different actors of micro or macro level to play an important role on the world stage.

For example, the People’s Republic of China currently has some of the best-developed levers for sharing *hardware* and *software* tools in order to achieve integrated control over the informational content to which the population has access (*Figure no. 1*).

As it can be seen in *figure no. 1*, the specific elements of *soft* power are interconnected with those of *hard* power, in a unitary design, capable of ensuring a high level of control over the population. From the perspective of *hard* power-specific tools, it can be seen a wide range of actions that are directed against the population, actions that target a wide range of fields of activity: economic, political, technological, etc. Adjacently, direct control over the population can be determined



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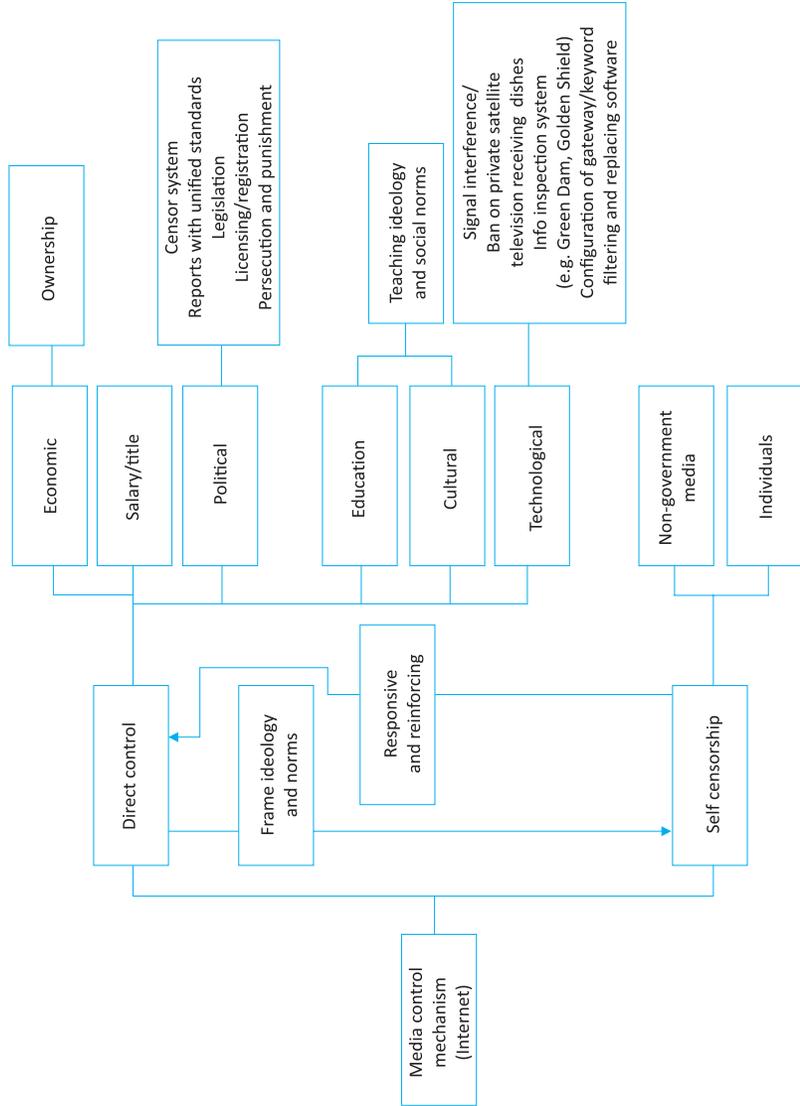


Figure no. 1: The Internet control mechanisms in China (Dong, 2012, p. 408)

by the use of *soft* power-specific tools, by outlining educational and cultural models that lead to the exercise of a permanent, subconscious and indirect control over the target groups. This indirect control, as a form of *soft* power, can generate long-term changes at the cognitive level that can outline a psychological profile based on certain framework ideologies and norms established following the vision of actors using tools specific to this type of power, a profile that materialises in everyday reality through self-censorship actions both individually and on information that is not directly controlled by the competent authorities. At the same time, a level of self-censorship that ensures a degree of acute receptivity can generate a direct control over the people around the individual target of the indirect control from the incipient phase, generating a cascade effect characteristic to the *soft* power.

As a consequence of the fact that cyberspace is the result of evolving stages in technology, the main ways in which Beijing's leadership uses censorship as the first control tool specific to *hard* power are the *Great Firewall* – a protocol that prevents people from accessing the foreign websites, the *Golden Shield* – a system used to monitor how the population uses cyberspace and access/post content, respectively the *Keyword Blocking System* – used to block informational content in which certain keywords are previously selected by system administrators, both at the network and the application level (Mongillo, 2016, pp. 162-163).

Moreover, the Beijing administration announced, in 2014, the implementation of a population scoring system based on which each person is scored according to their daily behaviour and, depending on the score at a given time, has part of various rewards and facilities, in case of a high score, or is punished/withdrawn from rights, in case of a low score. A low score leads to the inability of certain individuals to access different organisational levels, to borrow different amounts of money from the bank, or to buy train/plane tickets for business class. At the same time, a low score of parents can lead to a ban on enrolling children in certain schools (Kshetri, 2020, p. 17).

Concluding the above, there is a tendency of the Chinese authorities to ensure the highest possible level of control over the population, probably to ensure the highest level of resilience



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The Beijing administration's desire to have the highest possible level of power is not limited only to domestic action, the strategic umbrella of cyberspace covering vast areas of activity in different parts of the world. This desire is anchored, on the one hand, in China's aspiration to become a superpower in various fields such as the military, economics and politics, and to turn Chinese organisations into international actors at least as important as those from the United States of America.

of the Chinese people to any alleged external interference in the internal activities of the Chinese state. This control represents an intelligent combination of punitive and rewarding actions, specific to both *hard power* (in a higher percentage) and *soft power*, which, used together in a form as close as possible to the particularities of the current world situation, generates what is called *smart power*.

It should be noted that, even in this case, one of the vectors for the propagation of different forms of power over the targeted groups is cyberspace. In the case presented above, the fifth operational environment is in the form of three valences:

- channel for the distribution of specific *soft power* actions – through social platforms, online news channels, instant messaging tools, through which messages with subliminal content are distributed, which at the subconscious level can cause sensory, perceptual or cognitive changes;
- distribution channel for specific *hard power* actions – by hiring a complex of virtual resources in order to restrict users' access to some facilities;
- platform for analysing the behaviour of users in the cyber and real space, to provide complex, complete and accurate data on the character of individuals, depending on which punitive or rewarding tools are applied, both in the virtual and real environment.

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of internal social order and the continuity of the leadership regime, conditions the way actions are undertaken domestically, as well as the way of involvement in global initiatives revolving around cyberspace (Bozhkov, 2020, pp. 1-3).



CONCLUSIONS

In the current period, cyberspace is a reality augmented by the impetuous desire of individuals to anchor in virtual space characterised by a lack of borders and, implicitly, a limitation of constraints (at least legal) specific to physical reality. The peculiarities derived from the way of constituting the cyberspace, which lead to the provision of cyber identities different from the real ones, facilitate the appearance of centres of power that, in certain situations, can converge towards the execution of a series of cyber actions with potentially harmful effects on areas of activity such as political, military, economic, social, technological ones. Unlike other operational environments, the virtual confrontation space is the place where weakly equipped actors in real space acquire exceptional forms of power in the cyber environment that, in a geopolitical context, have the ability to strategically capture and overturn a potential conflict in direct proportion to the effort made by the initiators in their favour.

These forms of power, as a whole, represent only the temporary supremacy of an actor, conditioned by the level of financial, technological and expert involvement, within a certain field of interest. *Hard power* is a desideratum aimed at being fulfilled since ancient times, often being confused with the concept of power itself. On the other hand, focused on the cognitive-affective component, the *soft power* is conditioned by the gradual performance of manipulative, persuasive actions, which will generate long-term effects and which will facilitate the achievement of the expected result. Analysed separately, the two forms of power can lead to a partial and temporary hegemony in certain areas, generating various, complex and persistent effects. However, the various conflict situations specific to the current century have shown that the single application of the instruments specific to these two types of power has not fully led to the achievement of the proposed objectives, involving a large number of varied resources.

Cyberspace is a reality augmented by the impetuous desire of individuals to anchor in virtual space characterised by a lack of borders and, implicitly, a limitation of constraints (at least legal) specific to physical reality.



The implementation and continuous development of the fifth operational environment, represented by the cyberspace, favours the emergence of new centres of power whose objectives can be interspersed in different areas of interest and lead to new conflict situations, both in the real environment, as well as in the virtual one.

On the other hand, the reality of the last decade has objectively transposed in geopolitics and strategy textbooks the fact that the common use of tools specific to *soft* and *hard power*, at certain temporal moments specific to the conflict situation generated by various political, economic, territorial and other objectives, has overwhelmingly guaranteed success. The sharing of elements specific to the two types of power is called *smart power*. And within this form of power, as well as within the component forms of power, cyberspace has an overwhelming role, having various functions that facilitate the consolidation of the power level at a certain time and generating various effects whose final result is materialised, in case of a conflict situation, in increasing the chances of ensuring success.

In conclusion, the first part of the current century is characterised by a growing need to identify the possibilities of ensuring a level of intelligent power that will propel national interests in the sphere of actions under the auspices of success. Currently, the implementation and continuous development of the fifth operational environment, represented by the cyberspace, favours the emergence of new centres of power whose objectives can be interspersed in different areas of interest and lead to new conflict situations, both in the real environment, as well as in the virtual one. Last but not least, the cyber environment is the modern vector of designing the conditions necessary to be met in order to obtain a level of *smart power* related to the specificity of the challenges of today's reality.

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