

Problematic Nature of Russia's Soft Power Discourse

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Abstract

Russian policymakers in pathology of their country's foreign policy have concluded that traditional policy was based on hard power but this policy is no longer in use in recent decades. Therefore in adjusting the new doctrine of foreign policy, the country offered a special place to soft power. In this framework, Russia tried to repair its internationally damaged status especially in countries such as Georgia and Ukraine, confronting the Color Revolutions and preserving pro-Russian regimes in its near abroad. Accordingly since 2007 the term of soft power gradually entered into the Russian foreign policy literature. With Putin's reelection in 2012, Russia showed more interest in adopting soft power in its foreign policy.

However, many analysts including Joseph Nye, the architect of the concept of soft power, argues that there is a wide gap between speech and action in Russia and that Russia has failed to achieve soft power. He believes that in Russia soft power policy is not based on private sector and independent civil society. According to Nye, Russia needs to turn its speech into action and use the talents and capabilities of its civil society. So, studying the issue to understand the nature of Russian soft power discourse requires a scientific research which is the main purpose of this article.

The paper which is in the framework of an interpretative and discursive approach focuses on the nature of Russian leaders understandings from the soft power perspective and seeks to theorize the process of change in perception of Russian leaders about soft power. From this point of view, this paper has an innovative purpose, so it can help to understand the dimensions and unknown angles of Russian soft power. The paper also seeks to answer these questions that how Russians have dealt with the concept of the soft power discourse in order to gain dignity and power and how the western hegemonic powers have affected their understanding of this term. The discourse is made in relation to the subject of "the other" and from this perspective; the West has an inevitable impact on the evolution of Russia's

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soft power discourse. Therefore the hypothesis which has been articulated as an answer to the research main question is: dual great power identity of Russia that emerged in a complex relationship of love and hatred toward the western world led to dual identity of the Russian soft power discourse on the path of trying to gain dignity and influence in international arena. It means that the west perception of soft power is accepted by Russia as far as it is not being encountered by the Great - Power identity of Russia, its influence and prestige, but when Russia fails to accept the criteria of western soft power, it has turned to processing a discourse of soft power that has been opposed to the Western discourse. To analyze the issue, the concept of cultural hegemony has been chosen as theoretical framework of research.

The findings of the research show that Russian efforts to gain its status are based on the Great - Power dual identity of Russia which is shaped in its relations vis-a-vis the west. When Russia cannot gain dignity by recognition of western hegemonic discourse, it resorts to its pre- Great Power status in international system and consequently presents a different discourse of soft power in relation to the western hegemonic one. The wave of pessimism and criticism between Russia and the West and worsening of their relations reinforced this feeling among Russian elites that Russia's interests deliberately disregarded by the west and the continuation of this approach would lead to insecurity and harms to Russia. Accordingly, in order to secure Russia's national interests, they embarked to articulate a soft power discourse on geopolitical considerations and in opposition to the western discourse.

In this regard, the question is whether the latter aspect of Russia's soft power which is founded on the basis of political pragmatism and competition with the West could be recognized in the west and leads to gain its status. It is clear that the recognition of Russia's soft power by western countries depends on the types of Russian confrontation to the measures which hegemonic powers, namely liberal democracies have adopted. It also depends on the fact that the United States and other western countries have a tendency to moderate neo-liberal order to identify positions and interests of others. In order to adapt practical conformity with consideration of hegemonic powers and recognition of its status in this framework, Russia must make some social innovations that are acceptable to hegemonic powers.

Regarding the spike in the climate of mistrust between Russia and the West, it seems that the discourse of Russian soft power in current situation tends to be more inclined to confronting the West. In conclusion, Russian leaders are trying to bring together like-minded countries to counter the

Western hegemonic order and create a foundation for its soft power in future. Therefore, when Russian leaders deal with verbal attacks to discredit hegemonic powers and blame them for the failure of Russia's soft power, the possibility of its recognition by the hegemonic powers will become weak. Moreover, by considering the logic of vicious circle, it seems that competing aspects of Russian soft power discourse seem to persist with more predominance.

Keywords: Cultural Hegemony, Discourse, Great Power, Identity, Russia, Soft Power.