

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF USA’S SOFT POWER VIA HOLLYWOOD: LOOKING BACK TO COLD WAR

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Abstract

Since 1980’s Joseph Nye’s famous soft power conceptualization has become a very popular instrument while defining the states’ foreign policy approaches. Due to the term has a very abstract structure; a wide range of non-military means, for instance cinema, sports, cultural interactions or cross-border linguistic activities can be considered in the frame of this foreign policy approach. Despite of the fact that many states use soft power in order to achieve their foreign policy goals; recently, USA is known as the best implementer of soft power. In this context, Hollywood which is the great name of American film industry takes on a political role besides its artistic nature on certain occasions. Without any doubt, one of the most politicized period of Hollywood encounters the Cold War era. The persistent struggle between America and Soviets necessitated the participation of various fields and scopes to the “Cold War Arena”. One of the most visible non-political instrument of this era was the film industry where the political messages of the polar leaders can be distributed to international system rapidly and easily. This study seeks to investigate the role of Hollywood during the Cold War as an implementer of soft power on certain movies.

Key Words: *Soft Power, Hollywood, Cold War, USA, Foreign Policy*

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HOLLYWOOD'UN YUMUŞAK GÜÇ ARACI OLARAK ABD TARAFINDAN KULLANIMI: SOĞUK SAVAŞ DÖNEMİNE BAKIŞ

Özet

Joseph Nye'in uluslararası ilişkiler literatürüne hediye etmiş olduğu meşhur yumuşak güç nosyonu 1980'lerden itibaren devletlerin dış politika yönelimlerini anlamlandırmada kullanılan popüler bir terim olarak karşımıza çıkmaktadır. Terimin oldukça soyut bir doğası olması sebebiyle, sinema, spor, kültürel etkileşim veya sınır ötesinde yabancı dil eğitimi veren merkezler dahi yumuşak güç nosyonunun bir parçası olarak tahayyül edilebilir. Her ne kadar günümüzde birçok devlet yumuşak gücü bir dış politika aracı olarak kullansa da halen ABD dış politikada yumuşak gücü en başarılı olarak kullanan devlet olarak karşımıza çıkmaktadır. Bu bağlamda, Hollywood olarak bilinen Amerikan sinema endüstrisi spesifik durumlarda, kendi sanatsal doğasının dışına çıkarak birtakım siyasal misyonlar da üstlenmiştir. Şüphesiz ki Soğuk Savaş dönemi, Amerikan film endüstrisinin en çok siyasallaştığı dönemlerden birisi olarak karşımıza çıkmaktadır. ABD ve SSCB arasında bitmek bilmeyen mücadele dönemi, birçok siyaset dışı alanın da "Soğuk Savaş Sahnesine" dahil olmasını zorunlu kılmıştır. Bu bağlamda sinema sektörü de kutup liderlerinin uluslararası kamuoyuna vermek istedikleri politik mesajları hızlı ve kolay bir şekilde iletebildikleri bir araç haline dönüşmüştür. Bu çalışma Soğuk Savaş döneminde, Amerikan film endüstrisi Hollywood'un yumuşak güç kullanımında nasıl bir araç haline geldiği spesifik birtakım filmler üzerinden analiz etmeyi amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Yumuşak Güç, Hollywood, Soğuk Savaş, ABD, Dış Politika*

Introduction

The Cold War era was one of the most critical period of the world recent history. After the end of 2. World War, due to the disappearance of Nazi threat which was the common interest both for USA and Soviets; superpowers' perceptions towards the potential new world order majorly differentiated. In 1946, when Winston Churchill had its famous "Iron

Curtain” speech at Fulton which was the symbolic start of the Cold War, world public opinion clearly understood the fact that the new world order was describing a long-lasting struggle between USA and the Soviets. In this context, The Soviets shall be the main threat for the USA during the following decades.

According to Painter and Leffler, the unique structure of the Cold War was defining a very complicated profile which was beyond a classic conflict. For instance, geopolitical perceptions, technology, ideology, social reconstructions and national economic reforms and economic policies were the main struggling arenas of the Cold War. (Painter and Leffler, 2005) In the light of these information, in order to sustain an effective defense/offence, obviously the instruments of both parties would be beyond an intense militarization. Moreover, the militarization profile of the both parties were majorly constructed by the nuclear weapons which were almost impossible to use due to the balance of terror.

In this context, famous American scholar Joseph Nye’s published article in *Foreign Affairs* gave a start to a new conceptualization regarding the classic power notion. The article was published in 1990 and Nye was aiming to offer a new perspective to American foreign policy’s approach to new world order. According to Nye, power was not lying anymore in the resources of states such as population or pure militarization. In contrast, the new shift over power notion was living on states’ communication potential, organizational and structural skills and manipulation ability. (Nye, 1990) On the other hand, despite of the fact that Nye’s new conceptualization call soft power is firstly pronounced in the late of 1980’s, the implementation of this instrument was not that new in the context of (American) foreign policy. In other words, Nye was just naming an old strategy for (American) foreign policy. In order to support this argument, Ying Fan argues in his critical study against Nye’s soft power that, even Mother Teresa had soft power due to her status and reputation. (Fan, 2008) Due to this debate is not the main argument of this study, one thing of being certain that during the history states or actors have always supported their policies with soft power even if they believe in the classic power concept which relies on the pure militarization for security. Otherwise, why the Roman Empire would support the gladiators if they would not promote the great empire image against the enemies?

Retailing the soft power conceptualization, as it is mentioned above, one of the most important instrument of soft power is the technology and manipulation. Depending on the technological developments in the late of 19. Century, film industry which was something very unfamiliar started to dominate the people's life. On the other hand, despite of the fact that film industry has emerged quite late; its charm quickly closed the rank. In this context, many film studios were established in the beginning of 1900's such as in Paris, Rome, London, Tokyo, Sydney and Mumbai (Silver, 2007) But, American film industry Hollywood had become by far the best leading figure of the movie industry. Needless to mention that such a giant industry in many aspects such as economic, cultural and political, started to take on a governmental role shortly after its foundation. Because, the potential and the profile of Hollywood were showing a perfect match with Nye's soft power conceptualization. In the first place, addressing body of the Hollywood was almost the entire world that has access to cinematography. In other words, according to Hortense Powdermaker this phenomenon which is the symbolism of Hollywood was beyond the USA. (Powdermaker, 1951) In the second place, the distribution speed of the "political messages" was incredibly high. Finally, entertaining sector's credibility was comparably high rather than the politicians' "everlasting public speeches". Not to mention, these political advantages of the film industry are still valid even today which still makes this industry indispensable for manipulating the masses.

This paper is constructed on the following research question:

Can cinematography take on socio-political duties besides its primary artistic and visual nature?

According to the findings of this paper, the answer of this question is positive. In this sense, it is very possible to argue that during the Cold War era, the aforementioned advantages of the film industry is used by Hollywood during the fight against communism. In order to support this hypothesis, various famous Hollywood films are covered from a critical approach. In the first part of the study, it is argued that during the very beginning of the Cold War era, Hollywood took on a mission to disinfect the communist ideology and also support the official American state ideology. During the following years of the Cold War, in particularly within the *détente* period, the "American dream" image is distributed by Hollywood in the sense of America's so-called invincibility. Finally, very parallel to this period, Hollywood also inspired the USA's defense doctrines even if it never came true.

1-Disinfecting Hollywood From Communism

“There is a right way and a wrong way to fight communism. This administration is doing it the right way, and the sensible way. Our attack on communism is embodied in a positive threefold program: ... we are working quietly but effectively without headlines and or hysteria against communist subversion in this country wherever it appears and we are doing this within the framework of the democratic liberties we cherish” (Truman, 1950)

In the end of 1940’s, Harry Truman’s famous speech against the communism was giving some tips towards the fact that this fight shall not be consist only within the politics. In other words, when Truman used the “wherever it appears” clause, it had been clearly understood that every single sector of USA could be the subject of this fight against communism. Because, a “loose” communism in any sector could create a domino effect which might spread the other parts of the American state. In this context, during the late of 1940’s and the beginning of 1950’s, Hollywood was one of the most important field of the fight against communism. In order to understand the American state’s dominance on Hollywood, in the first place “McCarty Effect” on American state structure should be analyzed.

Joseph McCarty who was a Republican senator, was one of the most important figures of American politics during the 1940’s and 1950’s. Don Carleton identifies the dominance of Joseph McCarty as a tool of unfounded accusations, inquisitive investigations and a pure paranoia for suppressing the communism in all levels of American society. (Carleton, 1987) In this context, McCarty’s most important trauma on Hollywood was the *Hollywood Ten* which will be investigated in the very next part of the study; but firstly “the democratic propaganda of Hollywood” in the 1940’s should be taken under debate.

The Iron Curtain (1948) was the most famous anti-communist movie of Hollywood in the very beginning of the Cold War. In other words, this movie can be considered as the first implementation of America’s soft-power via Hollywood during the Cold War. According to this based on a true story film, Igor Gouzenko who was a *GRU* spy and working for the Soviets, finally sends his resignation to Soviet government and takes refugee to American authorities for enjoying the full freedom. (Öymen, 2014) On the other hand, while Hollywood was implementing America’s

soft power by the aforementioned movie; simultaneously the communist associated actors/actresses were in the agenda of American government.

Therefore, McCarthyism's paranoid implementations on Hollywood created a "black list" which is also known as *Hollywood Ten*. In this context, very famous names of Hollywood respectively: Alvah Bessie, Herbert Biberman, Lester Cole, Edward Dmytryk, Ring Lardner Jr., John Howard Lawson, Albert Maltz, Samuel Ornitz, Robert Adrian Scott and Dalton Trumbo are blacklisted for almost three decades by the House Committee on Un-American Activities due to their unconfirmed "major communist activities." (Eckstein, 2004) Besides *Hollywood Ten*, despite of not being an American citizen, world's most famous film star Charlie Chaplin is accused by FBI for being communist and exiled from the United States. (Sbardellati and Shaw, 2003)

In the light of these information, it is very possible to argue that the first years of the Cold War transformed the United States from being a democracy supporter to a "paranoiac" democracy "fetishist". On the other hand, in the sense of soft power concept this period can be considered as the manifestation of this question:

"How the United States should use its dominant power and will raise its democratic attraction?" (Nye, 2017)

On the other hand, the results of the Hollywood's "disinfection" from the communism did not fully meet with the expectations. Quite the contrary, while the that period's American government was trying to consulate America's democratic image, this attempt was producing counter results. Ironically, one more time the Hollywood was the main subject of these counteractions of American government. In this respect, Charlie Chaplin's one of the most famous and critical movie *A King in New York* (1957) can be considered as one of the most significant counteraction against this matter of fact. In this movie, Chaplin symbolizes and criticizes the McCarthyism's extreme implementations over a small child's intelligence and innocence.

To sum up, in the very beginning of the Cold War, American FP's usage of Hollywood as a soft power instrument, produced a profile which does not fully match with the nature of soft power. It can be argued that this fact was basically stemming from the McCarthyism's extremism. In other words, by excluding some exceptions like the *Iron Curtain*; it can be argued that American government's implementations which better match

with the hard power concept dominated the Hollywood. On the other hand, shortly after the aforementioned period, Hollywood used its unique soft power against the McCarthyism. Without any doubt, this period might be considered as one of the most anti-democratic term of the United States. On the other hand, during the *détente period* it is witnessed that the usage of soft power via Hollywood is started to be implemented in a more effective way in order to distribute the American exceptionalism idea.

2- Advocating Invincible America

In the historical process, the term of American exceptionalism has been one of the most significant idea of American FP. Despite of the fact that the term describes a very abstract nature, Harold Hongju Koh cites this famous term from Margaret MacMillan who is a historian in the University of Toronto by the following definition:

“American exceptionalism has always had two sides: the one eager to set the world to rights, the other ready to turn its back with contempt if its message should be ignored... Faith in their own exceptionalism has sometimes led to a certain obtuseness on the part of Americans, a tendency to preach the other nations rather than listen to them, a tendency as well to assume that American motives are pure where those of others are not...” (Koh, 2003)

In the light of these information, it might be argued that most of the Americans consider their nation as exceptional and in addition, there is a strong tendency in United States which claims the United States as a perfect outcome of human factor instead of a creation of destiny. (Ferrie, 2005) Despite of the fact that American exceptionalism is an overly questioned idea; according to Henry Kissinger, along with the presidency of Woodrow Wilson, all the American presidents take on a responsibility for being a “searchlight” for the humanity. (Kissinger: 2004) Certainly, this mission not only represents the personality of the American presidents but also represents the mission of the United States. In this point, the term of American exceptionalism brings about another term: Invincibility of United States.

According to my standpoint, beside the American Civil War, the Cold War era can be considered as one of the greatest challenge to invincibility of the United States. Despite of the fact that the very first years of the Cold War, forced the United States to take “hysterical” precautions

against the “red threat”; as soon as the *détente period* emerged United States started to gear its FP in a relatively rational direction. In other words, during this period, the implementation of the soft power concept started to ensure full compliance with the ideas of traditional American FP. In this context, during this period once again the Hollywood started to play a key part on the distribution of America's power potential and more importantly for the consolidation of United States' “exceptional invincibility”.

Rocky (1976) film series serve a great model to this propositional statement. Despite of the fact that the movie can be considered as one of the best sport movie of all time; the fourth episode of the serial *Rocky 4* (1985) has unique political messages to “free world”. In this movie, Rocky's fight with Soviet boxer Ivan Drago symbolizes the United States' long-lasting struggle with Soviets. During the film, even though Rocky receives major wounds from his Soviet opponent; in the end he knocks down Ivan Drago. One of the most significant episode of *Rocky 4* is the preparation of two fighters for the big match. Principally it should be mentioned that the preparation period contains a great paradox for the classic discourses of the American FP against the Soviets. Inasmuch as, the common discourse of American scholars and the American government regarding the Soviet economy was focusing on the never worked and failed socialist economy. (Allen, 2001) On the other hand, in the film Ivan Drago's training for the match was performed by the high technology equipment. In contrast, Rocky was training with the old fashion methods. Yet, in the reverse reading this paradox can be considered as the absolute superiority of American old fashioning against the so-called Soviet “modernism”.

In this context, *Rambo* (1982) can be considered as another production of Hollywood which reflects the same arguments of this chapter. Even today, The Vietnam War is considered as one of the most important traumatic incidents of the modern American political history. Apart from its major damage on the collective memory of Americans; still the war entails many terms such as “Vietnam Syndrome” or “Lessons from Vietnam” for both policy makers and ordinary citizens of United States. (Eyerman, et.al, 2016) In this respect, it can be argued that the film perfectly recovered the broken image of United States by Sylvester Stallone's “stand-alone heroic performance”. On the other hand, *Rambo* series should be considered as an important message for the guerilla warfare. The third episode of the series *Rambo 3* (1988) is the subject of a guerilla warfare in Afghanistan where was under the occupation of

Soviets between 1979 and 1989. As a result of the Stallone's superhuman fighting skills, the movie ends with the "*this film is dedicated to the gallant people of Afghanistan*" inscription. On the long view, it can be argued that the movie series not only consolidated the United States' broken image after the Vietnam War but also it clearly emphasizes the impossibility of a potential guerilla war victory against the United States.

2- Astropolitics of the Cold War: The Star Wars

In fact, the term of astropolitics is a very new research field of international relations. As a result of tremendous developments on technology, space might be the potential conflicting field of states in the near future. In this context, international space law, governance of space resources, regulation of asteroid mining ventures can be counted as the major fields of astropolitics. (Koch, 2018) On the other hand, as it was mentioned at the introduction part, the unique nature of the Cold War beyond a classic political conflict between the parties and in this context extraterrestrial competition was one of the major field of the Cold War.

According to William Sims Bainbridge, the space race between United States and Soviets started in the end of 1950's and by the 1960's serious analyses had begun to appear in this field. (Bainbridge, 2015) On the other hand, despite of the fact that the usage of hard power in this field was almost impossible; the space race can be considered as one of the most important success of American FP against the Soviets in the sense of soft power. In the first place, an extraterrestrial superiority of any party could be counted as a great prestigious in the front of the other party. Secondly, despite of the fact that space race was an extremely costly field; United States economy could handle these expenditures but for the Soviet economy it was very difficult to claim the same argument. In other words, pushing the Soviets to an end of non-specific space race was a great option for United States to weaken the Soviet economy. Thomas Risse-Kappen's study which investigates the fall of Soviets supports this argument. According to Risse-Kappen, Soviet oriented research institutes such as Kurchatov Institute or Russian Space Research Institute were all the "retrieved" ideas promoted by European and American counterparts. (Risse-Kappen: 1994) On the other hand, obviously the concrete institutions were not the only instrument of this approach against the Soviets. When the *Star Wars* (1977) serial came out for the first time; the Hollywood had become one of the major means of space race between the United States and the Soviets. In fact, *Star Wars* serial can be considered as a pure science fiction project; on the other hand, the

popularity and the nature of this serial even effected the United States' defense politics which will be analyzed in the following paragraphs.

In the first place, *Star Wars* which can be considered as a “beyond the time” movie, puts forward the unthinkable technology, intelligence and the wisdom of United States. If this argument is analyzed deeper, United States' extraterrestrial hegemony becomes the first noticeable message of the movie. Despite of the fact that this idea is still a science fictional desire even for the super powers; producing this objective during the Cold War era should be considered as a great toll of Hollywood's soft power implementation against the Soviets. Because of this reason, in order to minimize the hegemonic messages and influence of Hollywood, most of the famous Hollywood movies were banned in Soviets till 1990's including the *Star Wars*.

In the second place, the dark side and the light side of the force separation symbolizes the existing modern states based on the brute force and the “civilized” states which are constructed on values. When this separation is analyzed according to the Cold War mentality, obviously the light side of the universe represents the United States and the dark side of the force represents the Soviets and their despotism. In other words, the aforementioned separation, forces the viewers to classify the international system consist with simply as “good” and “bad” states.

Thirdly, another notable discourse of the *Star Wars* is “the chosen” identification. In fact, this identification perfectly matches with the American exceptionalism term. John B. Judis investigates this term on the discourses of the former American presidents such as Richard Nixon and George W. Bush. According to him, United States being “called” or given “mission”, “maker of heaven”, “authority of liberty” discourses of George W. Bush and Richard Nixon's 1960 elections campaign speech, “*America came into the world 180 years ago not just have freedom to for ourselves but to carry it to the whole world*” set a perfect example of religious discourses of the American foreign policy makers. (Judis: 2005) In the light of these information, it can be argued that one of the most important soft power implementation of Hollywood shows its ability on the distribution of American exceptionalism connected to “the chosen one”.

Finally, it is a common belief that *Stars Wars* inspired the former United States President Ronald Reagan who was an old actor. On 23 March 1983, Ronald Reagan shared his new defense strategy with the

international public opinion. The new defense strategy of United States was named Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) known as also Star Wars Doctrine. (Stein: 1987) The project was anticipating a space-based anti-missile system against the Soviet nuclear weapon but the Star Wars Doctrine was never realized due to its applicability problem and its potential economic cost.

Conclusion

This paper argued that major developments on the cinematography, entailed the sector to politics particularly in the sense of soft power term. In this respect, American film industry Hollywood should be considered as the best sample of this theorem. In the first years of the Cold War era, Hollywood took on a very parallel role to official US foreign policy which had focused on the treatment of the country from communist ideology. In this context, while on the one part, Hollywood's big names are black listed and suspended by McCarthyism's rigid implementations; on the other hand, official state ideology is polished by the various Hollywood movies. Without any doubt, the aforementioned era can't be considered as the golden age of democracy in USA. On other part, as soon as the communist hysteria is relatively avoided; most of the Hollywood classics had started to focus on the consolidation of American exceptionalism image which particularly implemented against the Soviets. In other words, in this period Hollywood took on a duty for distributing the unconquerable USA image. Needless to mention that this tendency on the US foreign policy can't be limited by the Cold War era. Quite the contrary, in the present day still Hollywood relies on the ashes of the Cold War's unique dynamics and implementations.

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