



## Paris Olympics 2024 - D4 – Sport diplomacy & Smart power

Faced with many criticisms, on the concrete effectiveness of soft power, and its evaluation, Joseph Nye chose to introduce a new concept: “smart power”. Theoretically, a State with soft power developed without the ability to defend itself militarily, if necessary, cannot be considered powerful ; at most influential, and still within obvious limits. Conversely, a State with significant hard power will be able to succeed in military operations, avoid certain conflicts or impose its views on the international scene for a time, but will have difficulty in capitalizing politically on these «victories». A mix of soft and hard, smart power, designates "the methods of influence developed by a State which are not based on violence but on ideological or cultural elements in order to satisfy the interests of the nation who implements them ”.

The world is fragmented – the Western world would oppose a “Global South”, supported by authoritarian regimes, to struggle against an alleged imperialism. The number of democracies has drastically decreased for the past 18 years (Freedom House), the deterioration of democratic countries would affect a fifth of the world’s population in 2023. With 206 national delegations present in Paris for the Olympics, they are not obviously all democracies. Only Russia and Belarus are excluded in Europe with the war against Ukraine since February 2022. In the Middle-East , there is also an open and hidden war - Israël savagely attacked by Hamas (October 2023) , Hezbollah attacking Druze teenagers (July 2024); Houthis harassing western boats in the Red Sea (since 2023). They are all terrorist organizations supported by Iran. The war in Syria, since 2011, the Assad regime torturing and persecuting its own population, is supported by Russia, China and Iran.

The Olympic Games have always been a means to meet in an informal way for countries strongly opposed politically, commercially and sometimes militarily. This was the case during the Cold War (1946-1991) where the USSR and the Western World met each 4 years ; the successes of their athletes were telling on the balance of power. Western countries are not officially at war with many authoritarian countries but there is still a cyberwar conducted- fake news and disinformation are the main weapons. Authoritarian regimes mean to impose their storytelling and their rules on the international stage.

Diplomacy is a way to meet and discuss with countries that are not always friendly nor fair. It may be official and formal, conducted by the leaders of the countries together with their Foreign Affairs services. This is just the visible part of the iceberg. Most of the contacts are implemented in an informal way. It can be implemented secretly by the Intelligence service (unofficial but still public managed). It can be carried by culture through the many existing cultural Institutes (Alliance française, Goethe Institute, Institutes Cervantes, British councils, or Confucius institutes for China) or cinemas or platforms (Internet or social media) with popular series or movies , an efficient way to touch brains and hearts, especially among a younger population (Tik Tok).

Sport remains the best vehicle for being convincing as it is incarnated by real human beings- it brings so many emotions (happiness, disappointment, fear, ...) and it is always associated at a high level with excellence, performance and strength. A victory on the tatami or on a playground is more telling than a military battle. Sport is definitely part of an efficient hybrid war.

- (1) Theo Corbucci & Pierre-William Fregonese, Theo Corbucci et Pierre-William Fregonese “Soft power, hard power et smart power: le pouvoir selon Joseph Nye”, Slate, 14 June 2014 - <http://www.slate.fr/story/88487/soft-power-hard-power-smart-power-pouvoir-joseph-nye>
- (2) Hendrik Hertzberg “Smart power” The New Yorker. January 18, 2009 - <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2009/01/26/smart-power>
- (3) Joseph S. Nye, Bound to Lead, 1990 cité par le Centre de ressources et d’information sur l’intelligence économique et stratégique - <http://www.portail-ie.fr/lexiques/read/94>
- (4) Freedom in the world”, rapport 2024-  
[https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2024-02/FIW\\_2024\\_DigitalBooklet.pdf](https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2024-02/FIW_2024_DigitalBooklet.pdf)
- (5) Bénédicte Halba « Ideal world - Information, Diversity and Leadership – a centre of excellence for training “smart” leaders to diversity to defend Democracy & European values», working paper , submitted with the University of Parma (Erasmus + bid, 2022) and to the OIF (Organisation of Francophonie),
- (6) Documentaire de Mickaël Gamrasni « Olympiques ! La France des Jeux”, France, diffusé le 16 juillet 2024 sur France 2
- (7) Site officiel du COJO-<https://olympics.com/fr/>
- (8) Jules et Gédéon Naudet « Au cœur des jeux », France , 2024- **série de documentaires**  
<https://www.france.tv/sport/les-jeux-olympiques/6324884-ceremonie-d-ouverture-premiers-secrets-partie-1.html>

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