



Mains Practice Question

Q. Discuss the concept of "sharp power" in international relations. How does it differ from soft and hard power? **(150 words)**

30 Jul, 2024 GS Paper 2 International Relations

Approach

- Introduce the answer by mentioning how the concept of power evolved
- Mention difference in hard, soft, and sharp power
- Highlight the Nature of Sharp Power
- Delve into its implications
- Conclude suitably.

Introduction

The concept of power in international relations has evolved over time. Traditionally, **hard and soft power** were the primary tools employed by states to influence others.

- However, the advent of the **information age** has led to the **emergence of a new form of power: sharp power.**

Body

Hard, Soft, and Sharp Power:

- **Hard power** relies on coercion, threats, or military force to achieve desired outcomes. It is the classic "**stick**" **approach to diplomacy.**
- **Soft power** is the ability to influence others through **persuasion**, rather than **coercion**. It is often associated with **culture, diplomacy, and foreign aid.**
- **Sharp power** is a more **covert form of influence** that seeks to shape the information environment by **undermining democratic institutions, manipulating public opinion, and spreading disinformation.** It is often associated with **authoritarian regimes.**

Nature of Sharp Power:

- **Propaganda and disinformation:** Deliberately spreading false or misleading information to manipulate public opinion.
- **Media control:** Suppressing independent media and controlling the narrative through state-owned outlets.
- **Cyberattacks:** Targeting critical infrastructure and stealing sensitive information to gain leverage.
- **Influence operations:** Covertly supporting political parties or movements to advance national interests.

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Implications of Sharp Power:

- **Erosion of Democratic Institutions:** Undermining of free and fair elections through disinformation campaigns
 - Weakening public trust in democratic processes and institutions
 - **Example:** Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. elections
- **Distortion of Public Discourse:** Manipulation of social media algorithms to spread false narratives.
 - Creation of echo chambers and polarization of societies
 - **Example: China's use of "50 Cent Army"** to influence online discussions globally
- **Technological Vulnerabilities:** Exploitation of cybersecurity weaknesses to gather sensitive information
 - Use of **AI and deep fakes** to create convincing false narratives
 - **Example:** Saudi Arabia's alleged use of Spyware and involvement in the assassination of Jamal Khashoggi
- **Reshaping of International Alliances:** Formation of new coalitions to counter sharp power threats
 - Reevaluation of existing alliances based on vulnerability to sharp power

Conclusion

- The advent of sharp power has irrevocably altered the geopolitical landscape. Its **insidious nature** poses a formidable challenge to democratic norms and values. To counter this, not only robust defense mechanisms are necessary but also a **proactive strategy to bolster democratic resilience, media literacy, and international cooperation.**

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