Future of Global
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Strategic Multilayer Assessment (SMA)

Quick Concepts Series:

GLOBAL INFLUENCE

Global influence is the option to be considered and consulted in determining a country's strategic narratives, international activities, and foreign policy objectives.

"Influence" and "power" are foundational to how geopolitics are discussed and understood. Many American planners and policymakers are strong believers in global influence: fearing both its relative and absolute loss; seeking to "grow" and "spread" the United States' influence; and trying to counter the influence of critical competitors such as the People's Republic of China, the Russian Federation, and the Islamic Republic of Iran (Jafri & Stevenson, 2019).

Yet, there has been little consensus-making in either policy or scholarly discourse about how to consistently measure, operationalize, or conceptualize global influence. Often left undefined, global influence is a concept presumed obvious: everyone always "knows (it) when they see it (Jacobellis v. Ohio, 378 U.S. 184, 1964)." Therefore, global influence is an observable phenomenon which lacks clearly defined parameters. Treating global influence in this manner is not ultimately in the best interest of planners, as concepts that could mean everything often mean nothing.

The few specific definitions of global influence that exist are difficult to dis-entangle from conceptualizations of power:

- Ernest Wilson (2008): Power is the ability to influence another to act in ways in which that entity would not have acted otherwise.
- Daniel O'Neill (2017): Global influence is "the ability of State A to persuade State B to align its policies more closely to the preferences of State A." The "ability to exert influence also depends on factors in State B."
- Joseph Nye (2004): "The essence of power…lies in the conversion of resources into influence, which is the exercise of power."

These existing definitions obfuscate, rather than clarify, the relationship between power and global influence. First, influence has to have some relational route by which activities of multiple actors become interconnected (O'Neill 2017; Wilson, 2008). In other words, influence is a relationship of interdependence. Second, the effectiveness of influence as a capacity is relationship-specific (O'Neill 2017). Third, global influence should be conceived of as both relational characteristics as well as material ones, taking into account pathways of *persuasion* as a marker of influence (Nye, 2004; O'Neill 2017).

Existing definitions fail to explain the interactions of relational and material characteristics. Their preferred examples illustrate the limits of existing approaches. Wilson (2008) offers two examples of influence: Pakistan and India as well as France and Francophone Africa. Wilson observes, "Pakistan is likely to listen carefully to India, a contiguous neighbor with both a large conventional standing army and ample nuclear assets." This description imagines a linear relationship between Indian military power and Indian influence in Pakistan. Similarly, for Wilson, French influence in Francophone Africa rests on "daily uses of soft power including language, combined with the judicious uses of military intervention when necessary to back up its economic and cultural influences," an excessively polite way to characterize neo-colonialism.

How material resources interact with relational history to create influence remains opaque in these examples because it is not the straightforward linear relationship Wilson conjures. In reality, countries can amass leverage over other countries without corresponding increases in influence; inversely, materially weak international actors can be influential. For example, China's Belt and Road initiative is designed to create lines of commerce stretching to Europe from China's coasts through the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean and the South Pacific (O'Neill 2017). Nonetheless, "China's use of foreign economic policies...show that China is not always able to convert its tremendous economic power [read: economic leverage] into influence over other states (O'Neill 2017)." In contrast, the "European Union presents an [global influence] paradox...The EU's apparent weakness in material term has been considered part of its attraction" (Miskimmon, O'Loughlin & Roselle, 2017).

In short, there is not a direct correspondence of material capability to influence, and there are under-theorized relational dimensions of influence. Our challenge lies in specifying the ways in which actors are connected and what can be transmitted across those connections. In other words, a proper definition of influence is clear on how the relationship of any two actors, let's call them A and B, affects strategic narratives, international activities, and foreign policy objectives (Miskimmon, O'Loughlin & Roselle, 2017; Roselle, Miskimmon & O'Loughlin, 2014; Tallberg et al., 2018). (Global influence is not simply dyadic, but for the purposes of clear definitions, starting with a dyadic relationship allows for the clearest formulation.)

Taking both the material and relational dimension seriously, if actor A has influence with actor B, then:

- B actively notifies A of the international activities B undertakes along with B's objectives in pursuing those activities, and
- A has multiple channels by which to transmit its views and the range of responses it may take in response to any given activity or objective of B.

Therefore, in the national foreign policy toolkit, *global influence is the option to be considered and consulted*. (Consideration is the transmission dimension, and consultation is the relational dimension.) The key indicator of influence is that **both** A and B are (1) aware of the preferences and worldviews of each other, (2) possess multiple channels of communication, and (3) can actively incorporate the preferences and worldviews of the other.

Social psychology provides a wealth of insight about how influence operates inter-personally. One principle in this literature is that people like individuals similar to them; this regularity seems to hold whether the similarity is in the area of opinions, personality traits, background, or lifestyle (Cialdini & Cialdini, 1993). Furthermore, the "more we like and approve of [someone], the more like we are to take actions to cultivate close relationships with them" (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004).

The implication of these social psychology concepts for understanding global influence—that is influence between states, rather than individuals—is that both consideration and consultation effects are layered. I illustrate these in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Typology of Global Influence Effects
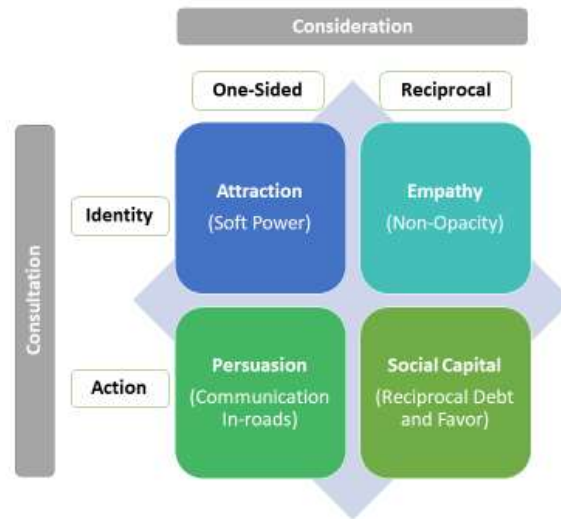
Consideration can be either one-sided or reciprocal, based on directionality of influence transmission. Consultation can be derived from (shared) identity or cultivated action. In colloquial terms, identity-based global influence is conceptualized as "possesses influence with" whereas cultivated action is talked about as "exerts influence over/on."

There are four observable implications of this model.

1. One-sided consideration in the context of shared identity produces influence via soft power, which is "the ability to attract, and attraction often leads to acquiescence (Nye, 2004)." Three areas of identity produce this influence: (1) a country's culture, (2) a country's political values (where it lives up to them at home and abroad), and (3) a country's foreign policies (where they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority). An example is the attraction that some states in the "Global South" have for China's development model: "Given a choice between market democracy and its freedoms and market authoritarianism and its high growth, stability, improved living standards, and limits on expression—a majority in the developing world… prefer the authoritarian model (Halper, 2010)." Despite "the current leadership in Beijing downplay[ing] the Chinese style of reform as a model for other parts of the developing world," the one-side attraction persists.

2. Reciprocal consideration in the context of shared identity produces influence via empathy: a sense in both countries that shared ties sustain linked fates, and that the peoples and habits of both countries are comprehensible to each other (Minhas, Hoff & Ward,

3. 2017). This variant of influence is grounded in the overlapping narratives of each country about the (1) each actor's understanding of international order, (2) messaging about ongoing bargaining regarding policies and norms (e.g. arms controls agreements), and (3) identity claims about the history and (heroic) myths of the actor (Roselle, Miskimmon & O'Loughlin, 2014). An iconic example of this kind of influence is found in Brazil's aid and cooperation with Africa, which "targets governance, culture, infrastructure, and post-conflict resolution," emerging out of Brazil's national narratives about its "experiences from dealing with poverty and inequality at home" (Kragelund, 2010). Brazil specifically prioritizes technical assistance, which "in the eyes of the Brazilian donors is geared toward helping encourage structural change in productive systems as a means to overcome obstacles to growth" (Kragelund, 2010).

4. One-sided consideration in the context of cultivated action produces influence via persuasion. Robert Keohane (2010) defines persuasion as "influence [targeting] actions, without using or threatening force, or providing incentives." Similarly, social psychology defines persuasion as "influence designed to change beliefs" (Chaiken et al. 2000). If persuasion, as a form as influence, cannot rest on force or incentives, then the chief international activity that comprise influence-as-persuasion is being present for repeated interactions and intentional effort to maintain ties outside of crises. International relations theorists have observed that "middle powers" specialize in this type of influence (Karim, 2018; Nolte, 2010). To maximize their influence, in the context of lesser material capability, middle powers pursue limited foreign-policy objectives and engage in "niche diplomacy" to exercise multi-lateral leadership on issues that do not directly involve the vital interests of the great powers (Lim & Cooper, 2015). For example, Indonesia hosted the Asian–African Conference Commemoration in 2005 and 2015, where it played a leading role among developing countries by reviving the Asia–Africa Strategic Partnership (Karim, 2018).

5. Reciprocal consideration in the context of cultivated action produces influence via social capital—exchanges of reciprocal debt and favor. Reciprocity is an important dimension of interpersonal influence. Reciprocity interpersonally is the obligation to give, an obligation to receive, and an obligation to repay (Cialdini & Cialdini, 1993). This influence emerges from international activities that offer support and investment, which mutually expands the influence horizons of both actors; it creates reciprocal debt from the fear that if either side were to lose the favor, they would also experience diminished influence. For example, Chinese support for South-South cooperation creates this form of influence: "China's ideological support of African despots lends them international legitimacy and influence in the United Nations and other international arenas that help to blunt pressure from the Western

democracies on human rights, economic openness, and political freedoms" (Brookes & Shin, 2006).

Conclusion: Implications for United States Influence

The most important implication of this conception of global influence is that there are two key pathways through which global influence can be cultivated: identity-basis and action-basis.

Coherent and clear-eyed strategic narratives are the lynchpin of identity-influence. These strategic narratives need to be clear about both how the United States understands itself and its past, and how the United States understands international political order (Kaplan, 2006; Walt, 2011).

Action-based sources of influence are more likely to arise from consistent and coherent American inter-governmental and military-to-military engagement (Keck and Sikkink, 1999). Being present and engaged in the international forum through diplomatic missions, and in interpersonal relationships between key leaders, sustains mutual consideration of objectives and international practices, as well as offers multiple, recurring opportunities for (informal) consultation.

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John A. Stevenson is a Principal Research Scientist at NSI, Inc. He earned his Ph.D. and M.A. in Political Science at the University of Chicago, and an A.B. in Government from Dartmouth College. Dr. Stevenson's passion is to curate illuminating data narratives to best enable informed decision-making given environmental uncertainty and complexity in support of all kinds of organizational ends. His substantive areas of expertise are multi-method social science methodology, and the statistical and historical modeling of political conflict and radicalization in sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia. Dr. Stevenson has served as technical lead on a variety of Joint Staff-directed Strategic Multi-layer Assessment (SMA) projects in support of US forces and Combatant Commands, including assessment of Chinese naval strength, the effectiveness of counter-terrorism strategies against Boko Haram, the effectiveness of Iranian proxy activities, and barriers to reconciliation in Afghanistan. To help military planners understand critical international relations and social psychology concepts that inform strategy, Dr. Stevenson developed the NSI Concept Paper and SMA Quick Concept Series, which have explored a wide-range of topics, such as space deterrence, public-private partnerships, and failed states. Dr. Stevenson was also a lead in developing a tool for mapping the distribution of information assets in the USG to support whole-of-government teaming efforts. His efforts have resulted in numerous original databases indexing critical and recurring national security challenges.

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