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In contemporary world politics, smart power is neither hard nor soft but both.

Recently, world has seen an unpredictable, rather mercurial President leading the most powerful country - America. Under his leadership at one point a nuclear exchange between North Korea seemed more imminent than ever. Comments like 'fire and fury' and words unknown to global diplomacy were exchanged. North Korea on its part did tests after tests - claiming to have developed thermonuclear bomb. Crisis was imminent.

It was averted by the clever Sports diplomacy of South Korean President Moon Jae-in. His efforts brought US and North Korean leaders to negotiating tables away from their nuclear buttons. Now, the teams marched under one flag in Asian Games too. Families have been united.

Above examples clearly illustrate the power - soft power weilds international relations.

But on the other hand all the concerns regarding reputation and leadership could not stop us from walking out of the Paris deal - blatantly looking out for its own interests, shunning of responsibilities. Chinese response to the Permanent Court of Arbitration puts to rest any hope of soft power on south China sea issue.

Going to the other extreme all the soft power in world could not have contained the challenges posed by non-state actors like ISIS - only hard power could.

Thus, it would seem like contemporary world politics demands both Real power lies in understanding what to use where?

Nations - states in global politics today see several challenges - like land conflicts, trade, terror, investment, climate change, organised crime etc.

Engaged in eternal competition for supremacy countries resort to hard power (military, monetary, water-sharing) as well as soft power (business, cultural, sports, religion, research, diaspora etc.) Each has its strengths and weaknesses.

Hard power has been the traditional safeguard for interests. Seen in world imperialism, world wars, cold war era and today's unipolar world.

Unipolar world today sees us playing global policeman - primarily for its own interests. NATO, SCO are other manifestations of hard power. Challenges today of global terror, piracy on high seas have to be countered by hard power in part.

Similarly, Russia has been focusing on defence production. China and US both have launched military modernisation. Nuclear deterrence has for decades been focus of debate as well as source of stability.

US today have decided to start a space force to protect its assets and get first mover advantage. China with its assassin mace is not far behind either. It recently tested missiles to target satellites. Thus, hard power is expanding in geopolitics.

Chinese acts in South China Sea of island reclamation and its militarisation clearly show recognition of hard power. So does military base in Djibouti near US. Chinese string of pearls, bases in Hambantota, Male could spell effects of hard power for

India.

India for its part has faced up to China using hard power in Doklam. Surgical strikes by India are yet another manifestation of importance of hard power. Chabahar by India in Iran counters Gwadar by China in quest for regional supremacy. Thus, the use of hardpower in regional as well as international politics is not lost.

More importantly, US's stance to India as a global leader saw phenomenal change only after we conducted 1998 - Pokhran nuclear tests. This resulted in Indo-US nuke deal. Decade later - US - wants India to patrol South China sea in what it calls Indo-Pacific now. QUAD is yet another case - in point - as are several military exercises like MALABAR, RIMPAC, CORPAT etc. amongst countries.

Hard power has found even newer domains like cyber warfare seen in Russian Ukraine attacks. Defacement of Indian websites by Pakistani hackers is yet another example.

However, hard power has not been without backfires. US's unending war in Afghanistan, misadventures in Iraq show limitations of hard power. Despite coordinated attacks on ISIS in middle east - as per intelligence the fighters have only dispersed to other countries and set up ISIS franchisee units. These carry radicalisation and one way attacks - London, Paris, Iran.

The mighty power that China seeks to be is faced with restive Xinjiang. Use of hard power here brings international criticism here. Solutions to its conflict with India

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do not lie in hard power either -
even less so as India modernises -
economy and military wise.

Africa is itself seeing the
ugly consequences of use of hard power
by tribal warlords. Groups like
Al-Shabab and Boko Haram set
records in human right violations.

Israel despite being sole
nuclear power in middle east and
with US backing is faced with global
criticism and challenges of Herbollah,
Intifada by Fatah.

Back home, we see that
only gainer from hard power based
confrontation of India and Pakistan is
deep state of Pakistan and possibly
China. On eastern front hard power
in Myanmar and against stateless
Rohingya has led to rise of Arakan
Rohingya Salvation Army - hotbed for

radicalisation.

Even US after realising the flaws of hard power strategy is relying on soft power - thus receding from the role of global policeman.

This brings us to consider - what if not hard power. Soft power provides various examples of successes.

Regionally, SARL - MVA, BBIN and BIMSTEC are examples of success of soft power. India's SARL satellite has earned it neighbourhood good will.

Generous, Indus water treaty has earned us global appreciation as responsible benign power. These ideas have been realised in our Gujral doctrine which appreciates role of soft power. So does PANSH SHEEL - for mutual co-existence.

Further more, India's 'no first use' of nuclear weapons earned us NSG waiver, Tajon deal, US deal and overall label of responsible power.

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Thus, even in Landpower India could cleverly leverage soft power to its advantage. Recent, Australia, M7Ch Wassenaar membership substantiate this

With global profile rising, India leveraged investment in Asia-Africa growth corridor as well as several line of credits to its advantage in leadership. We have also claimed soft power's advantage in International solar alliance and South-South leadership in climate change issues. Success of Montreal deal exemplifies soft power in geopolitics.

Further, China seeks use of soft power for global leadership in Belt and Road and global investments from South America to Philippines. Inclusion of Renminbi in IMF basket is yet another attempt to expand soft power

Globally countries have been focussing on business - 2 - business, people - 2 - people contacts and exchanges. Cultural exchanges are seen in gifts exchanged by state leaders on visit (eg Tortoise from Maldives).

Cooperation in research, humanitarian assistance, expanding trade, pharmaceutical assistance are important ways for countries to expand their global profiles. Further, international negotiations like Iran deal, Basel Convention, call for UNSC reform, WTO, IMF reforms show weight of joint soft power.

Countries are trying to increase interdependence by signing trade pacts to reduce role of hard power. However even soft power has its limitations.

Soft power cannot counter organised crime. Issues like racism, xenophobia, hate crimes and protectionism are beyond the exclusive remit of soft power. Crimes like tax evasion, terrorism cannot be countered by soft power. Trafficking in human need hard power to stop.

Further, not just non state but state actors like US walking out of TPP, UNESCO show limits of soft power and hard power working alone. US has stuck WTO dispute resolution mechanism - this could be an end to WTO's efficacy.

Thus, we need to realise that soft power or hard power alone are no solution to challenges posed by contemporary politics. Solution lies in a smart power.

Smart power relies on
a Soft - hard - soft power strategy.

Here stakeholders would try to settle disputes peacefully, amicably through negotiations, grievance redressal and accommodation of reasonable demands. This would be through multiple steps like ceasefire, dialogue, humanitarian works, culture, business, Sports, etc. Diplomacy - track 1 to 7 would play a lead role.

Failing which, if belligerents still take a hardline and abuse force - hard power would step in.

Proportional, defensive and deterrent force would be used. offensive

- force under rule based global order
- eg UNSC Sanction would be step 2.

Building on the gains made diplomacy would be resorted to.

This along with relief, rehabilitation (13)
and building back better - would reduce
chances of abuse of hard power and
belligerence again. This model would
work for non state actors like ISIS,
Taliban etc. Soft power would provide
lasting role of healing the wounds.

Where possible soft power
should be relied to the fullest
potential. Eg. Iran deal, North
Korea issue, global governance
reform. Soft power should be
the mainstay of global politics -
as well as ensurer of sustained
peace and welfare of mankind.
Rule based and transparent
hard power would help provide
fail safe option devoid of vested
interests. Together these would
constitute smart power for smart
humanity of 21st century

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Is democracy the best setting for economic growth?

Under the backdrop of world war II Korean peninsula was divided along the 39th parallel. Eventually, North came under dictatorial rule while South under democratic rule. Each took its own chart in next 60 years. Today, South Korea is an advanced economy approaching developed status. North Korea on the other hand is poverty ridden country known for appalling human right violations.

Along the same timeline, India became free in 1947- and China in 1949. India chose the path of democracy while China chose one-party rule which analysts don't call democratic.

Today, Chinese economy is four times that of India and has $\frac{1}{10}$ th the people living under international poverty line compared to India.

These two examples implore us to think is democracy really the best way for economic growth? The wise words of Winston Churchill come to mind -

Democracy is the worst form of government
except all those other forms that have
been tried and tested from time to time.

These words clearly recognise the efficacy of democracy over others. But at the same time warn us against pitfalls of democracy. Path to economic growth lies in leveraging the advantages and avoiding the pitfalls.

Democracy in its simplest form is rule by people. Logical extension would make it rule of people, for the people. Most starkly it manifests

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in free fair, period elections. This is the biggest strength of democracy. These allow people to elect their leaders based on their ideas, preferences and vision. The leaders are expected to form people oriented policies - health, education.

These policies could help people to achieve their fullest potential - as individuals and as a country - thus acting as human capital. A skilled human capital is a prerequisite for economic growth as shown by China, Asian Tigers - (South Korea has 96% people technically trained).

Democracies automatically make governments accountable to voters. This reduces chances of corruption seen in authoritarian regimes. Budgeting becomes a regular exercise and a part of social contract. As democracies deepen, outcome budgeting add to

Culture of accountability. This is also boosted by evidence based policy making.

All this ensures, every penny out of public exchequer produces maximum bang for the buck. Thus, benefiting the economic outcome of investments.

Democracies deepen further to provide opportunities for feedback from people. Mid term debates, medium term policy discussion help leaders to form / reform progressive policies for the upliftment of bottom of pyramid. This reduces chances of social instability propelled by economic stagnation - avoiding costs of civil wars.

Socio-political stability also attracts foreign investments in the globalised flow of capital boosting economic growth. This social stability is also complemented by fundamental political rights - speech, culture, religion,

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equality etc. Thus, every person as a secure right holder contributes to nation-
building efforts - making the best out
of national endowments. This applies
especially to minorities.

Another feature of democracy
is an impartial judiciary as the
ultimate guarantor of rights of every
citizen and in some cases aliens too.
This insures people against state's
excesses and provides for citizen
centric, governance under rule of law -
an essential prerequisite for economic
growth.

Democracies engrain a culture
of celebration of differences. In intellectual
honest differences are often a healthy
sign of progress. This was clearly
seen in how renaissance led to
growth of reason. Reason led to science
which help the western world emerge
a super powers - then and today.

Even, today universities fiercely protect their democratic cultures for it leads to new ideas and growth.

Democracies enable people to protect their environment and livelihood better against the plunder by powerful vested interests. Protests by Dongariga Konthi in Niyamgiri Hills and those of chipko movement have shown the strength of democracy. They delayed 'growth' in short term but now world is realising how development at cost of environment is fatal (eg. Chennai floods 2015; Kerala 2018)

Democracy helps accommodation of legitimate concerns of people seen in reorganisation of states - based on linguistic, economic, cultural lines in India. This helps better policy formation and uniform implementation leading to faster economic growth - (eg North East India)

Democracy also provides for enough space for private sector to play its part. Post 1991 India has seen state receding to regulation and free play to market for most optimum economic trajectory. This complemented with welfarism of India and minimum government and maximum governance based regulation - has shattered the glass ceiling of pre 1991 - hinder growth rate.

However, democracy is not without its fair share of challenges. Recent Comments by Chinese president Xi Jinping on how democracies have forced political parties to consolidate vote banks in multiparty system are not without some truth. Democracies do suffer from populism, vote bank politics as well as religion based mobilisation. This is seen more in first past the post Indian democracy

Democracy by its nature
of frequent election suffers from frequent
opportunity costs of campaign caused
policy paralysis - during elections.

Members game is always under
fear of majoritarianism.

When not a majority the
coalition governments have held central
governments hostage to regional interests
(eg. Tamil Nadu issues regarding Sri
Lankan Tamils). Even favourable policies
like foreign direct investment
liberalisation have been stuck by
politicisation of trade unions. Thus,
governments at centre - due to vote
banks can't bring policies to bring
economic growth.

It works the other way
around too. Central governments have
shown biased behaviour against
states ruled by political opposition

The planning commission era in India saw discretionary grants exceeding plan grants. These on discretion of central government became a means to arm twist opposition. Collateral damage was economic growth.

Abuse of powers by centre has led to president's rule leading to political instability. Thus, overturning the advantage that democracy brings to ensure economic growth. Dismissal of governments by congress in Kerala in 1967 is an example

Too much democracy can also be counterproductive. For eg. recent Brexit vote based on protectionist fears have led to possible set back of a decade to Britain and EU's economy. Similarly, rise of a protectionist president in USA and his subsequent walking out

if TPP is a loss to US and other economies involved.

This calls into question idea is authoritarian rule better!

Authoritarian regimes certainly have some credits. Explosive growth of China under one party rule as well as imageries of Saudi Arabia - a monarchy with streets paved with gold are certainly an antithesis to democratic model. Freedom from populism and fast implementation of policies uniformity of policies nationally certainly help in economic growth.

However we need to analyze costs. Are the costs of Chinese Cultural Revolution and Tiananmen Square massacre something we are willing to pay at the altar of economic growth. Can we ignore violence in Stalinist Russia or Stasi Germany -

which are also possible outcomes of authoritarian regimes.

The authoritarian regimes by nature are non-accountable, tendency to be corrupt. Severe human right violations characterise authoritarian regimes. Recent jail of 18 months for blasphemy to Indonesian women for criticising loud voice of mosque is a case in point.

Rights of minorities can be suppressed for sometime but eventually they erupt to cause partition of country (- eg Bangladesh in 1971) ~~there is~~ misuse of states resources for police / surveillance to safeguard authoritarian divert money from economic growth's needs. Poor investments in human capital leads to poor growth today and tomorrow.

Thus, it would appear though democracy is the worst form of government - still it is better than other forms which deny the very right to live for their interest - thus endangering economic growth of all.

Further democracy can be reformed to provide for best possible economic growth. For that it is necessary to see democracy not only as an event but as an unending process.

Instead of top down governance bottom up governance needs to be developed. Strength of federalism, right to speech need to deepen democracy. right to information need to be supplemented with right to timely service delivery and right to grievance redressal.

Overall, the idea of good governance and inner party democracy and transparency need to be the norm.

People need to be educated for issue based politics not freebie based. Politics needs to be purified as a contest between ideas not money or muscle. Bodies conducting elections need to be strengthened.

Civil society like media, pressure groups, political parties need to be given space to perform. Voter education, education of general masses in participatory governance would ensure democracy as a means for sustained economic growth - as the best option.