

TOEFL Listening Lesson 18

Setting: A college-level *Politics* class.

Questions

1. What is the lecture mainly about?

- A. The history of American foreign policy
- B. The structure of global military alliances
- C. The concept of soft power and how it differs from hard power
- D. How countries compete economically on the global stage

2. According to the professor, what are the three main sources of soft power identified by Joseph Nye?

- A. Economic development, technological innovation, and media influence
- B. Military strength, foreign policy, and natural resources
- C. Culture, political values, and foreign policy
- D. Religion, education, and international trade

3. Why does the professor mention South Korea's entertainment industry?

- A. To show how soft power can be used to spread military ideals
- B. To illustrate how cultural exports can increase a country's global appeal
- C. To argue that soft power is only useful in Asia
- D. To contrast hard power with economic sanctions

4. Why does the professor say that soft power can be difficult for governments to control?

- A. Because it depends entirely on military action
- B. Because it is based on spontaneous market forces
- C. Because it often comes from non-governmental sources like civil society
- D. Because it changes depending on election cycles

5. Why does the professor mention that soft power is “relative”?

- A. To argue that it is more effective than hard power in every situation
- B. To emphasize that its success depends on cultural and regional context
- C. To show that it always leads to misunderstandings between nations
- D. To explain why only democratic nations can use it successfully

Script

Professor:

Today, we're going to talk about the concept of *soft power*, a term that's become increasingly relevant in international relations over the past few decades. While the traditional idea of power in global politics has centered on military strength and economic might—what we call *hard power*—soft power refers to a country's ability to shape the preferences and influence the behavior of others through attraction rather than coercion.

The term *soft power* was coined by Joseph Nye, a political scientist, in the late 1980s. Nye argued that in a globalizing world, power wasn't just about who had the most tanks or the biggest economy. It was also about whose culture, political values, and foreign policies were seen as legitimate or attractive by others. In other words, if country A can get country B to want what country A wants, without force or payment, that's soft power at work.

Let's break that down a bit. Nye identified three primary sources of soft power: culture, political values, and foreign policy. First, culture—which includes things like movies, music, fashion, and food—can project an image that makes a country more appealing. Think about how American pop culture, through Hollywood films or global music trends, shapes how people around the world perceive the United States. Similarly, South Korea has gained a lot of soft power in recent years through the global spread of K-pop and Korean dramas.

Second, political values can serve as a form of soft power when they are upheld consistently. For example, a country that strongly supports human rights, democratic governance, and freedom of speech can earn admiration and influence from people and governments that share those values. But this only works if the country also practices what it preaches. Inconsistencies—like advocating for democracy abroad while tolerating authoritarianism at home—can erode that soft power.

The third source, foreign policy, is a bit more complex. A country that uses diplomacy, aid, and cooperation rather than threats and force can gain respect and trust on the international stage. For example, Scandinavian countries often have high levels of soft power because of their neutral foreign policies, support for international institutions, and humanitarian aid programs.

Let's contrast this with hard power for a moment. Hard power is all about using force or inducements—military intervention, economic sanctions, or payments—to get others to do what you want. Both types of power are often used together, but they serve different purposes. Hard power might make others obey you, but soft power can make others want to follow you. And in today's interconnected world, where public opinion, global media, and non-state actors play significant roles, soft power has become a critical tool.

However, soft power has its limitations. It's not something that governments can fully control. Much of it comes from civil society—artists, entrepreneurs, educators—not just from state policy. Moreover,

soft power can take a long time to build, and it can be lost quickly if a country's actions contradict the values it promotes. Think about moments when a country has been praised for promoting peace but then engages in a military conflict—those actions can damage credibility and reduce soft power.

Another important point is that soft power is relative. What appeals to one country or culture might not appeal to another. For instance, a democratic system might be seen as a model in one region and viewed with suspicion in another, depending on historical, religious, or ideological contexts. Therefore, countries need to understand their audiences and tailor their approach accordingly.

So, to summarize: soft power is about attraction and persuasion rather than force. It emerges from culture, values, and foreign policy. While it can't replace hard power, it complements it and can often achieve long-term influence more sustainably. In the global landscape of the 21st century—where winning hearts and minds is just as important as winning battles—soft power is no longer optional. It's essential.

Answers

1. What is the lecture mainly about?

Correct answer: C. The concept of soft power and how it differs from hard power

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Correct answer: C. Culture, political values, and foreign policy

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Correct answer: B. To illustrate how cultural exports can increase a country's global appeal

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