

POWER AND SOVEREIGNTY: THE REALIST DILEMMA

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Abstract

Through the years the definition of power has been constantly evolving. It is among the myriad concepts of the study of politics that scholars have been persistently debating. This paper proposed that it is inadequate to conceptualize power as a single idea; rather it is composed of closely related integral parts and is manifested in each component. The paper examined these manifestations of power and how it affected state sovereignty within the framework of realism. Results showed that power is manifested in six closely related integral components; military pre-eminence, economic ascendancy, institutional weight, demographic functionality, cultural magnetism and ideological insinuation. The manifestations of power sometimes vary in each component but often times they are proportional. Sovereignty, on the other hand, is the source of legitimacy for a state to exercise its authority; it is the laws or fundamentally a state's constitution. Any action of another state must be tested against the source of the state's legitimacy, vice-versa. If it appends or controls regulations to existing laws, then it has an effect on sovereignty as well. The use of the different components of power, especially military in the form of intervention, economic in the form of bilateral or multilateral trade arrangements and institutional in the form of treaty stipulations affects sovereignty if it is contrary or if it appends or controls to existing state laws.

Keywords: *power, sovereignty, realist, dilemma*

1.0 Introduction

Power as a concept in the study of politics has a long history. It is frequently measured by means of military capability. Thucydides in writing *History of the Peloponnesian War* is the first person to write about power. As Thucydides records, the Athenian envoys refer to their mastery of the seas, their ability to defeat any resistance from the islanders and their allies and the natural law of the powerful: "the powerful exact what they can and the weak grant what they must" (Kissane, 2008). In his treatise entitled *The Prince*, Machiavelli argued that the two most essential foundations for any state, whether it be old or new, or both old and new, are sound laws and military forces (Machiavelli, 2003). Although Thucydides conveys power in

naval force and Machiavelli on land forces, both significantly relate power to military strength.

Thomas Hobbes in the *Leviathan* extends the definition of power by including economic might to armed forces:

"...not only the whole militia or forces of the commonwealth... the sovereign power is placed, and resideth ...the power to coin money, to dispose the estate and person of infant heirs, to have preemption in markets." (Cahn, 1997,p141).

Edward Hallet Carr's *The Twenty Years Crises* submits three key elements of power; the military element, the economic element

and the national and international propaganda. The foreign policy of a state is limited by its military strength because there lays the options of how to influence international politics and achieve strategic aims. Economic power according to Carr is used either to achieve self-sufficiency or to control foreign markets (Carr, 2001). National or international propaganda are state funded propaganda efforts that a state can employ in order to advance its interest.

In his book *Politics Among Nations*, Hans J. Morganthau defines power as “man’s control over the minds and actions of other men”. In contrast to this obligatory treatment of power, Henry Kissinger argues, “what is possible [for a state] depends on its resources, geographic position and determination, and on the resources, determination and domestic structure of other states” (Kaplan, 1999). Recent scholars have classified power in different ways – e.g. Joseph Nye dichotomizes hard power and soft power (Nye, 1999).

The scholars mentioned above have done a great deal of conceptualizing power, however, all are equally guilty of the ambiguity of the nature and components of power and how it is manifested. Thus, this paper argues that power is composed of closely related integral parts and is manifested in each component. It was guided by the following objectives (1) to present a modern multifaceted concept of state power within the realist framework, (2) to determine the different manifestations of state power, (3) to determine how these manifestations of power affect state sovereignty.

This paper was also guided by the framework of *realism* often times called political realism which claims to offer an account of world affairs that is “realistic” in the sense that it is hard-headed and devoid of wishful thinking and deluded moralizing

(Heywood, 2011). Those who adhere to this lens in understanding global politics views power as the end of global politics. Realism is based on two core assumptions; states are basically selfish and competitive so is the main characteristic of human nature and the international system operates in an international anarchy because there is no authority higher than the sovereign state.

2.0 Methodology

Documentary analysis was used as a method for this paper. It involved analysis of academic journals, leading international newspapers and magazines and cached online news reports of leading world news agencies. It further involved time-scale categorization in which “primary sources” consist only of evidence that was actually part of or produced by the event in question; “secondary sources” consisted of evidence relating to and produced soon after the event in question; and “tertiary sources” were materials written afterwards to reconstruct the event.

3.0 Results and Discussions

There are six modern manifestations of state power; military pre-eminence, economic ascendancy, institutional weight, demographic functionality, cultural magnetism and ideological insinuation.

3.1 Military Pre-eminence

None but the United States of America befits to illustrate this component of power. The U.S. Department of Defense now spends over \$50 billion annually for research, development, testing and evaluation, an amount larger than the entire defense budget of Germany, Great Britain, France, Russia, Japan or China. The United States maintains hundreds of military bases and

other facilities around the world, with an estimated replacement value of \$118 billion (Walt, 2005). The United States has the largest and most sophisticated arsenal of strategic nuclear weapons, and it is the only country with a global power projection capability, stealth aircraft, a large arsenal precision-guided munitions and integrated surveillance, reconnaissance and command-and-control capabilities. United States military personnel are also far better trained (Walt, 2005).

3.2 Economic Ascendancy

There are three major indicators commonly used that measure the strength of an economy; the gross domestic product (GDP), total foreign reserves (TFR), and inflation rate. A country's GDP is its entire economic output. The most recent GDP ranking from the World Bank indicates that United States has the biggest GDP amounting to \$14.3 trillion, second is Japan with \$5 trillion and third is China with \$4.9 trillion (World Bank, 2010). Total foreign reserves comprise holdings of monetary gold, reserves of International Monetary Fund (IMF) members held by the IMF and holdings of foreign exchange under the control of monetary authorities such as the World Bank (WB).

As of the end of 2008, being the most recent data, China has the biggest TFR summing to \$1.8 trillion, followed by Japan with \$999.7 billion and Russia with \$427 billion (World Bank, 2010). Inflation rate is the percentage change in the cost to the average consumer of acquiring a basket of goods and services, thus, the lower the inflation rate the stronger the economy. As of 2008, being the most recent data, Japan has the lowest inflation rate with 1.4%, followed by Canada and Switzerland both with 2.4%.

3.3 Institutional Weight

States employ international institutions to organize and regulate certain combined activities. Peacekeeping for example, falls under the auspices of the United Nations (UN); international trade is regulated by the World Trade Organization (WTO); and international finance and development are guided by the IMF and the WB (Walt, 2005). In the UN, only the five permanent members of the Security Council are entitled of veto rights, they are the champions of World War II, however, almost seven decades later, new powers are emerging, yet no effort of reorganizing it has succeeded.

In the two most powerful international economic institutions, IMF and WB, the current voting system allows the West to dominate, even though the Asian share of the global GNP has grown by leaps and bounds since their creation in 1945 (Mahbubani, 2008).

3.4 Demographic Functionality

Population is like a double-edged sword; it can have both favorable and unfavorable consequences for the state. The case of India and Italy is the best illustration. In the year 2008, India ranked 2nd with 1.1 billion while Italy ranked 22nd with 59.9 million total population. However, in the same year, India ranked 92nd with \$7,445 while Italy ranked 17th with \$45,932 GDP output per person. In effect, India ranked 12th with \$1.2 trillion while Italy ranked 7th with \$2.3 trillion GDP in the same year (World Bank, 2010).

3.5 Cultural Magnetism

This component of power is manifested in the overall exhibition of a state's desirability in terms of attitudes towards the spheres of politics, economics, education,

lifestyle, environment, values and beliefs system. In short, it is the overall charisma, charm, appeal and attractiveness displayed by the state that allures and hastens the flow of tourists and foreign investments.

3.6 Ideological Insinuation

It is an advantage for any state to mold the inclinations of others by insinuating ideologies that espouse universally accepted norms, such as the emphasis on the rule of law, democracy, liberty, modernity, equality and security. This insinuation is successfully delivered through movies, music, art, fashion or simply, popular culture. Others will want, what you want if they believe that what you propose will revolutionize their way of lives. How for example the United States inculcates the “American Dream” through popular culture is clear. People in volatile societies all over the world; want what the US wants because of the ideological guarantees insinuated through the omnipresence of its popular culture, especially those in the grassroots level since they masticate it.

3.7 Sovereignty; has it really changed?

Asking if sovereignty really changed is like asking if states no longer exist. In the broadest sense, sovereignty is the absolute authority of a state within its territory, a right enjoyed equally by all states. In the narrowest sense, sovereignty is the source of legitimacy in exercising that absolute authority. In short, it is the laws of the state. Sovereignty did not change at all. It is all encompassing; a state is not a state without sovereignty. Having said that, the basic test for the existence of sovereignty must be placed parallel to its laws.

Some scholars argue that sovereignty is diminishing due to increased foreign

interventions in the domestic affairs of others states, the protection of democratic institutions in particular. United States Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, once visited neighboring states of Russia, this group of states was called by Russia as “sphere of privileged interest.” These states are Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia and Poland.

The series of state visits to the countries mentioned above was meant to reassure them of America’s support and to defend democratic institutions. The latter gives rise to questions of sovereignty. To shed light in this matter is to delve on the source of legitimacy of exercising authority in each state.

Ukraine’s constitution univocally declares in Article III that the main duty of the state is ensuring democratic human rights and freedom. The constitution of Azerbaijan clearly proclaims in Section II, Article XII that the “supreme aim of the state shall be to ensure human and civil rights and freedoms.” So as the constitution of Armenia, it affirms in Chapter I, Article I that “the Republic of Armenia is a sovereign, democratic state, based on social justice and the rule of law” and in Article IV it guarantees the protection of human rights and freedom. In like manner, the constitution of Georgia upholds democratic principles in its preamble and has a very detailed Bill of Rights composed of three elaborate sections and 40 paragraph provision. It is probably one of the most detailed anthologies of the rights of person in the world. Lastly, the constitution of Poland asserts in Chapter I, Article II that “the Republic of Poland shall be a democratic state ruled by law and implementing the principles of social justice” and in Article XIII it prohibits political parties or organizations based on nazism, fascism, communism, racism and violence.

All sources of legitimacy in the mentioned states above, advocates democratic principles, thus, any effort of foreign states, provided that it is legally appropriate, does not weaken state sovereignty. In fact it is strengthening it, by aiding the state to uphold the principles that the laws within it requires. If laws affirm democratic principles – laws being the source of legitimacy – then efforts by a foreign state in helping to uphold it is in congruence with state sovereignty. The source of legitimacy to exercise authority within the state – sovereignty – is the laws of the state, so to weaken sovereignty is to control the laws or to change it. As long as foreign intervention is in congruence with the principles of the laws of the state, then it does not diminishes state sovereignty, it rather strengthens it. The commitment of the United States to defend democratic institutions in Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia and Poland is parallel to each of their state laws; therefore it reinforces the sources of their sovereignty which is their own laws.

However, if an objective of a foreign intervention is in contrast to the principles of the laws of the intervened state, then that is weakening the sovereignty of the intervened state. If further efforts of an intervening state intends to change the principles of the laws of the intervened state, then the likelihood of the intervened state to lose its sovereignty is about to happen if the intervening state succeeds.

The example above is mainly on foreign intervention that is often times expressed in the military component of power. Another example is a fusion of two components of power, institutional and economic. The European Union's Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) is a trade arrangement through which the EU provides preferential access to the EU market to 176 developing countries and

territories, in the form of reduced tariffs for their goods when entering the EU market. There is a special incentive arrangement in EU's GSP, known as GSP+, which offers additional tariff reductions to support vulnerable developing countries if they ratify and effectively implement 27 international conventions. Being included in the GSP of the EU is advantageous because of the reduction of tariffs and it is not subjected to competition within the EU market, the more advantageous if under the GSP+.

The GSP scheme weakens the sovereignty of any state because it is a requirement to ratify and effectively implement 27 international conventions. It appends laws that will regulate the state, laws being the source of legitimacy to exercise authority must be within the control of the state. Otherwise, if it is controlled by another state or any external entity, then the state's sovereignty is for a minimal effect weakened, and worst it will be lost.

This is an example of how a state or a group of state using its economic ascendancy and institutional weight affects the sovereignty of weaker or weak states. The EU being a single compact market has a very strong capability to either enhance or damage an economy of a weaker or weak. Being an international institution it uses the consequences of its economic might in order to compel states to ratify international conventions and ratification appends regulations of how the state should act, cluttering its source of legitimacy which is the laws.

4.0 Conclusions

Power is manifested in six closely related integral components; military pre-eminence, economic ascendancy, institutional weight, demographic functionality, cultural

magnetism and ideological insinuation. The manifestations of power sometimes vary in each component but often times they are proportional. Conceiving power as a single linear idea is inadequate because it has many variations. The best way to measure it is to treat its components individually. Sovereignty is the source of legitimacy for a state to exercise its authority; it is the laws or fundamentally a state's constitution. Any action of another state must be tested against the source of the state's legitimacy. If it is contrary to its laws, then it affects sovereignty. If it appends or controls regulations to existing laws, then it has an effect on sovereignty as well. The use of the different components of power, especially military in the form of intervention, economic in the form of bilateral or multilateral trade arrangements and institutional in the form of treaty stipulations affects sovereignty if it is contrary or if it appends or controls to existing state laws.

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