

Power and National Interest in International Relations

Ejitu N. Ota and Chinyere S. Ecoma

ABSTRACT

Every state in the global system has values and ideals that it so cherishes that it would rather go to war than compromise. In fact, realist scholars believe that in international relations, the ability of any given state to protect and advance its national interest is a function of its power position in the comity of nations. This paper seeks to examine the nexus between power and national interest in international relations. In doing so, it has adopted the qualitative analytical research methodology of content analysis. This is because, by its nature, the paper could not employ the quantitative analytical methodology. Therefore, content analysis of relevant literature is the preferred option. The research finding is that although power is a necessary component in analyzing relations between states in the international system, the concept is ambiguous and should not be relied upon as the major compass of a given nation's foreign policy orientation.

Keywords: Foreign Policy, International Relations, National Interest, Power.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The perception of the world as anarchic and inherently evil by realist scholars of international relations has made the concepts of power and national interest recurrent in most discussions on inter-state relations. Similarly, their preoccupation with security tends to cast a dark shadow over the balance of power as a panacea for inter-state wars. Where any weight is given to the idea of balance of power, states, according to realists, are interested in it only if it is in their favor. In other words, they believe that it is not enough for a state to be just as strong as a potential enemy. Rather, security can best be assured when a given state is relatively stronger and free to use a margin of force to achieve its foreign policy objectives. Put differently, each state should seek safety by relying on its own power and viewing with alarm, those of its neighbors (Spykman, 1942, p. 18; Schuman, 1969). Therefore, the vigilant statesman must engage in a constant power calculus, and be ready to intervene or enter into an alliance almost immediately in order to preserve the balance, regardless of ideological affinity, economic interest, and domestic political attitudes (Haas, 1953).

II. POWER

What then is power and why is it important in the study of International Relations? While Hans Morgenthau sees it from the political perspective as the immediate aim of all states in their relationship with each other; that is, man's control over the minds and actions of other men or the tendency to dominate (Morgenthau, 2012, p. 31, 117), Frederick H. Hartmann sees it as the ability of states to use force (Hartmann, 1978, p. 13). On his part, Karl Deutsch defines power as "(...)the ability to prevail in conflict and to overcome obstacles" (Deutsch, 1978, p. 23). According to A. F. K. Organski, it is the capacity of an individual, group, or nation to influence the behaviour of others in accordance with one's own ends (Organski, 1968, p. 104). Other scholars have defined power as "(...)the ability to move men in some desired fashion through 'persuasion, purchase, barter, or coercion' (Spykman, 1942, p. 18), and as "The ability to move others or get them to do what one wants them to do and not to do what one does not want them to do" (Wolfers, 1962).

All these definitions have only added to the confusion regarding what power actually means in International Relations. The authors cited above all see power as a basic requirement that every state should possess, defend, and extend if it must sustain its sovereignty, achieve its national interest, and therefore, remain relevant in the comity of nations. However, it is important to admit that in as much as power is an important concept in the analysis of International Relations, the emphasis on its role in inter-state relations has created more problems than solutions. For instance, if power is the major determinant of a state's

National Interest On International Law And Order

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