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**Power in International Relations**

“It is an unfortunate fact that we can only secure peace only by preparing for war”

(John F. Kennedy)

**Introduction:**

Power can be defined as;

‘The factors that enable one state to coerce (enforce) another. It could be military capabilities, resources, economic and political clout or technology’.

* Generally, we measure power by referring to tangible or hard power elements and intangible i.e. soft power elements.
* However, power still remains an ambiguous concept or phenomenon.

**Realists’ Viewpoint of power:**

* Before realists, arms and military capabilities are the most important factors in determining which rival state will win a dispute.
* According to realists, ‘power’ gives states the ability;
* To promote national interests
* To win in international bargaining
* To shape the rules governing the global system
* Hans Morgenthau (1960) is the foremost advocate of the concept of power as the theoretical core of international politics.
* In his views, all politics is a struggle for power. He derives this dictum from assumption that the desire to dominate is 'a constitutive element of all human associations."

**Neo-Liberalist Viewpoint:**

* Neo-Liberalism believes that under the conditions of ‘Globalization’, economic resources will be increasingly more critical to national security and strength than military capabilities.
* They argue that states should pursue power through co-operation.
* International organizations for neo-liberals serve a multi-purpose, as they not only create security for liberals, but coerce norm-breakers through ‘peacekeeping and bargaining’ which can be assessed as a form of exercising soft power.
* Hard Power is still important to neo-liberals as in a world of different political and economic systems there are chances of conflict e.g. Iraq War, Ukraine Crisis etc.
* Linking into the neo-liberalists’ view of power, it can be summarised as, ‘Contemporary power is chaotically distributed and the only method to deal with these challenges is through implementation of co-operation’

**The Concept of Hard Power and Soft Power:**

* The idea to distinguish between hard power and soft power was first introduced by Joseph Nye (an American political scientist) more than two decades ago (1990).
* In general, he defines power as the “ability to affect others to get the outcomes one wants”

**Hard Power:**

* According to Joseph Nye, command or hard power is a coercive power wielded through inducements or threats.
* Hard power is based on military intervention, coercive diplomacy and economic sanctions.
* It relies on tangible power resources such as armed forces or economic means.
* The German invasion into Poland in 1939 and the UN economic sanctions against Iraq in 1991 following the first Gulf War are examples of the use of hard power.

**Soft Power:**

* In contrast, co-optive or “soft power is the capacity to persuade others to do what one wants”.
* According to Nye, persuasive power is based on attraction and emulation and “associated with intangible power resources such as culture, ideology, and institutions.
* Some analysts emphasise the importance of legitimacy for the concept of soft power. They argue that state activities need to be perceived as legitimate in order to enhance soft power.

**Examples:**

* The dispersion of American culture within the Eastern bloc during the Cold War indicates the existence of American soft power
* EU enlargement is indices for soft power possessed by the EU.

**The elements of State Power**

* To determine the comparative power of states, analysts usually categorize them according to their capabilities or resources that are considered necessary to achieve influence over others.
* There are multiple factors (more significantly, military and economic capability) that measure countries’ relative ‘power potential’.

**Power Potential:**

The capabilities or resources held by a state that are considered necessary to its asserting influence over others

State power is generally constituted of three elements;

1. Tangible
2. Intangible
3. Fungible
4. **Tangible**
5. **Size of economy**

* It is usually measured in terms of GDP (Gross Domestic Product)
* Economic power can be defined broadly as the capacity to influence other states through economic means.
* Political economic power enables a state to generate control over a particular population within a particular territory.
* Today’s great powers host most of the economic activities within their territories
* Throughout history military power has been paramount and economic power a luxury. However, the trend has slowly changed to the point that the two roles have been reversed.
* Japan, China and even the United States have relied on economic prosperity to finance formidable military forces.
* Size of economy generates as well as impacts soft-behaviour and military capabilities.
* A country’s economic capacity also determines its capability to exert and maintain its political, social and economic independence in the world.
* Deteriorated economic conditions, by the 1980s, fell heavily on the Soviet’s military power which ultimately culminated into the disintegration of the USSR.

1. **Military**

* Of all the components of state power potential, realists see military capability as the central element.
* According to realist, throughout history, the decisive factor in the fates of nations has usually been the number, efficiency, and disposition of fighting forces.
* In spite of the increasing importance of other forms of capabilities, in the contemporary global context international order still depends fundamentally on military power.
* The unrivaled ability and potentiality of military power to achieve deterrence and destruction make it irreplaceably essential for the survival and success of states.
* Intellectual acknowledgement of such military dependency of world order is not limited to classical realist scholarship only.
* Apart from some paradigmatic disagreements (e.g. on inter-state coherence and cooperation) both neo-realist and neo-liberal have generally recognized the practical importance of military capability for states.

**Phenomena that underlined the importance of ‘Military Power’**

* The large-scale armies maintained by Asian countries
* The continued possession of nuclear weapons by leading powers
* The American response to 9/11 terrorist attack
* The Western armed interventions in Iraq
* Indo-Pakistani wars on territorial conflicts

1. P**opulation**

* Population has always counted for national power to some degree.
* A huge population if fed, educated, and possessing skills valued in an industrial society is an asset.
* Countries with large populations offer greater prospects for their indigenous market-economy to flourish.
* The size of manpower substantially contributes towards a country’s scope of achieving prosperity.
* A huge population may be an essential condition for great power status, but is no guarantee of it, as in the case of India and China.
* Consequently, a ranking of the ten most populous states in the world, would not correspond to the ten most powerful states in the world.
* For example, Pakistan is the world’s sixth most populous state, but is not considered the world's sixth most powerful state.

1. T**erritory**

* Territory of a country and its contours hold a great value.
* Poland a country consisting mostly of flat plains has a history of being divided into spheres of influence by its more powerful neighbors.
* Afghanistan, on the other hand, contains a forbidding topography, which makes its conquest very difficult

1. G**eographic position**

* Russia is generally considered a land power while the United States is viewed as a sea power.
* According to Halford MacKinder, a Scottish geographer, whoever controlled the heartland (roughly equal to Eastern Europe and European Russia) of the Eurasian land mass could dominate the world.
* On the other hand, the U.S. Admiral Mahan argued that sea power was the key to world domination.
* Therefore, it has been in the national interest of the U.S. to maintain the freedom of the seas, especially in the Atlantic Ocean

1. **Natural Resources**

* Another important tangible element of national power consists of natural resources, such as oil.
* A group of oil producing countries have joined together to form a cartel known as OPEC , which in the 1970s attempted to use oil as a weapon to influence U.S. policy in the Middle East
* The possibility that the Caspian Sea may contain vast new deposits of energy has resulted in renewed U.S. interest in the area, in an effort to reduce its dependence on Middle Eastern oil.
* Less dependence on foreign resources of materials

Other tangible components are;

1. T**echnological capacity**
2. V**olume of trade**
3. S**avings and investment**
4. I**ndustrial productivity**
5. **Intangible Elements:**

* Elements of power which are uncountable and untouchable

1. **Political culture and values**

* A political culture is a set of attitudes and practices held by a people that shapes their political behavior.
* It includes moral judgments, political myths, beliefs, and ideas about what makes for a good society.
* Political cultures matter because they shape a population’s political perceptions and actions

1. I**deology**

* The structure, form and manifestations of ideologies shape power structure
* During cold war era both U.S.A and USSR projected their national interest resembling their ideologies about liberal democracy and communism respectively.

1. **Efficiency of governmental institutions**

* Rule of law
* Soft –infrastructure; institutions required to maintain the economic, health, and cultural and social standards of a country
* Good governance

1. **Educational level**

* Access to higher education
* Research and Development
* Literacy level
* Creativity
* Human Resource

1. **National morale and internal solidarity**

* National Morale: It can be defined as popular dedication to the nation and support of its policies, even when that support involves sacrifices.
* The history of nation-states establishes the fact that national morale and internal solidarity remain among the most vital elements bearing on national power.

1. **Fungible elements:**

* Fungibility refers to the uses of a given amount of a power resource, not to the uses of varying amounts (e.g. in the economic realm, rich people can buy more things than poor people)
* Elements of power are highly fungible e.g. whenever necessary economic power can be converted into military power.
* Waltz writes, “Power is much more fungible…… As ever, the distinction between strong and weak states is important. The stronger the state, the greater the variety of its capabilities. Power may be only slightly fungible for weak states, but it is highly so for strong ones”.
* Simply, it means more power resources allow a state to broaden its horizon of influence.
* Fungible Commodities: Gold, crude oil, precious metals, currencies etc.
* Generally, money is the most fungible capability because it buys other capabilities.
* Economic wealth is important because it is fungible e.g. gold can be used to purchase tanks or other weapons.
* In the past, states pursued mercantilist policies, which were designed to acquire as much wealth as possible.

**Assessing the role and significance of State Power**

1. **Military Spending:**

* Military spending do not necessarily enable a state to obtain its desired goals in international political system.
* Moreover, size of defense budget is not important. What is more important is how wisely it is used.
* USA has budgeted 2.8 trillion dollars for military spending between years 2006-2011. Such a large spending does not imply that it will yield USA victory in Afghanistan or Iraq. It even did not ensure fool proof security system at homeland.
* US military budget is greater than that spent by all other countries combined; a cost which each American has to pay.
* Military expenditures extract high ‘**opportunity costs’.**

**Opportunity costs:**

The concept in decision-making theories that when the occasion arises to use resources, what is gained for one purpose is lost for other purposes, so that every choice entails the cost of some lost opportunity

1. **Territory and Population:**

* These factors are no longer important
* For example, if power potential is measured by territorial size, Russia would be the globe’s most powerful country.
* If power is measured by the UN’s projections for countries’ populations by the year 2025, China, India, the United States, Indonesia, Pakistan, Nigeria, and Brazil would be the most powerful.

1. **Expenditure on Research and Development**

* It is characterized by the GDP allocation to Research and Development
* Since the end of World War II, a handful of states have increased their relative power by investing their resources in civilian rather than military technology
* According to this criteria Israel, Sweden, Finland, Japan, USA, Switzerland South Korea, and Germany have the brightest future

1. **Power is relative**

* Power is relative as power comes in many forms
* The leading countries in some dimensions of power potential are not leaders in others
* It is difficult to weigh the various factors that contribute to military capability and national power
* Power is not a tangible commodity that states can acquire. It has meanings only in relative terms

1. **Power is relational**

* Power is relational; a state can have power over some other actor only when it can prevail over that actor.
* Both actual and perceived strength determine who wins a political contest.

**Changing Character of Power:**

* Military power is central in leaders’ concepts of national security, however, a shift is being observed in assessing factors contributing to a state’s power.
* Many analysts look at economic indicators to measure national power, because a large economy provides the means for acquiring the military capabilities necessary for projecting political influence.
* Rich countries possess the means of exercising influence.
* Liberal theorists argue that the sources of state power today depend less on military strength than on factors such as information, technology and trade competitiveness.
* Therefore, i) technology, ii ) external respect and reputation, iii) education and iv) economic growth are gradually becoming more important replacing the importance of i) geography, ii) population and iii) raw material

**Factors that caused this shift:**

1. **Military Ineffectiveness:**

* Role of military against rogue states and terrorist groups and other non-state actors remained ineffectual.
* Fighting against non-state actors requires superior intelligence and communication capabilities more direly than military weapons.

1. **Trade Competitiveness:**

* Realization that trade competitiveness of a nation will make it more powerful

1. **Creativity Crisis:**

* The current era of globalization has entered into a world based on education and human capital, one where creative ideas, product design, financing, and marketing are increasingly become major sources of wealth and power.
* In an age of globalization, policies emphasizing on economic and trade approaches to national power seem to be increasingly effective in acquiring political power and material advancement.
* USA is undergoing a ‘Creativity Crisis’ as the United States is not keeping up with its competitors in this area.
* Whereas the United States spends most of its research and development budget on military programs, Japan and many European countries invest heavily in developing new technologies related to consumer goods.

1. **Opportunity Cost:**

* Military spending comes at the cost of private and public investment
* Military spending has direct costs, because expensive equipment quickly becomes outdated in the face of rapid technological innovations. This creates the need for even more sophisticated new weapons, the costs of which are staggering.

1. **Peace Dividends**

* The reallocation of spending from military purposes to peacetime purposes, such as housing, education, and social projects.
* Less spending for defense purposes will facilitate spending on development purposes.

1. **Attraction rather than coercion**

* Policy makers are coming to realization that national goals can be achieved better through attraction rather than coercion.
* The intangible power resources such as the attractiveness of a country’s people ideals and seductiveness of their culture possess the ability to get others to embrace their values and to see their objectives as legitimate.

**Conclusion:**

* How people spend their money reveals their values and inclinations.
* Exactly, how states allocate their revenues shows their priorities.
* Examination of national budgets reveals state’s unmistakable patterns of preferences.
* Although the sources of global political power are gradually undergoing a change, however, states continue to seek security by spending more on arms.