

# POWER POLITICS

**Exam Strategies:** Crystal-clear argument! Situate the question within the different IR frameworks and lenses (realism, liberalism, constructivism) to speak to their relative strengths and limitations. Include the **different levels of analysis** – power can work on multiple levels: regional, domestic, international/transnational... International actors who have powers are predicted differently by the different IR approaches, make sure to say which one is the best theory!

**My own position:** *Hard power, or material capabilities are insufficient for understanding the current international system. This neglects the many ways in which soft power influences states' behaviour – so those forms are just as important, if not more, for understanding power in the international system. Just because we cannot measure softer forms of power quantitatively, this does not mean that there isn't a significant qualitative impact. A state can only rely on its material capabilities up to a certain point. Hence, I believe that constructivist thought offers a more comprehensive account of power, since it emphasises the importance of normative power, and also actors like IOs, NGOs, transnational networks which can influence such.*

## DEFINITIONS AND CLARIFICATIONS

- › How should power be conceptualised?
  - > Power is an essentially contested concept with different interpretations, which are held together only by a family resemblance rather than a core meaning. It is pertinent to be **aware of the different ways “power” can be defined** (Berenskoetter 2007)
  
- › How is power understood?
  - > Often seen as “an actor controlling another to do what that other would not otherwise do” (Dahl’s definition)
  - > But more recently there is a call for understanding power through a **multi-dimensional conceptual framework**. Barnett and Duvall 2005 introduce a taxonomy of power, understood as “the production, in and through social relations, of effect that shape the capacities of actors to determine their circumstances and fate.”
    - This entails two analytical dimensions: The **kinds of social relations** through which power works; and the **specificity of social relations** through which effects are produced.
    - From this they derive four concepts of power: compulsory, institutional, structural and productive – emphasis is placed on how those multiple concepts are connected, not necessarily competing with each other.
  
- › How can the **IR levels of analysis** be employed?
  - > Useful for structuring argumentation – distinguish between different levels of analysis: regional (sub-state), domestic, international / transnational
    - Power potentially works in different ways on those levels.
  
- › What concepts of power are conventionally distinguished?
  - > **Hard Power:** involves **coercive tactics**, e.g. threat or use of armed forces, economic pressure or sanctions, assassination or other forms of intimidation. Generally associated with the stronger of nations.
    - Realists and neorealists tend to be advocates of the use of such power for the balancing of the international system.
  - > **Soft Power:** ability of an actor to **shape the preferences of others through appeal and attraction**. “It co-opts people rather than coerces them” (Nye 2004). The currency of soft power is culture, political values and foreign policies.
    - Rising powers like China are noting the significance of this type of power: Xi Jinping in 2014 announced that “We should increase China’s soft power, give a good Chinese narrative, and better communicate China’s messages to the world.”

- According to the **Soft Power 30 Index**, the leading sovereign states in soft power are France, Germany, US, Japan, Canada, Switzerland, Sweden, the Netherlands (countries of the “west”)
- > “**Smart Power**”: refers to the **combination of hard and soft power strategies**, depending on which is more effective in a given situation (Nye 2003). Stems from the motivation that using only hard or only soft power in a given situation will usually prove inadequate, e.g. Nye argues that combatting terrorism demands a smart power strategy.

## OTHER WAYS OF UNDERSTANDING POWER...

How can power be understood apart from hard and soft etc.?

- > As **goal** of states or leaders
    - Realist lens: power is an inherent goal of mankind and of states. Economic growth, military spending etc. can all be considered to be working towards the ultimate goal of international power
  - > As measure of **influence or control** over outcomes, events, actors (this is the way we usually talk about power in the IR discipline)
    - This influence can be coercive, attractive, cooperative, or competitive
  - > As **status**, which some states or actors possess, and others don’t
    - If a country has “power” (as influence) in military, diplomatic, cultural and economic spheres, it might be called a “power” (as status)
- › What are categories of powers (in the sense of status)?
- > **Superpower**: “*great power plus great mobility of power*” (Fox 1944) – with the decolonisation of the British Empire after WWII and dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, US is currently the only country considered to be a superpower
  - > **Great Power**: states that have strong political, cultural and economic influence over nations around them and across the world
  - > **Middle Power (see below)**: has sufficient strength and authority to stand on its own without the need of help from others (particularly in the realm of security) and takes diplomatic leads in regional and global affairs. But clearly not all middle powers are of equal status
  - > **Small Power**: they are instruments of the other powers and may at times be dominated; but they cannot be ignored. The International System is for the most part made up of those
- › What is the **balance of power theory** in IR?
- > Suggests that states may secure their survival by preventing any one state from gaining enough military power to dominate all others. According to Waltz (neorealist) **states do not seek to maximize power, but only to balance it** – “*hegemony leads to balance*”. Countries hence try to build their power to match the power of the strongest states, so as to achieve mutual security.
    - States who are threatened may then seek to **balance** the rising power (by allying with others against the prevailing threat); or **bandwagoning** (aligning themselves with the threatening power)
      - States can either: Develop their own capabilities (internal balancing) or by forming alliances to keep potential threats in check (external balancing) (Waltz 1979)
- › What is the **balance of threat theory** in IR?
- > Developed by Walt (1987) the theory predicts that **states’ alliance behaviour is determined by the threat that they perceive from other states.**
  - > Balance of threat theory modified the balance of power theory by separating power from threat. It denies that greater power always reflects offensive intentions. According to balance of threat theory however, states will not balance against those who are rising in power but do not display offensive intentions.

- Example: US was most powerful of the two superpowers during Cold War, but more states allied with US instead of Soviet Union as the US displayed less aggressive intentions toward them.
- > Four **criteria** are used to **evaluate the threat posed by another state**:
  - i. Aggregate strength (size, population and economic capabilities)
  - ii. Geographic proximity
  - iii. Offensive capabilities
  - iv. Offensive intentions

The more states view a rising power as possessing these qualities, the more likely they are to view it as a threat and balance against it.

## FOUNDATIONS

- > Historically, from Hobbes to Foucault, philosophers have found “power” to be intertwined with the human condition, e.g. Weber defined *Macht* as “*the opportunity to have one’s will prevail within a social relationship, also against resistance, no matter what this opportunity is based on*” (Weber 1976)
- > Dimensions of Power (by Berenskoetter and Williams 2007)
  - > **Winning Conflicts: Power relation as being two parties facing each other.**
    - Classical definition: “A getting B to do something B would otherwise not do” (Dahl 1961, 1968)
    - Popular in IR scholarship, resonates with realist assumptions of states as competing entities and of power as the ability to win wars, to achieve hegemony etc.
      - Most realist writings (Carr 2001, Measheimer 2001, Waltz 1979) take the distribution of military capabilities as the indicator for measuring ‘power’. In this way, power becomes synonymous with being safe (or not). Power analysis is security analysis.
      - Power in realism is regarded to be zero-sum, security dilemma turns “power to” automatically into “power over”, given that one state’s increase in military capabilities is perceived by others as potential for domination (Berenskoetter and Williams 2007)
    - **Problems** with this definition:
      - Only having resources is not enough, the actor also must have the will of using them. This suggests that “will” is a power resource in itself (Hart 1976)
      - Power as control of resources neglects the relational dimension, and that resources need to be recognised by others (Jervis 1976). For A to have power, B needs to know that A has resources and also that and how they could be used!
        - Example: Military parades or the “testing” of weapons to signal what a country has (Carr 2001).
      - A greater arsenal of military resources is not that all that matters when determining outcomes
  - > **Limiting alternatives: Power as how the environment is structurally advantaging one party and disadvantaging the other.**
    - Bachrach and Baratz (1963, 1970) analyse “non-decisions”, and suggest that power analysis has to address the question why some alternatives are *not* part of the debate. Who has the authority to exclude issues from the discussion? This puts more focus on structure.
      - Example: UN Security Council – esp. the five permanent members can decide on which issues will be part of resolutions
    - In IR this is found in the institutionalist and regime literature.
      - For example, Nye (1989) argued that asymmetrical economic interdependence affects the autonomy of the state and provides sources of influence different from those emphasised by realists.
  - > **Shaping Normality: Power is at work not only when there is conflict of interests, but also when there is consensus.**
    - More in the political theory literature, IR’s engagement still story in the making.

- Examples: Shift **from pluralism to solidarism** in the international society! See normative shift from state to human security, facilitated by the UN; EU setting the abolishment of death penalty as normative standard (Manners 2002)
- › **Using a certain concept of power is not only making a descriptive claim about actors and their relations, but also colours our understanding of causality!**
  - › If power is the ability to make a difference, i.e. if it is *because* of power that things turn out to be particular way, then identifying power is analytically the same with identifying a “cause”.
  - › Furthermore, **how we think of power may serve to reproduce and reinforce power structures and relations**, or alternatively may challenge and subvert them (Lukes 2005)
    - This seems to be going into critical theory. By adopting realism, and thinking about power in material terms, then our own actions will reinforce the truth – states will regard themselves and others as having power via military capabilities. But this means we don’t recognize the way power has been and continues to work in more diffuse ways.
- › **Claim: Even the broadest definition of realism cannot accommodate the above three dimensions**
  - › There are a greater variety of political spaces in world politics reaching beyond the state, into the global and local levels (Ferguson and Jones 2002)

## POWER IN IR THOUGHT

What does each theoretical lens in IR think is the appropriate way of understanding power?

- › **Realism** contends that military capabilities provide the primary currency of international relations, economic influence the secondary (Nexon 2009).
  - › Obj.: But this is fundamentally limited for understanding the international order. It does not take other, softer forms of power (which are difficult to measure but still exist) into account, and also only regards states to be the primary actors
    - Example: The move away from pluralism to solidarism. Shift from human security to state security via UN, abolishment of the death penalty via the EU.
  - › One might argue that realism can only explain power in certain periods of Great Power politics, but not well in eras of complex interdependence
  - › Hard power is limited.
- › **Liberalism** recognizes that states modernization increases the level and scope of **(complex) interdependence** between states (Keohane and Nye 1997). Under complex interdependence, transnational actors are increasingly important and military force is a less useful instrument. But military forces remain important.
  - › Instead, what gives states power is legitimacy, economic influence
  - › Liberalism emphasises institutions, the role of cooperation and path-dependency. This focus implies that power is shared – it is not only what one actor has over the other.
- › **Constructivists** contend that realists underestimate the role of transnational and sub-state actors in processes of international continuity and change
  - › Unlike realism or liberalism, constructivism can explain the mechanisms underlying power and crucially, how power structures **change**. The other theories only focus on what *is*, not what can become.
  - › Relevant factors determining power are ideals, norms, shaped by institutions, but also non-state actors like NGOs, civil society...
  - › It can account for material power and ideational power as well, however, it does not say much about a ranking between them.

- > Keck and Sikkink (1998) stress the ability of “non-traditional international actors to mobilize information strategically to help create new issues and categories and to persuade, pressure, and gain leverage over much more powerful organizations and governments.”
  - What facilitates this ability are changes in communications, travel, economic globalization etc. which make “**transnational networks**” **effective sites of collective action.**

## LEVELS-OF-ANALYSIS FRAMEWORK

It is useful to think about power on different levels.

- > **International / Transnational level:** Power works through interactions of the states in the international society, via institutions, norms, standards...
- > **Domestic level:** The government as an actor, opposition parties, lobby groups...
- > **Regional / Sub-state level:** Organizations like firms, clubs, parties are affected by power (it pervades through from above). The norms and standards that international organizations set will have an impact on sub-state actors.
  - > Example: EU trade regulations affect how firms conduct their business
  - > But equally, power can also pervade from the bottom up! E.g. via grassroot movements – see “Black Lives Matter”, Environmentalism movements

KEY: Power works on all levels, and those interact dynamically with each other.

## HARD VS. SOFT POWER

- > Nye (2004) defines soft power to be “*the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments. It arises from the attractiveness of a country’s culture, political ideals and policies*”.
  - > Means that country can obtain its desired outcomes because other countries **might admire its values**, or follow its example, there is no need for carrots and sticks. The **currency of soft power** is a different one, not force or money, but **rather an attraction to shared values, culture and institutions**, and the justness and duty of contributing to the achievement of those values. Government policies to enhance soft power thus include public diplomacy, bilateral and multilateral diplomacy, cultural activities etc.
  - > **Limits of soft power are that attraction often has a diffuse effect**, which creates general influence instead of an easily observable, specific action.
    - Additionally, governments do not have perfect control over soft power, but it also arises significantly from civil society (this does not undermine its effectiveness of course, but makes it less focused, shapable through policies)
- > A **dominant power can rely on its weight and hard power to convince others only up to a certain point.**
  - > Example: Prolonged insurgency and failures in Iraq following US military intervention in 2003 demonstrated limits of hard power (Mingst and Karns 2018) “*Leadership depends on the inspiration and cultivation of soft power as well as on followers*”.

## OTHER CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF POWER

- > “*Power is the production, in and through social relations, of effects that shape the capacities of actors to determine their own circumstances and fate*”. (Barnett and Duvall 2005)
- > Barnett and Duvall argue that that **IR scholars should not limit themselves to thinking about power in realist terms**, as the way “*one state uses its material resources to compel another state to do something it does not want to do*”. Analysis of power in IR must include considerations of **how social structures and processes generate differential social capacities for actors** to define and pursue their interests and ideals

Building on this, they identify two analytical dimensions in social relations that are at the core of the power concept:

- > **Kinds:** refers to the polar positions of social relations of interactions – power is either an attribute of particular actors and their interactions, or a social process of constituting what actors are as social beings.
  - > **Specificity:** concerns the degree to which the social relations through which power works are direct and socially specific, or indirect and socially diffuse.
- > From these two dimensions, they create a taxonomy and identify **four main expressions of power:**
- i. **Compulsory** power: allows one actor to have direct control over another. This is closely related to the famous power definition by Robert Dahl “*power is best understood as the ability of A to get B to do what B otherwise would not do*”. However, note that compulsory power does not hinge upon intentionality.
  - ii. **Institutional** power: indirect control through the design of institutions
  - iii. **Structural** power: constitution of social capacities and interests of actors in direct relation to one another
  - iv. **Productive** power: production of subjectivity in systems of meaning and signification
- > Criticism:
- > Barnett and Duvall neglect the theoretical contexts in which the concept has been embedded, e.g. the “three dimensions”, as [Lukes \(1974\)](#) called them ([Berenskoetter and Williams 2007](#)). While it is worthwhile to analyse how different value systems overlap and actors affect each other *within* a dimension, this should not be confused with applying multiple *concepts* of power within the same argument.
- > [Manners \(2002\)](#) bases a distinction of power on [Carr \(1962\)](#) as follows:
- > **Civilian Power:** Ability to use civilian instruments
  - > **Military Power:** Ability to use military instruments
  - > **Normative Power:** Ability to shape conceptions of “normal”.
    - “*The ability to define what passes for normal in world politics is, ultimately, the greatest power of all.*”
    - Normative basis developed over 50 years via declarations, treaties, policies: peace, liberty, democracy, rule of law, respect for human rights ([Treaty of the EU, Art. 6, 11, 177](#))
  - > Example of how the EU norms are diffused: Death Penalty
    - EU policy was legalized via the Amsterdam declaration, the charter on fundamental rights and the 1998 Guidelines for EU policy on the death penalty.

## POWER AS A STATUS

### RISING POWERS

- > What are **rising powers**?
- > Defined as those states that have established themselves as veto-players in the international system, but have still not acquired agenda-setting power ([Narlikar 2013](#))
  - > Current rising powers are Brazil, India, China, who possess significant military powers, which are historically associated with the global South and which “*share a belief in their entitlement to a more influential role in world affairs*” ([Narlikar 2013](#))
- > What are ways to conceptualise negotiation behaviour of rising powers?
- > Negotiation-strategies can be conceptualized in relation to a bargaining spectrum ([Narlikar 2013](#))
    - **distributive**/value-claiming strategies (refusing to make any concessions, threatening to hold others’ issues hostage...)
    - **integrative**/value-creating strategies (expanding the pie)
  - > Coalitions, defined as a group of states that comes together in pursuit of a common end: **bloc-type** versus **issue-based** coalitions; and **balances** (counteracting the current major powers in the system) vs. **bandwagons** (aligning with the major powers in the system)

- The choice of coalition type provides useful insights into the negotiating behaviour of the different case studies
- › The rising powers of Brazil, China and India all recognize the use of distributive bargaining strategies, albeit by different degrees. All three powers make use of coalitions but differ in their patterns and their commitment toward them.
  - › On India: resists bandwagoning by refusing to enter into a formal alliance with the US. The way India negotiates depends considerable on whom it is negotiating with (Narlikar)
  - › On China: **China embodies a mixed negotiation strategy** – it has been willing to use some integrative strategies (particularly in areas that represent “non-core” interests), perhaps to avoid triggering alarm in the international system as response to its rise; China **emphasizes importance of South-South alliances**, but also has an “*issue based and pragmatic*” approach (Breslin)

## MIDDLE POWERS

- › There has been a surge in leadership by so-called “**middle powers**”. Middle powermanship suggests a liberal-internationalist tendency in foreign policy, prioritizing peaceful, reciprocal foreign policy tools rather than unilateral, coercive strategies. States that are “middle powers” typically specialize in more niche areas such as disarmament, environmental affairs, human rights (Mabera and Spies 2016)
  - › Primarily rely on multilateral coalitions to get the international community on board on these issues. They are thus predisposed to the use of **soft power**.
- › Example: R2P debate as middle power project
  - › Canadian government sponsored the ICISS and its support for research on R2P, which has been matched by that of Australia.
  - › Landmark endorsement of R2P at 2005 World Summit was largely due to efforts of these two states, as well as South Africa and Rwanda who helped to build consensus beyond the West.
- › Hurrell (2013) contends that we need to focus on the role of middle powers and the would-be role of “middle-ground” ethics in impacting normative orders.

## CHANGES IN WORLD ORDER: THE END OF AMERICAN PRIMACY?

- › What is the old American-led order?
  - › In the decades after WWII, the US has created a **liberal hegemonic order** – that is, it not only encouraged open and rule-based order, but also became the hegemonic organizer and manager of that order (Ikenberry 2011). A **distinctive type of international order was constructed after WWII**, namely a **hierarchical order with liberal characteristics**.
  - › Led an extended system built around multilateral institutions, alliances, partners etc.
    - Under American leadership, the “free world” would be a sort of “security community” and “mutual protection” society, in which members enjoyed trade, growth and economic stability.
    - “*Inside it was warm; outside it was cold*” (Ikenberry 2018)
  - › Nye defines the American century to be the 20<sup>th</sup> century
- › How is this “old Order” being challenged?
  - › American era of dominance is passing: US and its allies have less legitimacy than they were when they built the post-war order (fuelled by the current US administration, which erodes its own norms?), whilst at the same time we see the rise of rival global powers with own order-building agendas. The **unipolar moment is ending**.
    - **2008 financial crisis originated in the US and served to taint the American model of liberal capitalism**, raising doubts about the capacities of the US to act as global leader in the provision of economic stability (Ikenberry 2011)

- Social purposes of liberal order undermined by rising economic insecurity: Wealth and fortunes of workers and middle-class citizens in Europe and US have stagnated ([Ingelhart and Norris 2016](#))
    - Economic growth in countries like China and India has resulted in new centers of global power.
  - > The crisis of the liberal hegemonic order can be seen as a **gradual diffusion of power away from the West**
    - It is NOT necessarily a transition from American to Chinese hegemonic order. China probably won't replace the US as illiberal hegemon, because its system is not as attractive. But US and its allies will be a smaller part of the global whole ([Ikenberry 2018](#))
- > How can international orders be distinguished and compared?
  - > By the ways in which **stable order is maintained**:
    - Through **balance**: order maintained through equilibrium of power among the major states
    - Through **command**: a powerful states organizes and enforces order. It is hierarchical and based on the dominance of the dominant state
    - Through **consent**: order is organized around agreed-upon rules and institutions which allocate rights and limits on the exercise of power.

## LIBERAL INTERNATIONALISM

- > What is liberal internationalism about?
  - > Not simply a creature of American hegemony, but a general way to think about, and respond to modernity. A vision of an **open, loosely rules-based and progressively oriented international order** ([Ikenberry 2018](#)).
  - > Characteristics and convictions:
    - i. **Openness**, especially market openness
    - ii. Commitment to loosely **rules-based set of relations** – what [Ruggie \(1993\)](#) described “**multilateralism**”, an institutional form that coordinates relations among a group of states on the basis of generalized principles of conduct
    - iii. **Security cooperation**
    - iv. **Reform** is possible, what Wilson called “corrigible”: **Power Politics can be tamed to some degree**, states can build stable relations around pursuit of mutual gains
    - v. States will move in a **progressive direction**, defined in terms of liberal democracy.
- > Is the liberal internationalist order in a crisis?
  - > On the one side, one might think so: Think Trump, Brexit, nationalist tendencies...
  - > But on the other side, it could be seen as a crisis which resulted from the rapid mobilization and spread of global capitalism and complex interdependence, not the return of Great Power politics and problems of anarchy.
    - [Ikenberry \(2011\)](#) says that the crisis of authority occurs within the old hegemonic organization of liberal order, it is **not a crisis in the deep principles of the order itself**. The sources of the crisis are that underlying foundations of the old order have been transformed, e.g. by shifts in power, contested norms of sovereignty, threats related to nonstate actors...
- > How can it be successful again (normatively speaking)?
  - > [Ikenberry \(2018\)](#) claims that liberal states need to either offer a “small and thick” vision of liberal order, centred on western liberal democracies like in the Cold War, or offer a “large and thin” version of it with global principals and institutions for coping with the dangers of 21<sup>st</sup> century.
  - > Future will depend on ability of US and Europe to lead and support the liberal order



- > “Global leadership hinges on state power, but also on the appeal and legitimacy of the ideals and principles that Great Powers embody and project” (Ikenberry 2018)
  - So hard power is not enough, but we also need **soft power (legitimacy)**

## THE RISE OF CHINA

- > **Realist position:** China will use its influences to reshape rules and institutions and other states, especially the current hegemon the US, will see it as a rising threat. The result of this will be tension, conflict and distrust.
- > **But there are other ways the rise of China can play out:**
  - > Schweller and Pu (2011) argue that prior to military confrontation or even threat of such a conflict, the rising challenger must delegitimize the hegemon’s global authority and order.
    - China has been working within the current international system to expand its economy, military and status as global political player. However, it avoids actions which directly challenge US hegemony.
    - China seeks a “*gradual modification of Pax Americana, not a direct challenge to it.*”  
Employs the following tactics:
      - i. **Denouncing US multilateralism and promoting the concept and practice of multilateralism.**  
Example: Since mid-1990s, China has actively participated in most regional multilateral institutions, e.g. ASEAN+1, ASEAN+3, Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation.
      - ii. **Participating in and creating new international organizations.** China makes concessions to join the WTO, but gains a seat at the bargaining table to influence the rules of the game.
      - iii. **Pursuing a proactive soft power diplomacy** (esp. in the developing world). China promotes its language and traditional culture amongst other countries (via Confucius Institutes for example) – additionally, its political authoritarian regime provides an attractive developmental model for many poor, nondemocratic countries; aid is typically offered without political preconditions.
    - There is a **diverse range of Chinese perspective on what alternative Beijing could put forward** to the American order. *Note* that these are hotly debated within China itself!
      - A New Chinese Order: China putting forward a competing view for how the world should be structured
      - A Modified Liberal Order: China emerging as a supporter of the existing system, employing “**bandwagoning**” strategy
      - A Negotiated Order: China continuing to shirk some of its international commitments, focusing on internal development and consolidation.
  - > Ikenberry (2008) argues Western system can contribute to a peaceful rise of China
    - The Western system is based around rule of law, norms of non-discrimination and market openness. China operates within this open-market system and is benefiting from it. Having economic might translates into power, and China needs a stable system and trading partners to achieve this.
    - This gives China incentives to integrate, rather than to challenge the current order, e.g. it thrives in the global trading system and has no other choice but to promote trade and to adhere by WTO rules. The Western system is “*hard to overturn and easy to join*”. China may triumph over the US, but not over the whole of the Western world.

- > Nye (2015) argues that in order to get the outcomes one wants, it does not suffice to just be the largest economy, but one must also be able to affect others through coercion (sticks), payments (carrots) and attraction or persuasion (soft power). All three are important to consider, they indicate that **even though China’s economic power grows, this does not automatically mean that the US century is over.**

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