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### The Concept of “power” in International Relations: Basic approaches, the analysis, and interpretation

Today power remains one of the most effective means of modern world politics. With the concept power is related one of the central problems of international relations – the problem of war and peace, the problem of conflict and its resolution, the issue of security. On the basis of the “power” the actors are judged on mutual opportunities, make plans of their interaction, make decisions, assess the degree of stability of the international system. Category of “power” plays a significant methodological role in the science of international relations. “Power” is an important instrument of their scientific analysis: the significance of “power factor” there have been discussions between the various scientific and theoretical schools. Power a criterion of diverse models of the system of international relations. In practice this means that the various states are used to take advantage of the different models with «hard» or «soft» power.

**Keywords:** power, class power, structural power – strength, neo-realism in international politics.

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#### Халықаралық қатынастардағы «күш» түсінігі: негізгі әдістер, талдау, интерпретация

Бүгінде күш қазіргі кезеңдегі әлемдік саясаттың әрекет етуші негізгі құралдарының бірі болып табылады. Күш ұғымымен халықаралық қатынастардың орталық мәселелері – соғыс және бейбітшілік, қақтығыстар, оны шешу және қауіпсіздік. «Күш» негізінде акторлар бір-бірінің мүмкіндіктерін бағамдайды, өзара іс-әрекет жоспарын құрады, шешім қабылдайды, халықаралық жүйенің тұрақтылық деңгейін бағалайды. «Күш» категориясы ғылыми талдаудың маңызды құралы ретінде халықаралық қатынастар туралы ғылымда белгілі бір әдіснамалық рөлге ие: «күш факторының» маңызы туралы түрлі ғылыми-теориялық мектептер арасында пікірталастар жүргізілуде. Күш халықаралық қатынастар жүйесінің көптүрлі үлгілерінің критерийі болып табылады. Іс жүзінде түрлі мемлекеттер өз мүдделері тұрғысынан «қатан» немесе «жұмсақ» күшті пайдалана отырып түрлі модельдерді қолданады.

**Түйін сөздер:** күш, күш категориялары, құрылымдық күш, әлемдік саясаттағы неореализм.

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#### Понятие “сила” в международных отношениях: основные подходы, анализ, интерпретация

Сила сегодня остается одним из действенных средств современной мировой политики. С понятием силы связана одна из центральных проблем международных отношений – проблема войны и мира, проблема конфликта и его разрешения, проблема безопасности. На основе «силы» акторы судят о возможностях друг друга, строят планы своего взаимодействия, принимают решения, оценивают степень стабильности международной системы. Категория «сила» выполняет значительную методологическую роль в науке о международных отношениях, являясь важным инструментом их научного анализа: о значении «силового фактора» ведутся дискуссии между различными научно-теоретическими школами. Сила выступает критерием многообразных моделей систем международных отношений. На практике это означает, что различные государства в своих интересах используют различные модели с использованием «жесткой» либо «мягкой» силы.

**Ключевые слова:** сила, категории силы, структурная сила, неореализм в мировой политике.

Power is a fundamental concept within the study of world politics. In spite of its importance, it still remains “one of the most troublesome in the field of

international relations” [1]. It is thought to belong to “all-inclusive concepts” [2] since the accurate definition of it still “remains a matter of controversy”

[3], but its "essentially contested nature" [4] is explained not only by diversity of views on how to define power but also by a variety of approaches used to operationalize it. Different theoretical paradigms have attempted to conceptualize the power concept from different perspectives. Because of the contestation over the concept of power, it is necessary to review where the discussion takes its root as well as the on-going debate on the matter.

Traditionally, power was defined as "the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance" (*Max Weber*). At that time it was assumed that the power of a state relied primarily on its military might. If a state "can confidently contemplate war against any other existing single power" then it was considered to be a "great power". In case it "can contemplate war against any likely combination of other powers" then it is a "dominant power" [5]. Those "powers" that possessed the greatest military capabilities were usually referred as to the main "players" in the international arena while "small states" were designated with an irrelevant role (*Nicholas Spykman*) [6].

Later on, this understanding of power was advanced to a more complex concept which was conceived as the sum of capabilities (military, strategic and material ones) available to a state. For instance, classical realist Hans Morgenthau argues that power is comprised of certain "elements" of "components", which can be subdivided into two groups: tangible and intangible. Geography, natural resources, industrial capacity, military preparedness and population belong to the former category, while the latter consists of national character, national morale, quality of diplomacy and quality of government [7].

Neorealists, represented by Kenneth Waltz, also identify a set of indicators of national power such as military might, political stability, wealth, territory and population but the emphasis is put on the international system rather than the actors. From the neo-realist school of thought, power is defined as a stock of capabilities of an entity within the systemic restrictions [8]. In other words, this approach proposes that the notion of power implies either control over resources or as the capacity to influence outcome in pursuing one's interest [9]. The strength of this method is that it provides the possibility to rank actors in a fairly consistent manner. A lot of literature has proposed that if one takes into account a stock of capabilities, both tangible and intangible

possessed by the state, then one will be able to explain the behaviour of nations (*Johann Galtung*) and predict with a high probability the ability of an entity to pursue its national interests despite opposition or resistance from others or calculate the outcome of the conflicts between nations [10]. To put the matter another way, it is a transformation process where a nation's control over various types of resources goes into control over actors or events (*Klaus Knorr*) [11].

However, there are a number of problems associated with this approach. Therefore, it becomes a subject of criticism especially from the liberal and neoliberal schools of thought [9, 470]. Firstly, it is not always clear what elements of national power are appropriate as measures of real power. To amplify this point, resources or capabilities required may differ from issue to issue [12]. Different situations require different blends of resources. Secondly, it is not always certain whether resources which are nominally under the control of an actor will be usable by the state. The other difficulty is that not all "components of national power" are fungible. For instance, the will to use force, national morale or quality of diplomacy are not very easy to measure. In addition, even though scholars belonging to liberal and neo-liberal paradigms do not ignore the importance of the military domain of power, they emphasize the importance of interdependence, common norms and rules, as well as the importance of international institutions. For instance, it was argued that "while military force remains the ultimate form of power in a self-help system" it becomes more difficult and more costly to apply it nowadays. In addition, it is noted that mutual cooperation can bring more advantages in issues such as economic or ecological ones (*Nye*) [13]. In line with this, another problem with the "control over resources" method is the role of non-state actors in different spheres and problems associated with the assessment of the power of states in coalition. Even though one suspects that the power of the bloc may be measured by adding up its member's national power scores, other scholars argue that members of an alliance lose their power of manoeuvre in dealing with others and thereby lose control. Consequently, they argue that the power of a coalition of states is not equal to the sum of its participants' power (*J. David Singer, Melvin Small*) [14]. In spite of all these drawbacks, however, the "power as resources" approach still remains attractive enough and should not be easily left aside.

Rather than focusing on states' property in terms of resources, the second approach conceives power as a relation (*Jeffrey Hart, K. J. Holsti*). Basically, it

attempts to capture the processes, relationship and situations through which A influence B to do something which he would otherwise not do (*Robert Dahl*). Thus, the focus is put on the “context” precisely on the structure of relations and the specific form of interaction between actors, rather than on “objects” – the primary concern of the concept of power as resources (*Ashley J. Tellis and others*) [15].

Considering power as a relationship of influence mitigated the normative complicity of international relations with militarization. “Since no single power base ... is decisive” in crafting influence, states were counselled to marshal all kinds of power resources – not just arms (*Stefano Guzzini*) [9]. Indeed, preoccupation with military power for quite a long period of time led to neglecting other forms of power. For a sophisticated attempt at capturing the notion of power, scholars have proposed to distinguish between “hard power” and “soft power” (*Joseph S. Nye*) [13]. Hard power or command power is thought to be associated with the neorealist school. Its tactics are to focus on military intervention, coercive diplomacy and economic sanctions to enforce national interests. In its turn, liberal institutionalist proponents emphasize soft power as an essential resource of statecraft [16]. The term “soft power” was developed by Joseph Nye, who defines it as one’s ability to get other countries to want what it wants through co-optation, persuasion or attraction instead of force or payment. Splitting hairs, Nye specifies that even though the ability to persuade others by argument to follow a designated course is an important element of soft power, the ability to entice and attract is the core of it. Soft power arises from the attractiveness of a country’s culture, political ideals and policies, and rests on the ability to shape the preferences of others. The advantage of this approach is that when one country is able to get others want what it wants, then there is no need to spend as much on sticks and carrots to get others do what you want them to do [11]. In other words, in contrast with hard power, which is used to shape other actors’ behaviours, soft power is used to shape other actors perceptions and preferences that then shape their behaviours. This conception of soft power is framed in terms of immaterial or intangible resources possessed by a country: “its culture (in places where it is attractive to others), its political values (when it lives up to them at home and abroad) and its foreign policies (when they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority)” [11]. One important

condition should be met: these resources need to be attractive and be seen as legitimate or having moral authority in order to be used to structure a situation so that other countries develop preferences or define their interests in ways consistent with its own. Public diplomacy is an instrument that governments use to mobilize these resources to communicate with and attract the public of other countries, rather than merely their governments. Public diplomacy tries to attract by drawing attention to these potential resources through broadcasting, subsidizing cultural exports, arranging exchanges and so forth.

Another conceptual framework that draws a lot of attention among international relations scholars is that proposed by Michael Barnett and Raymond Duvall. They conceptualize power as “the production in and through social relations, of effects that shape the capacities of actors to determine their circumstances and fate” [17]. Resting on the assumption that “no single concept can capture the forms of power in international politics”, they propose to employ a four-fold conception of power: compulsory, institutional, structural and productive.

Compulsory power centres its attention on a variety of relations between actors that allow one of the actors to shape directly the position and actions of another. This type of power is thought to be as an evolution of Dahl’s definition of power as “the ability of A to get B to do that B otherwise would not do”. The main defining features of this definition are intention, resistance and capabilities. However, Barnett and Duvall’s taxonomy takes into account the argument of Peter Bachrach and Morton Baratz, who state that the “power still exists even when those who dominate are not conscious of how their actions are producing unintended effects” [18]. Thus, according to the authors’ conceptualization, certain conditions should be met if one speaks about compulsory power. Firstly, the compulsory power exists when A shapes B’s circumstances or actions even without the intention to do so. Secondly, A should possess certain resources that can be employed to force B to change its position. Thirdly, it should be specified that B does not want to do what is prescribed by A, since it would result in a weakening of B’s positions and there is an initial contradiction between goals pursued by A and B. The field of action of compulsory power is not limited only by material resources but “symbolic and normative resources” can be used to exercise influence on power recipients. Because power is the result of effects, compulsory power is

best understood not from the perspective of the deliverer, but from the recipient's view.

If compulsory power is characterized by "direct control" of one actor over another, institutional power is the capacity to control others in indirect ways. According to Barnett and Duvall, in this case the focus is put on the formal and informal institutions, which serve as intermediaries between the deliverer and recipients, working through the rules and practices that define those institutions, guides, push and constraints actions and circumstances of existence of others.

Mainly authors identify several main characteristics that differentiate compulsory power from institutional one. Firstly, compulsory power primarily rests on capabilities possessed and employed by actor A to exercise influence over B. In contrast to it, in case of institutional power, institutions that constraints and shapes B are not owned by A. There is a probability, that A maintains control over those institutions, which diffuses the preferred rules "of the game" further over other actors. However in such a case, Barnett and Duvall suggest "to conceptualize the institution as possessed by the actor, that is, as an instrument of compulsory power". In reality, it is not very common when there is only one dominant actor over the institution. Instead there are more chances that an institution has some independence from actors that constitute it [16].

Second feature typical of institutional power is the distance at which A and B operate in a social context. The distance can be either spatial or temporal. Spatially, A shapes the actions or conditions of B through institutional arrangements such as decisional rules, formalized lines of responsibility and divisions of labour. In this case, the power works "through socially extended, institutionally diffuse relations". Temporally, "institutions established at one point in time can have on-going and unintended effects at a later point" (Barnett and Duvall). Structural power is the third typology of power mentioned by Barnett and Duvall. According to authors, it concerns the structures or, more precisely, the co-constitutive, internal relations of structural positions that define what kind of social beings actors are. In other words, the focus here is put on how the structural position of an actor affects its capacities, subjectivities and interests. Proponents of structural power conceptualize structure differently from those focusing on institutional power.

Namely, scholars who have used institutional

power approach define structure as "sets of rules, procedures, and norms" that impose limits on behaviour of already established actor with static preferences. Advocates of structural power approach theorize structure as "an internal relation" between A and B, such that "the structural position A exists only by virtue of its relation to structural position B". The type of interrelation established between A and B is determined by the location of these two in the structure since their positions shapes conditions and fates of actors. This logic is based on two assumptions. Firstly, positions occupied by actors within the structure do not create the same social privileges to every actor. On the contrary, "structures allocate differential capacities and typically differential advantages to different positions" (Barnett and Duvall). Secondly, social structure not only assigns capacities of actors, it also forms their understanding of its position in the international relations and their subjective interests. In other words, structural power is not only about the actors' capacity to act, it is also about the perception than an actor has certain rights to act which are defined by its position in the structure of power.

Finally, the last type of power introduced by Barnett and Duvall is productive power. This type of power partly overlaps with structural power, since both are "attentive to constitutive social processes that are, themselves, not controlled by specific actors, but are effected only through the meaningful practices of actors". Taxonomy of power developed by Barnett and Duvall provides a comprehensive frame for the categorization of different types of powers. The contested nature of power does not allow to any single concept to capture the forms of power in international politics.

Apparently, in contrast to structural power, productive power is seen as a broader and a more comprehensive concept. Productive power implies the construction of understandings, meanings and norms through discourses and systems of knowledge. Whereas structural power deals with positions of actors in relation to each other within the structure ("hierarchical and binary relations of domination", Pollack, Zartman, Rubin), productive power refers to the formation of social identities through meaningful reciprocal communications between actors [18].

However, authors highlight main distinctions between these two types of power as follows: "*Structural power is structural constitution that is, the*

*production and reproduction of internally related positions of super – and subordination that actors occupy. Productive power, by contrast, is the constitution of all social subjects with various social powers through systems of knowledge and discursive practices of broad and general scope. Conceptually, the move is away from structures, per se, to systems*

of signification and meaning (which are structures, but not themselves structures) and to networks of social forces perpetually shaping one another. Productive power concerns discourse, the social processes and the systems of knowledge through which meaning is produced, fixed, lived, experiences and transformed” (*Barnett and Duvall*).

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