

Power and Foreign Policy: A Theoretical Approach

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Abstract: - Power and Foreign Policy: A Theoretical Approach is an inquiry into the link between power and foreign policy domain. The study was carried out relying on historical descriptive research method and the realist theoretical framework of analysis. It was discovered that right from the ancient times, in Greek City States to the Contemporary Period that power and the conduct of States Foreign Policies have been inseparable. Equally, the study found out that there are lack of scholarly agreement on appropriate theoretical perspective even among those of the same school of thought like the realist school that have appeared in different bents in foreign policy analysis. The study therefore, came to the conclusion that in all foreign policy action, small or large power plays commanding roles in their outcomes. It is the opinion of the paper that theoretical integration for foreign policy analysis within the realist school that invoke power as its tool of analysis will create a harmony for better understanding of states' foreign policies and international behaviour.

Key words: Power, Foreign Policy, Realists, Actors, States, International Relations and International Behaviour.

I. THE THEORY OF POWER: AN INTRODUCTION

The theory of power has remained the central language of politics and political science. The concept has attracted varied definitions in political science generally and its sub-field foreign policy in particular. Hans J. Morgenthau (1956:26) defined power as man's control over the minds and actions of other men; that by political power we refer to the mutual relations of control among the holders of public authority and between the latter and the people at large.

Morgenthau went further to stress his definition of power by contending that political power is a psychological relation between those who exercise it and those over whom it is exercised upon; that it gives the former control over certain actions of the latter through the influence which the former exert over the latter's mind. That influence may be exercised through orders, threats, persuasion or a combination of any of these. Morgenthau, stressed that international politics like all politics is a struggle for power, that whatever the ultimate aim of international politics, power is always the immediate aim. That statesmen and people may ultimately seek freedom, security, prosperity, or power itself. They may define their goals in terms of a religious, philosophic, economic or social ideal. They may hope that this ideal will materialize through its own inner force, through divine intervention or through the natural development of human affairs. They may also try further its realization through non-political means such as technical co-operation with other nations or international organizations. But whenever they strive to realize their goal

by means of international politics, they do so by striving for power.

Further, Morgenthau in (Vasquez, et al 1986:37), opined that the crusaders wanted to free the holy places from the domination by the infidels; Woodrow Wilson wanted to make the world safe for democracy; the Nazis wanted to open Eastern Europe to German colonization to dominate Europe and conquer the world. Since they choose power to achieve these ends, they were actors on the scene of international politics.

Other scholars that have exposed the concept of power are (Shively, 1997, Ball and Guy Peters, 2000, Mclean 1996, Nnoli 1986). Shively W. Phillips defines power as the ability of one person to cause another to do what the first wishes, by whatever means. He cited how Hitler rose to high office by convincing many Germans to vote for him; the US congress disagrees with the president so often about energy policy because the president does not have much power either to force or convince congress to go along with his wishes that in area etc as examples of the exercise of power.

On the other hand, Ball and Guy Peters defined power broadly as the capacity to affect another's behaviour by some form of sanction, that this sanction may take the form of coercion or inducement. According to these scholars, power may be hacked by the carrot or the stick and it may be exercised in a positive or negative fashion. According to them, political leaders may acquire compliance with their wishes by promising wealth or honours to their supporters, or they may threaten to deny such rewards to their opponents accordingly. The negative penalties for opposing the holder of power may be extreme, such as imprisonment or death. Ball and Guy Peters (2003:34), argue that it is fear of these coercive sanctions which promotes obedience, not the coercion itself. But they pointed out that too frequent use of these penalties may be an indication of the weakening of political power.

Mclean (1996:396), defined power as the ability to make people (or things) do what they would not otherwise have done. According to him, power is often classified into five principal forms: (a) force (b) persuasion (c) authority (d) coercion (e) manipulation

Nnoli (1986) defined power as that non-divisible unit of energy which is capable of causing a change in the actions of its victim in spite of the victim's opposition to the change. All in all, power is the fundamental concept which integrates all aspects of political science, including foreign policy. It is

with power in the society that political science and political practice is concerned with, as its, basis, scope and results.

The relational power theorists challenged the “elements of national power” approach which viewed power as a possession or property of states. They view power as a type of causation. They conceive power as a relationship (actual or potential), in which the behaviour of actor A partially causes a change in the behaviour of actor B. In this perspective, power is seen as an actual or potential relationship between two or more actors (in this sense can be persons, states, groups, etc.) rather than a property of any one of them (Baldwin, 2013: 276-77).

As a result therefore, the relational power view sees power as multi dimensional rather than monolithic and unidimensional, meaning that power can increase in one dimension while simultaneously decreasing in another. As a result of therefore, they view power dimensions as including scope, domain, weight, costs and finally means. With respect to scope, it refers to the aspects of B’s behaviour affected by A meaning that an actor’s power may vary from one issue to another (Baldwin, Op cit) notes that a country like Japan may have influence with respect to economic issues than with result to military issue and the reverse may be the true of a country like North Korea coming to domain, the domain of an actor’s power refers to the number or importance of other actors subject to its influence meaning how big is B, or how many Bs are there? That is to say, that a state may have a great deal of influence in one region of the world, while having little or no influence on other parts of the world.

While the weight of an actor’s power refers to the probability that B’s behaviour is or could be affected by A (Dahl, 1957:2015). For instance, a country that has only 30% chance of achieving its aim in trade – negotiations is less powerful than one with a 90% chance. On the other hand, the costs of power means both the costs to A and the costs to B are relevant to assessing influence. As a result therefore, the following question arises: Is it costly or cheap for B to comply with A’s demands? Based on this, it has been suggested that more power should be attributed to an actor that can exercise influence cheaply than to one for whom it is costly.

Finally, means of power means the many means of exercising influence and many ways to categorize such means. They include: (a) Symbolic means: that is appeals to normative symbols as well as the provision of information (that is communicative action). (b) Economic means: improving or reducing the goods and services available to other countries has a long history in international relations. (c) Military means: this includes actual or threatened military force of all other means. This has been the most widely acknowledged means of exercise of power in international politics. (d) Diplomatic means: this includes a wide array of practices including representation and negotiation.

The other two points about power we want to discuss briefly in this paper is power fungibility and power analysis relevance in policy making and implementation. Coming to the fungibility of power, it refers to the ease with which power resources useful in one issue area can be used in other issue areas. Power plays the same role in international politics that money does in a market economy. Political power resources do vary in degree of fungibility. Some scholars contend that fungibility of power resources increases as the amount increases (see Waltz, Art 1996) meaning that power is said to be more fungible for powerful states than for weaker states. Along this line, it is reasoned that more power resources allow one to do more things that influence more actors and more issues. Fungibility of power at the end refers to the use of a given amount of power resource not to the uses of varying amounts.

With respect to the relevance of power theory to policy formulation and implementation (Nye, 1990:26, 2011:240), suggests that the relational power is likely to seem “too ephemeral” to “practical politicians and leaders”. The idea of power as the “possession of resources”, he contends holds more appeal for policy makers because it “makes power appear more concrete, measurable and predictable than does the relational definition. As a result therefore, it is the element of a national power approach that has proved useful in carrying out war projects. Policy makers are also said to have notoriously short time horizons if they are considering going down to war. In this scenario, context matters, and policy makers, as practical people are likely to understand this more readily than we academics.

In summary, despite the long origin of power theory and its close link with foreign policy sub-field of international relations, scholarly agreement on the nature of power and its role in foreign policy is lacking and may not be available soon.

However, theorizing on the role of power in foreign policy in particular and international relations in general may never the less enrich the understanding of different dimensions of foreign policy and by extension international behaviour generally. The emphasis on power has acted tremendously on the traditional approach to politics and the realists analysis of foreign policy.

II. FOREIGN POLICY AS A SUB-FIELD OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Holsti (1977), defined foreign policy as “the actions of a state towards the external environment and recognitions usually domestic under which actions are formulated”. While Nnoli (1978), sees foreign policy as, “a nation’s reaction to the external environment involving the reorganization of both domestic and external relations”.

Foreign policy as an aspect of international relations has two dimensions in its organization, the formulation and implementation. The way a nation makes its foreign policy

decisions are spelt out by the constitution. Most constitutions assign this responsibility to the parliament and executive organs of government while the implementation dimension is mainly reserved for the executive organ of government. But it is important to note that under a military junta, one man may constitute himself into foreign policy formulator and implementer.

The other important aspect of foreign policy in international relations is its objectives. The objectives are (1) short range objectives (2) middle range objectives (3) long range objectives.

1. The short range or core objectives of a nation are those values and interests that are critical for the survival of the state and the population. These usually include the population itself, resources, security and territory. Included in this are Monroe and Breshne doctrines during the cold war era. The core objectives have very short time of accomplishment, and delays are unnecessary.
2. The middle range objectives in foreign policy formulation and implementation are objectives that are not all that significant but significant to be pursued by a state. They include military assistance, foreign aid, foreign trade, defending of other states, helping other states to withstand destabilization. Usually they are not as urgent as the core objectives.
3. Long range objectives in foreign policy are those objectives that have a messianic character to change the world community, e.g. communism, world capitalism and world government, African unity or pan Africanism, global caliphate or Islamism. These are objectives you do not fix a definite date for their accomplishments (Mbah, 2007:474-475).

III. THE LINK BETWEEN POWER THEORY AND FOREIGN POLICY

In foreign policy making and implementation, it is an obvious fact that all nations are generally interested in the possession of power and prestige in the international system. In the same vein, these states are interested in the preservation of their power and prestige at all cost. (Offiong, 2000:137). Therefore, a successful actor in foreign policy making and implementation is the good reader of power and its deployment.

The theory of realism is regarded as the most influential link between power and the foreign policy sub-field of international relations. This is because of its ancient root and its wide influence in the actual conduct of diplomacy and foreign policy. Realists who are strong believers in the potency of power theory describe and explain the world as it is rather than how we might want it to be. The world is therefore perceived by realists as dangerous and insecure

environment, where violence is regrettable but endemic. According to the realists, the conflictual nature of international politics make it mandatory that high priority must be given to the centrality of the nation state in all considerations (Mbah, 2007:498). They acknowledged the nation state as the supreme political authority in the world. That what accounts for the violent behaviour of nation-states, can only be ascertained by focusing on the role of power and the importance of the most powerful, that is the great powers.

Power theory and foreign policy has its intellectual roots in ancient Greek historian Thucydides and his account of the Peloponnesian war between Athens and Sparta (431-404BC). The theory is also linked to the political philosophy of the sixteenth century Italian theorist Niccolò Machiavelli in his book "The prince, a political calculus based on interest, prudence and expediency above all else, notably morality". Some of the realist assumptions which impact profusely on foreign policy makers and implementers are:

- a. That of all the peoples' evil ways; no sins are more prevalent, inexorable or dangerous than the distinctive lust for power and their desire to dominate others.
- b. The possibility of eradicating the instinct for power is a utopian aspiration.
- c. Under such conditions international politics as the English political philosopher Thomas Hobbes puts it is a struggle for power "a war of all against all".
- d. The primary obligation of every state in this environment – the goal to which all other national objectives should be subordinated is to promote the "national interest", defined as the acquisition of power.
- e. The nature of the international system necessitates the acquisition of military capabilities sufficient to deter attack by political enemies.
- f. Allies might increase the ability of a state to defend itself but their loyalty and reliability should not be assumed. Never entrust the task of self protection to international organizations nor to international law.
- g. If all states seek to maximize power, stability will result in maintaining a balance of power lubricated by dual alliance system.

The above submissions about power and foreign policy reflect the hard position of classical realists on the role of power in the conduct foreign policy. But contemporary realists represented by neo-realism slightly differ with the hard stance of classical realists on the need to seek for power as the ultimate in foreign policy domain even though (Waltz, 1996), claimed that neo-realism is a theory of international politics and hence not a theory of foreign policy.

In the main, neo-realism appears in two distinctive forms: Aggressive and Defensive forms. Aggressive neo-realism argues that given the anarchic nature of the international system and the fact that security is always

scarce, states have to maximize their share of world power unabatedly in order to remain secure (Lobel, 2012:12) in (Walter, 2013:308) fathoms it this way:

Uncertainty about intentions of other states combined with the anarchical nature of the international system compels great powers to adopt competitive, offensive and expansionist policies whenever the benefits exceed the costs.

Like the classical realists, neo-realists of the above tradition are still pessimistic and of Hobbesian stand in the conduct of a state's foreign policy.

But defensive neo-realists do not share the stance of aggressive neo-realists, when they argue that although systemic factors do not have causal effects on state behaviour, they cannot account for all state actions. As a result therefore, instead of emphasizing the role played by the distribution of power in the international system they point at the importance of the source, level and direction of the threats, defined primarily in terms of technological factors, geographical proximity, offensive capability and perceived intention (Glaser, 1995). Meaning that states pursuing security in a rational manner on the whole can afford to relatively relaxed except in rare instances and that security can generally be achieved by balancing against threats in a timely way, a policy that will effectively hinder most forms of actual conflict. (Walter Op.cit). One of them (Rose, 1998:150) puts it this way:

Foreign policy activity is the record of rational states reacting properly to clear systemic incentives coming into conflict only in those circumstances when the security dilemma is heightened to fever pitch.

The import Rose's contention is at state in deploying its power in foreign policy domain acts rationally in line with perceived security situation. But in the recent, a third variant of realism emerged with the name neo-classical realism. This approach simply put, is realist theory for the foreign policy analyst and has established itself among foreign policy analysts with a realist bent as an alternative to both offensive and defensive neo-realism, with its view that a country's foreign policy is primarily formed by its place in the international system and in particular by its relative material power capabilities. They also argue that the impact of systemic factors on a given country's foreign policy will be indirect and more complex than neo-realists have assumed since such factors can affect policy only through intervening variables at the unit level (Rose, 1998:146).

The logic of this approach places domestic politics as an intervening variable between the distribution of power and foreign policy behaviour (Waltz, 2002:211). The above approach in the realist school of thought traces how different factors combine to forge the particular foreign policy of states. Neoclassical realists approach has equally yielded a lot of empirical studies like: Christopher Layne's examination of

U.S. grand strategy and strategic adjustment and Schmitter's study of threat assessment and alliance formation in Britain and France before the two world wars (Walter, 2013:309).

IV. CONCLUSION

We have seen the centrality of power to political science generally and foreign policy domain in particular. Equally, we have seen that foreign policy decisions are made by actors in reaction to the external environment in recognition to the domestic environment. The realists have also emphasized that foreign policy behaviour is determined by the relative power position of the actor in the international system. No actor acts above her power potential in the system. The relative power position is a function of distribution of power in the international system and which depends on the configuration of the elements of power and relational power capability. Equally, common also is the fact that non-state actors do not significantly matter in defining foreign policy and its outcome (Nwankwo, 2013:12).

In all, the paper has shown that foreign policy is a well established sub discipline of International Relations with a long chequered historical pedigree. Power plays an important role in foreign policy outcomes. However, there is an increasing lack of agreement on the most fundamental aspect of scholarly inquiry even among those of one school of thought like the realist perspective which the paper has taken up to demonstrate the link between power and foreign policy. This lends credence to the call for theoretical integration as an imperative for foreign policy analysis. This call has remained elusive and unfulfilled. Our submission here, is that all foreign policy action, small or large is linked together with power playing a pivotal role in their outcomes.

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