

What is 'power' in international relations? use examples to illustrate your argum...

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Power can be seen as a very complicated concept within International Relations. Power in International Relations does not only refer to military might but also includes economic power, cultural power and also, 'soft' and 'hard' power. Brown defines power as not just one thing but three things all working at the same time. They are; the attributes that the actor has and can use, the relationships between actors and the ability an actor has to influence others and thirdly the actors structure, when its system makes actors behave in a certain way. The first two parts of this definition of power in International Relations are most relevant to traditional International Relations such as Realism.

The realist approach to power in International Relations is that "power is based on the material capabilities that a state controls". Dunne, T. Kurki, M. Smith, S. (2007) "International Relations", Oxford University Press. This is the basic force model.

That an actors power depends on its attributes. The basic force model is a simple enough understanding of power in International Relations as the more attributes a state has the more power it has. However, there are problems with the basic force model. The current conflict in Afghanistan is a prime example of the problems with the basic force model. On paper the United States and the United Kingdom are two of the most powerful countries in the world, regarding military strength. Despite this they have been unable to win the war against the Taliban in nearly ten years.

Their overwhelming military power has failed to achieve its objectives against a vastly outnumbered and poorly equipped opponent. Therefore,

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other factors must be taken into account and the basic force model does not fully describe what is power within International Relations. Another example of the failure of the basic force model is the Vietnam war which raged between 1959-1975. Weber stated that power could be defined as an "actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance" Wallimann, I. 1977, On Max Weber's Definition of Power, Journal of Sociology, Vol. 13, No. 3, p. 231.

This coincides with the second part of Brown's definition of power. Dahl had a similar definition which stated that power is when an actor can get another to do something they don't want to do or to not do something they might normally do. This is the power of compliance and deterrence. An example of this definition of power in International Relations is the power that Saudi Arabia has over the United Kingdom as the holder of a large amount of natural resources. The third and final aspect of Brown's definition of power is structural power. Whilst traditional International Relations theories agree with the first two parts of Brown's definition many others, such as Marxism, also see power to exist in an actors structure. Gramsci described how structural power can be seen in the popular culture and the mindset of an actor.

He used the overthrowing of capitalism in Italy in the 1920's as an example. He stated that the overthrowing of capitalism in Russia in 1912 was easier as capitalism was so entrenched in 1920's Italy that common sense was dictated by it. He argued that the structure of life needed to be changed for

the revolution to come. Simply overthrowing the government was not enough. Structural power can shape the culture and heart of an actor.

Power in International Relations can also be manifested in other ways. Such as, political power, military power, economic power and 'hard' and 'soft' power. Political power is the basis of all international diplomacy. It can be seen as the ability to negotiate with other actors and make deals which can benefit all parties involved. The United States and the United Kingdom are two examples of actors who utilise their resources for political advantage. The United States showed its political power in 1990 when it lobbied China and Russia not to veto the UN Security Council Resolution 678 to authorise the invasion of Iraq (<http://www.cfr.org/publication/11205/>).

Although China did not vote, the United States successfully gained the support of Russia and prevented China from vetoing, which would have meant the invasion could not be authorised. Military power in International Relations can be seen through the size and destructive capabilities of an actor's armed forces. Military power can be measured by the amount of personnel, weapons, military vehicles and nuclear potential an actor has. Traditionally the United Kingdom and the United States have a very large amount of military power.

Actors tend to use their military power when their political power has not worked and it is used to either as a deterrent or to make another actor comply with their wants and needs. There are many examples of the use of military power throughout history. Iraq used its military power to invade Kuwait as

did the United Kingdom during the Falklands War. The Argentinian military invaded the Falkland Islands to reclaim them for Argentina. An example of their own military power.

The United Kingdom retaliated by sending a task force to the Falklands to recapture them from Argentinian control. The Falklands War is a prime example of military power as it shows two actors using their military strength to take what they want. Military power is not always visible until an actor decides to use it.

Actors have often lied about the strength of their military power i. e. Israel's nuclear bomb factory which came to light in the mid 1980's. Another form of power in International Relations is economic power. Economic power is tangible and can easily be seen with out the power having to be exercised. An actors strength of currency, natural resources and the size of its market can be used to measure its economic power. Economic power has become more important in recent years due to the depleting reserves of natural resources and especially during the current world economic climate and the recession within the United Kingdom.

The strength of an actors currency can be a very powerful tool, especially during trade negotiations. Saudi Arabia and Russia are seen to have a very large amount of economic power due to their large amounts of natural resources. Russia can account for around 20% of the world's oil and natural gas (<http://countrystudies.us/russia/59.htm>). Russia is largely seen as self-sufficient and also exports a large amount of her fuels. Organisations such as

the United Nations also have a large amount of economic power. The UN has the ability to set up economic sanctions against actors and use them to coerce them to comply with their goals.

In 1990 the UN imposed economic sanctions on Iraq after their invasion of Kuwait. When coalition forces had removed the Iraqi military from Kuwait the UN did not remove the sanctions and used them as leverage on Iraq to force their disarmament (<http://www.globalpolicy.org/iraq/previous-issues-and-debate-on-iraq/sanctions-against-iraq.html>). This is a prime example of economic power, as the UN used it to force an actor into disarmament.

The use of economic sanctions meant that there was no need for more military intervention, which prevented more lives being lost in combat. Power in International Relations can be interpreted in many different ways. Although, it is obvious that there is no single definition of power but many different varieties of power. Military power plays a very large role within International Relations as it is often used as a deterrence but it is not the only form. Economic power is just as important as the example of UN economic sanctions proves. It can be used as a powerful tool in forcing actors to comply with international law.

Power in International Relations can not be defined as one thing but as Brown said, it is a combination of attributes, the relationships between actors and the structure within the actor itself. Bibliography Dunne, T. Kurki, M.

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