

Why do states want power essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Realism is a school of International Relations thought that postulates that states are engaged in a struggle for supremacy against other states in a system that has no external oversight. Accordingly, states seek to acquire power to secure themselves from aggressors and to enable them to pursue their own interests in a competitive world where all states seek only self aggrandizement. This paper aims to delve into these core pillars of the Realist paradigm and ask why do states seek power and can they ever have enough?

To do so will require a study of power itself – what is it and how is it acquired? The relationship between states, power and politics is as contested and controversial as any debate in international relations discourse; this short treatise aims to offer an overview and an insight drawn from the study of the author. It hopes to provide a succinct insight into power as a core determinant of the evolution of global political realities. Introduction The one of theory in International Relations is the Neorealism as Waltz mentioned in his book “ Theory of International Politics” (1979).

Waltz became the first and most resolute reformer of political realism theory who has called in question a number of its postulates “ from within” of the realism. His works and work of his supporters such as Robert Gilpin, John Mearsheimer, Stephen M. Walt, Robert Keohane, Stephen Krasner, Robert Tucker George Modelski and Charles Kindleberger laid the foundation and served development of such direction, as Neorealism (Keohanne, 1986, pp. 256-257). Neorealist made the significant contribution to development of many key problems which have risen before the theory and practice of the international relations after Cold war.

Hence, Gray speaks about preservation in the international relations of a role of military force — at least in the solution of the questions connected with the nuclear weapon (Sygankov, 2003). Neorealist states that anarchy is one of the principles of the order of the international structure which distributes abilities of each powerful country according to the international systems. Therefore, anarchic is become most prominent among equal sovereign states that pursue their own interests and will not benefit their interests to other states.

For these reasons, state's goal is survive, because they ensure of other's states' future intention by that they develop own power by military capabilities (princeton. edu). On the above all, the key aspects of this essay are related to states power and its measure regards to neorealist. The objectives of this paper are twofold, firstly it is to explain and analyze why states desire power and secondly to determine if a ' sufficient' amount of power exists for a state.

In order to answer both questions, this paper will have to commence with a definition of power within the International Relations context and then proceed to explain why states wish to accumulate power – which will require a look at the contours of the global state system. As determined by the parameters of the question, both our understanding of power and of the international system will have a Neo-Realist orientation which whilst at first glance may seem somewhat limiting, is actually very apt as Realism has long been and remains the primary theoretical prism of analysis for policy makers.

At each stage, the core points raised will be reinforced with examples that illustrate the point being made – allowing a more nuanced and complete picture drawing upon both theoretical and illustrative strengths. Finally, a conclusion that will bring together what we have learnt about power, the international system and the operation of states within that system will be presented. What is Power? The nature of power has long been and remains a deeply contested notion for International Relations scholars. Can it be quantified in a tangible manner?

Is it something beyond mere physical possessions? Such issues continue to divide scholars on the matter. In fact, there is no single explanation of power and accepted definition of the concept of power does not exist. However, scholars agree that power is a primary shaper of international affairs and that its acquisition is a core objective for states. Therefore, this is better to present the numerous factors, before definition, that can be considered to comprise power as parts of a greater whole. At a most basic level, power is as Baldwin (Carlsnaes et al, 2002, p.

177) states the ability of one state to make another state perform actions, it otherwise would not and in this regard it can be seen to be the ability to influence the behaviour of other states. However, according to Neo-Realists school, it is apt to focus on more traditional notions of power as employed by Realists which are perhaps more tangible. For one, Realists have typically understood power in military terms (Gerace, 2012, p. 33) which others an easily quantifiable if not rather rudimentary measure of power for this modern age.

Moreover, consider the ease of adopting this measure of power, all that is needed is to add up the total sum of states troops, tanks, fighter jets, naval assets and the like and the state with the higher total value would be declared the more powerful. Immediately it becomes apparent that this does not offer a measure of quality, for example, an F-16 is far more potent than an aged MiG-21, but in a sheer numbers game they would be considered equal. However, beyond technical military issues, this dynamic is found wanting as it ignores the economic strength of a state.

Economic strength is an integral aspect of power in this modern, industrialised age – not only as a means to good living standards, but also as a means to sustain and maintain any military effort if one is to continue the Neo-Realist approach to power. For this reason, it is imperative to expand notions of power beyond the simple military measure, a fact recognized by modern Neo-Realists who allow for economic strength too in calculating a states power in the international system (Fitchner, 2007, p. 10).

Further factor inputs which one must consider are land size, population size and natural resources (ibid, p. 10) – all of which impact the ability of a state to project power and sustain a stance on an issue in pursuit of its core interests. To provide an example that makes the point in the most extreme manner, we might be able to consider that for all its per capita wealth, Norway cannot project power in the manner China can – owing to its smaller population, size and resource base which equates to a far smaller absolute economy and military, despite being approximately ten times wealthier per capita.

So then, we have found what constitutes power – it can be understood to be a sum of attributes across the full range of material aspects of a state – that is to say it can be understood to be a sum of a states military, economic, demographic power and natural resource base and physical size (Fowler, 1995, p. 72). The accumulation of such power attributes provides states with influence on the international scene – which was shown earlier in Baldwin's definition to be the ability to get states to do what you will them to do. Why states seek Power?

However, that understand why states seek power, one has to understand the nature and structure of the global system as understood by Neo-Realists. In essence, three core pillars underpin the entirety of Realist belief, including Neo-Realist theories, as to what guides states behaviour and motivates states into taking particular actions. The consequence of the existence of the conditions deemed to shape the international system, give rise to numerous mechanisms which potentially endanger states and force them to seek power as a means of self preservation.

Furthermore, that to briefly detail the pillars of Realism, including Neo-Realism, that give rise to the above described understanding of world politics – this paper will now succinctly elaborate on what is known as the Realist core that guides state action. Realists believe states exist in a system that is anarchical, meaning no power exists above the sovereign state that can ensure its safety and survival (Donnelly, 2000, p. 8). Ergo (Waltz, 1979, p.

91) states must ensure their own survival which is the primary objective and *raison d'être*. Therefore, as no third party can be assured to help a state –

their interests may not sync – states must be self-helpers. Finally, states are the core actors within the international system – a concept known as Statism. From that short narrative, the three core beliefs of Realism that underpin the system can be seen to be Statism, Survival and Self Help (Baylis & Smith, 2001, p. 142-145).

Consequently, this Realist international system in which states are left to fend for themselves without external assurance of their survival gives rise to two core mechanisms which are core in the Realist dialectic – and illustrate perfectly why states seek power. Thus, the first of these is the Security Dilemma – essentially a cycle of perpetual insecurity wherein one state seeks to enhance its survivability by building up military force, only for another state to feel threatened by the first's actions – thus pursuing its own arms build up.

In globalisation's world it is undeniable fact that the lack of perfect knowledge and the inherent mistrust between states in an anarchical system creates insecurity within each state about the others' intentions. The end result is an arms race (Glaser, 1997, p. 174). For instance; numerous real life examples can illustrate the security dilemma – the US and Russia, India and Pakistan or previously the UK and Germany. It is evident from the above that states seek to enhance their sense of security through acquiring enough power to deter aggressors.

Thus power can be seen as a means of survival, which we know from Waltz, is the core objective of any state. The Balance of Power operates along similar lines – it is too a means to preserve a state's existence by balancing

the power within the system and thus limiting potential existential threats to a state. Consequently, as the name suggests, the Balance of Power mechanism aims to balance power within the system to avoid a hegemonic power emerging that can threaten the survival of other states (Guzzini, 1998, pp. 45-46).

Indeed, from the definition, it is clear both that power is the attribute that must be in balance to sustain a functioning system and that a sufficient disparity in power can lead to an existential threat towards the weaker party. Thus power can be seen as a means of survival – which is why states chase it. What deters aggressors is an aversion to risk – and accumulating sufficient power allows a state to raise the cost of that risk sufficiently for any would be aggressor to ensure its safety. Can states have ‘ enough’ power?

It is undeniable fact that determining whether a state actor has ‘ enough’ power is ultimately a matter of perception. It could be argued that if a state is able to avoid predatory action from its neighbouring states and able to live in a peace – it is successfully deterring potential aggressors and thus has enough power to meet its needs (D’Anieri, 2010, p. 40). Such an approach is perhaps indicative of that adopted by Scandinavian countries-states too small to have global ambitions of power who therefore contently settle into a peaceful regional grouping that regulates the inherent anarchy Neo-Realists see in the system.

Such a definition of ‘ enough’ is however extremely subjective – does Japan have enough power? China is not attacking it so they may feel they are

detering Beijing's perceived aggression – but China is able to dominate the politics of the region and increasingly arrange affairs to its advantage – which is to say to Japan's disadvantage in a zero-sum perception of geopolitics Realists subscribe to (ibid, 56).

Ultimately, a state can be deemed to have ' enough' power only if it is the hegemonic power as such a position alone confers the ability to feel safe from any would be aggressor. Today, such an accolade applies only to the USA. Theoretically, all other states could be victims of American aggression – perhaps except those who have sufficient military power to make such an option too costly for Washington – a level of deterrence only Russia has achieved.

On the other hand, the realities of politics mean that all states have states they are unlikely to actually be a threat as well, or perceived as threatening by. Such a perspective gives rise to functionality issues – a state does need to be secure from realistic threats and for any state in the system these are limited in scope. For instance, to illustrate, the UK does not fear American aggression and so does not have to be able to deter Washington.

Thus having ' enough' power is functionally a level achieved at by being able to deter any likely aggressors, whilst theoretically ' enough' is defined by being able to deter any aggressor globally – that is to be a hegemonic or a great power in your own right (Claude, 1962, p. 14). To sum up, if Realists are right and all states are power maximisers, no state will be content short of hegemonic power status. However, ground realities in terms of resources

as previously determined mean few states can actually aim for that goal – leaving functional power levels as all they can aspire to.