

# Power in the essential elements of politics



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

As the title suggests, for Carr, " power is an essential element of politics" making the value of understanding and analyzing power of prime importance. The notion of power, however, is extremely hard to conceptualize. As according to Morgenthau (1986) the value of a political concept lies in the breadth of the relevant political phenomena that it covers, I will employ a broad definition of power, which is in accordance with Bachrach's and Baratz's (1962) view: " power is in limiting someone else's decision-making" (p. 949). Although such a definition is useful and necessary to capture different aspects of power, throughout my essay, I will use it against itself in a way, as by being so broad it omits the various angles of power. I will argue that in order to be practically useful, power in every political situation must be analyzed individually, as there are multiple facets to the concept of power and broad generalizations are likely to impair full understanding of a given situation. I will do this by looking at Carr's concept of military power and applying different theoretical viewpoints to it in order to show, how the meaning of military power changes depending on which theoretical position you adopt. Essentially, " what is common to all power and influence relations is only effect on policy" (Baldwin: 1979, p. 167), meaning that how you look at power is going to affect your policy-making decisions, and as there are multiple ways, each situation is unique. This doesn't render classifications and conceptualizations useless; it calls for an open frame of mind in how we understand power. Firstly, I will outline Carr's notions of military, economic powers and power over opinion as well as their interrelatedness, concentrating on military power. I will then apply different theoretical positions, such as the elitist and pluralist notions of power and the concepts of potential and actual power to see how the meaning and

<https://assignbuster.com/power-in-the-essential-elements-of-politics/>

implications of military power change with each of them. I will also give historical examples to illustrate each theoretical 'transformation'.

Carr (2001) outlined three types of political power: military power, economic power and power over opinion. Each of these types is peculiarly separate. Military power, Carr (2001) states, often becomes an end to itself. Wars are often fought not for territory or trade, but are often explicitly fought for the purpose of becoming militarily stronger. " The foreign policy of a country is limited not only by its aims, but also by its military strength or, more accurately, by the ratio of its military strength to that of other countries" (Carr: 2001, p. 103). Nowadays forces are assessed according to the efficiency and high quality of the military technology, including human resources and their direction. Military force has become a dominant figure of political values. Paarlberg (2004) in his analysis of U. S. military dominance mentions how science is often employed for military means, showing that even something considered as precious as human intellectual property is used to achieve military superiority. The extensive list of U. S. military achievements that he highlights in his work: stealth aircrafts, Abrams tanks, GPS navigation; is something closely watched by other nation states, something considered of prime importance in determining the global balance of power (Paarlberg, 2004).

Economic power acknowledges that wealth is a source of political power and that states seek to promote the acquisition of wealth. Its importance can be seen in the policies of the past: " The rise of modern nations has everywhere been marked by the emergence of a new middle class economically based on industry and trade" (Carr: 2001, p. 106). A good example of economic

power display can be noted in 1973 Arab oil embargo, being a reaction to a policy of the United States on Israeli military technology that, as a consequence negatively affected oil prices in the U. S. for a long period of time. Power over opinion is the art of persuasion, propaganda, power over minds (Carr: 2001) Carr (2001) argues that it is essential to ensure the efficiency of military and economic powers: " psychological war must accompany economic war and military war" (Carr: 2001, p. 123). He mentions that all great and military successful states had powerful ideologies underpinning them, going back as far back as to the dominance of Vatican in the middle ages: " It was the Catholic church which first understood and developed the potentialities of power over large masses of opinion" (Carr: 2001, p. 120).

Although these types of power are theoretically different, they are still interconnected. It is difficult to present a country in which one kind of force would be separated from others. " Co - operation between the missionary and the trader, and the support of both by military force, was a familiar nineteenth century example of unofficial association between propaganda and economic and military power in the interests of national expansion" (Carr: 2001, p. 122). Economic and military powers are ultimately interconnected and the relationship is both ways. On one hand, military power is used to acquire economic wealth and increase economic power. However, economic power in lots of ways determines military power, a rich country can afford to hire a large army and buy expensive armaments. Throughout history military power has been a paramount and economic power a luxury. " The substitution of the economic weapon for the military

weapon - what Marx calls the replacement of cannon by capital - is a symptom not so much of superior morality as of superior strength" (Carr: 2001, p. 117).

Despite their interconnected nature, in my opinion, Carr (2001) singles out military power as the most important and valued type of power. So, he mentions that the difference between "welfare" states, or states with predominant state activity in the spheres of healthcare and education, and military or "war" states, the opposite of this, is merely that welfare states can afford to spend on something else but military power, having already achieved it: "Have we already sufficient guns to enable us to afford some butter?" (Carr: 2001, p. 110). The superiority of military power goes back to antiquity when military power was the main instrument for states to rule and manipulate each other. "The Greek city-state rose to greatness when its hoplite armies proved more than a match for the Persian hordes" (Carr 2001, p. 102). With the increase of military technology, the position of military power has visibly improved. Carr uses other, more recent historical examples to illustrate the fatality of mistakes and shortcomings in the military sphere. So Italy, not proving its prowess in a first-class war or the "execution of the leading Soviet generals in June 1937" can both be seen as "symptom[s] of military inefficiency or unpreparedness in a Great Power [that] is promptly reflected in its political status" (Carr: 2001, p. 103). Thus, any display of political force was strongly reflected in the political life of a country. So, although all types of power are important in compiling the overall picture of a country's strength, military power stands out as the most decisive one, which can furthermore be observed in the secrecy attached to military

power, so, as Carr (2001) notes - " no government can afford to divulge full and frank information about its own military strength, or all the knowledge it possesses about the military strength of other countries" (Carr: 2001, p. 103).

As Barnett and Duvall (2005) suggest: " Analysis of power in international relations ... must include a consideration of how social structures and processes generate differential social capacities for actors to define and pursue their interests and ideals" (p. 42). If we now take the concept of military power and apply to it Bachrach and Baratz's (1962) analysis of elitist, pluralist and their preferred 'mobilization of bias' theories, we would have to ask very different questions to understand the military power balance in a given situation. So, for elitists, power is highly centralized, ordered and structured. " Who rules?" would the elitist ask (Bachrach, Baratz: 1962, p. 952). For example, the Big Eight countries, for the elitists, would be perfect examples of countries possessing military power, because of their clear cut superiority and its public display. Categorization of countries into developed, developing and third world also seems to be in line with the pluralists' organized notion of power. However, one of the criticisms of elitism is that it presumes that every human organization, international political arena being one of them, " has an ordered system of power, a 'power structure'" (Bachrach, Baratz: 1962, p. 948). This might not necessarily be true and it might be the case that international power is not a hierarchy, but rather a see-saw, with countries on the periphery, such as Iran and North Korea not included in the traditional, broadly-used definition of military power, however definitely feared.

The pluralist theories view power as diffused and based on actual activities of political actors and therefore not stable: " Pluralists hold that power may be tied to issues, and issues can be fleeting or persistent, provoking coalitions among interested groups and citizens, ranging in their duration from momentary to semi-permanent" (Bachrach, Baratz: 1962, p. 947). So, the pluralist asks: " Does anyone have power?" (Bachrach, Baratz: 1962, p. 952). To explore this from the point of view of coalitions - membership of NATO might grant a degree of power to some of the smaller member countries over certain issues. Membership of NATO can also be complicated by other power-struggles outside of NATO, meaning that a power of a country can be simultaneously aimed at and against a union. So, Greece withdrew its troops from the coalition between 1975 and 1980 following Turkish invasion of Cyprus as a sign of protest. What would have been broadly equal military powers within NATO, turned into display of its supremacy by Turkey, resulting in a conflict as the supposed balance of powers has been destroyed.

Finally, Bachrach's and Baratz's (1962) own take on power concentrates on how one party can influence the prominence of issues that are considered important in a given society: " Power is...exercised when A devoted his energies to creating or reinforcing social and political values and institutional practices that limit the scope of the political process to public consideration of only those issues which are comparatively innocuous to A" (p. 948).

Bachrach and Baratz (1962) illustrate this by exemplifying a faculty member that is reluctant to speak of his disagreement on some issues, because of the power that the academic board holds over what issues are discussed and

considered important. To draw a parallel with military power, in the international political arena, can it not be said that developed countries dictate issues that are concentrated upon: "organized into politics", while some issues that might be potentially important to third world countries are "organized out" (Bachrach, Baratz: 1962, p. 949). To illustrate this, although Russia's invasion of Georgia in 2008 admittedly did spark a wave of indignation throughout the global political arena, the reasons for it were not entirely different from the reasons Georgia had to invade South Ossetia. However, military power that Russia holds allows it to portray its invasion as 'noble' defense of a weaker country. Georgia, not possessing such powers, cannot present the issue to its benefit let alone to act upon it. Similarly, the U. S. presents its offensive against Iraq as 'building of a democracy' therefore highlighting democracy as being of important value in the political arena. Other motives for the invasion of Iraq, such as oil development stakes are on the contrary kept quiet, "organized out" of the discussion, albeit not successfully recently. This means that although a country might be militarily strong, it might not be powerful, as power according to this theory is determined by how influential you are in setting up the framework of importance, of actually defining what military power is.

To continue with various applications of military power - Baldwin (1979) distinguishes between potential and actual power, which is consistent with Kindleberger's (1970) notions of 'strength' and 'power'. So, potential power, or 'strength' refers to the ability and means that would potentially allow one country to influence another: "He [Kindleberger] treats strength as a means which exists independently of whether it is used to assert or achieve control



over policies of other countries" (Baldwin: 1979, p. 173). Thus, a country might be strong, but not powerful, if it does not use its strength effectively. This is the situation of failure of power that Baldwin (1979) describes as " He had the cards but played them poorly". For example, France was ranked third by World Bank in terms of military expenditure with \$74 billion spending in 2008 constituting 2.3% of their GDP ranking after USA and China (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute website). This definitely shows that the means were allocated and the effort is present, however, France is rarely considered a militarily powerful country, definitely not in the same way as USA or China. Despite the possibly present objective military strength, this perception doesn't allow France to use its strength to influence international opinions.

Actual, real 'power' for Kindleberger then is 'strength' capable of being used effectively. To continue with military expenditure analogy, U. S. military expenditure is very sizeable (\$663bn in 2008). Although its military strength is beyond doubt, it is also powerful, as U. S. opinion in every military situation is respected and sometimes forcefully imposed, as in the case of the perceived nuclear threat that was used as an excuse to invade Iraq. There was hardly an international consensus on the necessity of such radical means; however America was able to use its military power to enforce the issue. Again, we see how military power can be different things depending on the viewpoint; it can be objectively measured by actual number of weapons, soldiers, ammunition. However, this is not enough as effective use of these means is necessary. Power, however is unachievable without strength, tying back to the point of importance of military power for the so-

called military states that often put expenditure on guns above the expenditure on bread.

As we can see, military power means different things in different contexts and it is hard to decide which military power is 'real'. We can use the concept of interdependence as an analogy to illustrate the same point.

Interdependence plays a big role in power relations: " a rising level of interdependence increases both the opportunities and the costs of exercising the power" (Baldwin: 1979, p. 177). International theorists are highly interested in interdependency, because it is a concept closely linked to power. To consider the role of force in interdependence, it is necessary to make distinction between " sensitivity" and " vulnerability". " Sensitivity interdependence" is concerned with the effects within a given policy framework; " vulnerability interdependence" extends into effects even after the policy framework alteration (Baldwin: 1979). This distinction indicates that " dependence, like power, varies from one policy- contingency framework to another", meaning that we cannot talk of either power or interdependence as something general, the meaning of both of these concepts can be defined by the situation (Baldwin: 1979, p. 177-178).

To conclude with, although we all know what we mean by power in everyday conversation, this being " one and indivisible" whole, for theoretical purposes power has to be decomposed into types and levels. Carr (2001) proposes a typology based on the means used. Military, economic and 'emotional' means are at the base of his distinction and reflect the spheres where a country can operate. Although interconnected and ultimately being part of the bigger concept of power, it can be argued that military power is given

<https://assignbuster.com/power-in-the-essential-elements-of-politics/>

more weight by Carr, as it tends to be a priority for countries around the globe. Further to these empirical distinctions, each facet of power can be analyzed from multiple theoretical viewpoints, each highlighting a possible use and angle of power. When assessing a given country's military power, we can use objective measures, such as expenditure on military equipment. We could also conduct a survey on the streets, asking people of their perceptions. Both would be measures of military power, but whether they will coincide or not is uncertain. Thus, having analyzed only one facet of power from only a few possible dimensions, it is clear that this enquiry could be probed further, therefore making power not two or three-faced, as some theorists (Boulding: 1989, Bachrach and Baratz: 1962) argue, but rather multi-faceted.