

READING 1

LEAD IN

Whatever the popular formula “knowledge is power” may mean, it is obvious that power in foreign relations is more than just knowledge. Discuss the concept of power in international relations. What elements is it composed of? How is power measured in world politics?

Skim the text and compare your interpretations of power with that of the author.

WHAT IS POWER?

Niall Ferguson

Hoover Digest

“What is power?” asked Tolstoy at the end of *War and Peace*. Today most people would give a simple answer: Power is America. The United States is *the* global hegemon. In military terms, there’s never been a *superpower* like it. Consider the sheer size of the U.S. defense budget. The Pentagon’s budget is equal to the combined military budgets of the next 12 or 15 nations. The financial statistics actually understate the huge extent of America’s military lead. The most compelling evidence was there for all television viewers to behold in Kosovo in 1999, in Afghanistan in 2002, and in Iraq. In all three cases, the technical superiority of American forces allowed them to annihilate enemy troops, weaponry, and other military “assets” while sustaining minimal casualties.

All this is, of course, based on the assumption that power is simply military power: the capability to use force against others. Max Weber once characterized the modern state as claiming a monopoly on the legitimate use of violence. In the international sphere there can be no such monopoly. But international power can sometimes seem to depend on monopolizing the most sophisticated means of perpetrating violence. The United States today enjoys the kind of technological edge enjoyed by a few West European powers in the nineteenth century, when their possession of ironclad steamboats and machine guns put the world at their mercy.

Yet there are two problems. The first is that we underestimate at our peril the speed with which technological gaps have been closed in the past. Secondly, what has made the American “revolution in military affairs” possible has been the extraordinary economic growth of the 1990s, which made very substantial defense expenditures suddenly seem insignificant.

So power is not just military power; or rather, military power depends on economic growth and political institutions.

Another line of argument is that power is diplomatic, not military: Precisely the threat posed to smaller countries by the power of the United States is encouraging them to combine against America. This is an argument that has a special appeal to Europeans. They know that the EU is a military pygmy. However, by acting collectively and through the institutions of the postwar international order — the United Nations, the World Trade Organization, NATO — the Europeans may be able to restrain the United States.

Nevertheless, diplomacy will only get Europe so far. For demographically, it could be argued, power is inexorably ebbing away from countries with a low birthrate.

It is, of course, the oldest simplification to equate power and population. Still, it clearly matters. With a population of just 286,000, Iceland will never wield power in any meaningful sense; whereas, having a population more than four times larger than that of the United States undoubtedly

makes China powerful. America's erstwhile rival superpower, Russia, is currently in the grip of population decline: There are 5 million fewer Russians than there were 10 years ago, a symptom of the postcommunist economic, social, and environmental malaise.

Population counts. Plainly, however, demography isn't everything. If it were, India would be the world's number-two superpower after China. Much more important, economic power is what counts, and by that measure China is barely half as powerful as the United States.

It's certainly tempting to assume that power is synonymous with gross domestic product: Big GDP equals big power. Hence many analysts point to China's huge economy and rapid growth as evidence that the country will soon gain superpower rank, if it hasn't already. But GDP doesn't stand for Great Diplomatic Power. If the institutions aren't in place to translate economic output into military hardware — and if the economy grows faster than public interest in foreign affairs — then product is nothing more than potential power.

There is another possibility: financial power. According to this view, real power lies with the financiers — the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. This really is as silly as it gets. The two banks like to criticize one another, but both the IMF and the World Bank have one thing in common: They are trying to help less-developed or transitional economies. Their medicine may not always be palatable or effective, but that's another matter. If these institutions have a problem, it is that they are not powerful enough, not that they are too powerful. Much of the time all they can do is lend money to flaky governments and exhort them to be less flaky. Some power.

But what if the IMF et al. are just public-sector fronts for the real powerhouses: the multinational corporations (MNCs)? There have been examples in history of companies exercising power so directly and successfully that they have themselves become states: The East India Company is the most famous. Today's multinationals exercise power indirectly. Other than in those regions of the world where state power has crumbled away or become hopelessly contested, they prefer to coexist with rather than replace governments. That is not to say that multinational companies have not been known to topple or buy governments. But in general the large and immobile assets of most multinational corporations make them as vulnerable as their vast resources make them strong.

... The *real* point, some would claim, is that so many of these multi-national corporations are American. And the products they sell are the key to the real power the United States wields — its "soft" power, the things that make the United States attractive.

The trouble with soft power is that it's, well, soft. All over the Islamic world there are kids who enjoy (or would like to enjoy) bottles of Coke, Big Macs, CDs by Britney Spears, and DVDs starring Tom Cruise. Do any of these things make them love America more? Strangely not.

Actually, this is not so strange. In the nineteenth century, Great Britain pioneered the use of soft power, though it projected its culture through the sermons of missionaries and the commentaries in Anglophone newspapers. The British also revolutionized world sports, making cricket the most popular sport in the Indian subcontinent, rugby the favorite sport of the Antipodes, and soccer the near-universal opiate of the modern masses. Yet it was precisely from the most Anglicized parts of the indigenous populations of the British Empire that the nationalist movements sprang.

I have tried to suggest that power is about monopolizing as far as possible what might be called the means of projection (of power). A list of these would have to include manpower, weaponry, and wealth but also knowledge and, since a rationally organized bureaucracy is a formidable resource, administrative efficiency.

However, most if not all of these elements of power are tending to become more evenly distributed. In that sense, power per se is tending to be dispersed. And the more it is dispersed, the less power there is. One power with a nuclear missile is very powerful. Twelve powers with nuclear missiles are each much less powerful than that. The more proliferation, the less power.

READING 2

Read the text in detail to find out what psychology of weakness and psychology of power in international relations consist in.

POWER AND WEAKNESS

Robert Kagan

Policy Review

IT IS TIME to stop pretending that Europeans and Americans share a common view of the world, or even that they occupy the same world. On the all-important question of power — the efficacy of power, the morality of power, the desirability of power — American and European perspectives are diverging. Europe is turning away from power, or to put it a little differently, it is moving beyond power into a self-contained world of laws and rules and transnational negotiation and cooperation. It is entering a paradise of peace and relative prosperity, the realization of Kant's "Perpetual Peace." The United States, meanwhile, remains mired in history, exercising power in the anarchic Hobbesian world where international laws and rules are unreliable and where true security and the defense and promotion of a liberal order still depend on the possession and use of military might. That is why on major strategic and international questions today, Americans are from Mars and Europeans are from Venus: They agree on little and understand one another less and less. And this state of affairs is not transitory. The reasons for the transatlantic divide are deep, long in development, and likely to endure.

European intellectuals are nearly unanimous in the conviction that Americans and Europeans no longer share a common "strategic culture." The United States, they argue, resorts to force more quickly and, compared with Europe, is less patient with diplomacy. Americans generally see the world divided between good and evil, between friends and enemies, while Europeans see a more complex picture. When confronting real or potential adversaries, Americans generally favor policies of coercion rather than persuasion, emphasizing punitive sanctions over inducements to better behavior, the stick over the carrot. Americans tend to seek finality in international affairs: They want problems solved, threats eliminated. And, of course, Americans increasingly tend toward unilateralism in international affairs. They are less inclined to act through international institutions such as the United Nations, less inclined to work cooperatively with other nations to pursue common goals, more skeptical about international law, and more willing to operate outside its strictures when they deem it necessary, or even merely useful.

Europeans insist they approach problems with greater nuance and sophistication. They try to influence others through subtlety and indirection. They are more tolerant of failure, more patient when solutions don't come quickly. They generally favor peaceful responses to problems, preferring negotiation, diplomacy, and persuasion to coercion. They are quicker to appeal to international law, international conventions, and international opinion to adjudicate disputes. They try to use commercial and economic ties to bind nations together. They often emphasize process over result, believing that ultimately process can become substance.