

The Role of National Power in Achieving a Balancing Foreign Policy

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There has always been the influence of national power in the determination of foreign policy. Thus, when states are in the process of interacting with each other, the sufficient quantity and quality of national power is relevant to achieve of a balanced foreign policy. This article shows to dissect how the components of national power interact in countervailing foreign policy architectures, with an emphatic focus on great power and middle powers. Underpinning this study is the Realist Theory of International Relations which comprises of the Classical and Structural realism and uses the ‘Balance of Threat’ theory to explain how states wield their power resources against perceived threats. The study is predominantly exploratory and employs a case of United States to understand how national power can be utilized in furthering foreign policy interests.

1. Introduction

Under the umbrella of international relations, foreign policy encapsulates the foreign relationship of a state with other countries and represents its characteristics, goals, and position on the international forum (Iacob, 2024). In this regard, national power, which consists of military, economic, political and soft power capabilities, serves as the inherent foundation of foreign policy. Thus, the idea of balancing foreign policy was emerging in the era of the fluctuating power relations, the change of coalitions, and new threats on the global level (Kutlay & Öniş, 2021). This paper will focus on how this balance is facilitated by national power and the future of great powers and small powers within the system.

In the present period marked by a higher level of globalization, international relations have become rather more complex and challenging, and states find themselves facing emerging new international environments and problems (Ripsman, 2021). It is essential for the states to successfully manage such emerging changes in the context of their national and international security as well as their long-term agenda (Mishra et al., 2021). It has been identified that the practice of the balance of foreign policy is crucial in this regard as it helps to formulate strategies that are suitable for intergovernmental relations as well as ensures a focus on domestic issues that are critical to a state while at the same time, addressing external challenges that may exist (Zielonka, 2023).

Pivotal to this balancing act is the proper management of national power (Naseri et al., 2022). Military power, economic capability, diplomacy, and culture then are the mechanisms through which states can pursue their objectives, reach out to determine the character of interstate relations and their place in the international system (Yakubu, 2022). National power therefore becomes one of the key factors that contribute to balance within a state's foreign policy; in countering emerging threats, forming and pursuing strategic partnerships as well as managing power transitions (Demir, 2022).

This article aims to explore to what extent states, strategically balance components of national power in order to build and maintain balanced foreign policies. By emphasizing the processes at play, it seeks to offer further understanding of how states navigate the international system in light of other state players and uncertainties. In this study, the United States is chosen as case study in which the impact of national power is investigated to construct and promote foreign policy. In this regard, the article strive to further the discussion on international relations and foreign policy by analyzing the relations between national power components in creating a symbiotic approach to linking the global politics and international relations systems. The purpose is to contribute to the existing literature review within this field and help those who formulate policies gain a better understanding of how states can manage to deal with the challenges regarding foreign policy that are present in the international system in order to achieve such objectives as stability, security, and power through foreign policy.

1.1 Research Question



How does national power influence a country's ability to achieve a balanced foreign policy?

2. Literature Review

National power has been a concept of significance to IR analyses. Hans Morgenthau in his great work published in 1948-Politics Among Nations, has categorically stated that power is the essential desire in the context of international politics. National power is usually described in terms of material and non-material components-defense strength, prosperity, and soft power. Joseph Nye, building on this idea, brought the term "soft power" that explored the need for attraction and exercise of power in foreign policies to the mainstream agenda. (Morgenthau, 1948)

In John Mearsheimer's *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, the theory of offensive realism is established against the backdrop of the structure of the international system as anarchic, which leads great powers to seek power as a means of survival. Mearsheimer argues that due to the uncertainty that pervades the system, states seek to control as much power as possible because of the anarchy nature of the system. This desire for power frequently leads to struggle and rivalry among great powers due to lack of security.

He backs up his theory by using historical facts and notes that the balance of power and the drive towards hegemony are critical to international relations. The main thesis of the book is that the peace between the great powers is short-lived and their behaviors are determined by the inherent characteristics of the anarchic state system that is marked by uncertainty (Mearsheimer, 2001).

Joseph Nye came up with the soft power theory that seeks to capture how a country gets other countries to do what it wants without having to use force or coercion, which is what hard power means. Soft power therefore stems from culture, political persuasion and overseas policies which are perceived to be legitimate and moral. A Nye additional postulate that in the new world of globalization soft power is crucial to achieve policy objectives since it influences choices and creates partnerships. Soft power is what Nye later terms as smart power, integrating both hard and soft power to address the global political dynamics the book describes (Nye, 2004).

Paul et al. (2004) are discussed about the balance of power as a theory in the international relation as well as the method for the fresh new world after cold war. The authors reveal how states interact with each other through balancing and other approaches that affect power distribution and emerging threats. Specifically, the book of these authors recalls classical balance of power theory, questions its effectiveness during the twenty-first century and examines its usefulness in the world of globalization, unipolarity, and non-state actors. It gives a complex view of how power relations play out in the current international politics (Paul et al., 2004).

Researcher critiques the widespread belief that states have well-planned and integrated strategies called grand strategies in their decisions regarding international relations. Therefore, according to Bill's application of the Public Choice Theory, it asserts that contrary to conventional rational planned model, foreign policy is the product of struggle of different groups and it does not involve strategic planning due to bureaucratic politics and domestic politics. Hanania pointed out rightly that governments often perform operations which actually are guided by interest groups and institutional factors and then we have the perceived notion of grand strategy. State behaviour in international relations is complex and the book offers an analytical tool for how it is fragmented and at times contradictory. (Hanania, 2023).

Lusk (2023) offers a collection of works that discuss the media and rhetoric in relation to the formulation of the United States foreign policy based on the formation of enemy images. The book explores how political statesmen, media, and narratives construct imaginary enemies to legitimate war and politics. Using the case of national security threats as an example, Lusk takes us through how politics and media are involved in the construction of the dominant discourses that justify state actions outside the country. The study brings understanding on the role of discourse in the making of the U.S. foreign policy (Lusk, 2023).

Sisson (2024) gives an insight into the shifting nature of the US and China conflict, including an emphasis on economic and technological relations, as well as military power. It does this to decipher how both powers manage the affairs of interdependency, economic, technological and military competition. Sisson provides a historical, political and economic background of the US China confrontation, reviews possible impacts to the global security and order. Really, a great source of information about the key strategies, the problem and the likely scenario of this important competition has been provided in the book (Sisson, 2024).

In this respect, balancing as a strategy is a product of realist thinking. Waltz (1979) structural realism looks at anarchy as driving states to balance in an effort to maximize their survival within the system. Stephen Walt in his "balance of threat" theory develops this further in a way that states balance not only power but threats. Studies on balance of Foreign policy indicate that it applies in both multipolar and unipolar systems which states are interested to reduce the likelihood of risks and be independent (Waltz, 1979).

As an edited volume this book therefore explores the origins and nature of Great Power politics especially with reference to emerging powers and the strategic adaptations of the Great Powers. The contributors explain how grand strategies, power transitions, tendencies or systems produce effects on the dynamics of the international relations. The authors on how emerging powers offer a threat to dominate share powers and how global systems transform in regard to them and for that the authors use historical and contemporary arguments. The book is a rich source of ideas that explain the main changes in the character

of competition in the global economy and the reasons for shifts of power in the 21st century. Most of the points are sourced from Rhomey et al. (2024).

Pape (2005) talks about “soft balancing” which is a tactic employed by states to challenge America without the use of force. According to Pape, the states that perceive the America as a threat after the Cold War they use the second-class type balancing where they resort to such things as forming coalitions, use of economic pressures, and diplomacy to restrain America. At the same time, the article reviews the potential of soft balancing as one of the tools of sovereignty preservation and means used by states in their attempts to counteract the policies of the USA while avoiding the military confrontation (Pape, 2005).

Friedberg (2005) in this article discusses the future of Sino American relations and whether it is possible to avoid the clash with China. Friedberg explores the causes of cooperation and conflict such as, for instance, economic relations, military build-up, and political systems. He looks at past experience and theories trying to determine if a full-scale war is probable, and concludes that, while full-scale war is perhaps unlikely, the condition of strategic rivalry can provoke tensions and small, more or less controlled wars, also known as proxy wars. Friedberg rightly underlines that such ambivalences must be addressed dialectically, selectively, and based on an adequate understanding of the aims and insecurities of the nations involved (Friedberg, 2005).

According to Mattern (2012), power in foreign policy is not only material assets but also stories, discourse, and the capacity to construct and order meaning in foreign affairs. He also emphasizes the idea of soft power by which states not only coerce and bargain but also employ persuasion, legitimacy, and an appeal to shared meanings. Incorporating these ideas, Mattern proposes an alternative and more applied understanding of national power. It contributes to filling a gap between the theoretical concepts in the field of IR and their behavioral manifestation in foreign politics, offering more nuanced insights into how states operate in international systems (Mattern, 2012).

Thus, the author is not distinctly focused on the concept of national power, but works on its context in the context of Russia’s geopolitics and NATO. This is how the author explains how Russia’s military, economic and diplomatic capabilities that constitute its national power have shaped its relations with NATO in the past and the present. The book also explains how Russia tends to see the rising NATO forces in Eastern Europe as a threat to its own security and European influence. In this sense, national power remains a crucial concept, as part of the context for analyzing Russia’s opposition to NATO enlargement and attempts to regain power in former Soviet states (Smith, 2015).

The author providing of an understanding of how the concept of national interest is to be understood and used in present-day international relations. He analyzes the concept of national interest itself; how various countries and political systems define and pursue their interests at home and internationally. The article focuses on what constitutes as national interest due to geopolitical, economic, and social changes and how these facets affect a



state's behaviors in the international system. Khan also draws attention to the realistic utilization of national interest in foreign policy, which also requires rational pursuit of national goals amid the contemporary global problems and changing balance of power (Khan, 2022).

In an attempt to understand why a certain nation has a certain foreign policy, the authors seem to focus a great deal on political elites. They posit that power is a dynamic component of states which are managed and employed by the political leadership in the foreign policy process. The authors stress that political elites' behavior is crucial in mapping states' power capabilities, material and non-material power resources into coherent foreign policies that entail military forces or economic power or soft power, etc. They go further in pointing that foreign policy is not only determined by material capabilities. Issues including elite perceptions, domestic political pressures, ideological inclinations, and external pressures also define how national power is applied internationally. Altogether, the article well demonstrates the complex interdependence of a state's national power and political elites' agency when it comes to foreign policy, as few and far between are the cases of the foreign policy outcomes which would not be dependent on how elites reinterpret and utilize the state's power resources to address both internal and external factors (Lami & Xharo, 2022).

Related to the topic of foreign policy, the authors consider the notion of national power. They state that the power in the international structure can be viewed as a complex concept that includes not only the economic and military capabilities of a state, but also such factors as technology, diplomacy and culture. These elements define the capability of a state to shape the foreign relations and to pursue foreign policy goals. The authors insist that without correct assessment of the power factors of different countries it is impossible to elaborate proper strategies of international relations. They note that foreign policy perspectives depend on how a state evaluates and employs power in relation to world problems and prospects. Li and Wang have developed a systematic National Power Index (NPI), which serves to assess power comprehensively; predetermined to assist the policymakers where national capabilities match the strategic foreign policy objectives (Li & Wang, 2022)

3. Theoretical Frame Work

The theoretical background of this article rests on the assumption that national power is the main driving force for implementing a state's foreign policy. Based on the Realist Theory of International Relations especially the classical realism and structural realism, it is posited that states rely on their national power which include but not limited to military, economic, diplomatic and soft power to operate within the system and achieve their goals. According to the classical realism as developed by Hans Morgenthau, the acquisition of power is at the heart of state conduct. However, structural realism especially Kenneth Walz's theory emphasizes the distribution of power and how states need to balance it to survive.



According to this framework it is argued that the attainment of a balanced foreign policy is directly proportional to the national power of a given state. The articulation of military, economic, diplomacy and soft power allows states to strategically achieve alliance changes, neutralize threats and influence international politics. National power is used to achieve the entire foreign policy as well as being the achievement of the foreign policy by offering the capacity needed to manipulate or modify the current world order to reflect the country's objectives. The following framework shows that foreign policy is a deliberate and systematic process of utilizing power to promote stability in the international system, national security, and diplomatic position.

4. Components of National Power in Balancing Foreign Policy

4.1 Military Power

Military force still remains as one of the most critical aspects of the power in every country. The military strength acts a credible threat to any potential rivals as well as a guarantee of security to allies in order to achieve its foreign policy goals. For instance, the US military supremacy in Asia-Pacific has played a crucial role in checking the rise of China.

4.2 Economic Power

Another factor that is important is economic capital. International policy instruments include trade, economic aid and/or trade sanctions as a way of exerting power. The U.S. has relied on its economic might to shape a liberal economic order and influence the liberalization of the global economy.

4.3 Soft Power

Following Nye is an instrument that strengthens a state's capacity to pursue its foreign policy objectives without the use of force. The examples of soft power assets include cultural industries of the United States, educational centers, and advanced technology.

4.4 Diplomatic Power

Diplomacy is a form of persuasion and partnership. Effective diplomacy helps states to constructively couple their objectives with those of other states for the formation of alliances that support balancing literature. The U.S. has commonly utilized international organizations such as NATO and the UN as the way to exercise diplomatic authority.

4.4.1 The Balance of Threat Theory in Action

Stephen Walt has also developed a more refined theory of balancing behavior known as the "balance of threat" theory. International states evaluate threats with the aid of the power level, spatial closeness, capacity of offense, and that of animosity. This theory can be illustrated by the U.S. cold war foreign policy which countered the ideological and military power of the Soviets. In post Cold war era the balance of threat has changed to address other threats like terrorism and cyber warfare. The reaction of the United States to 9/11 and

subsequent actions in the so-called “War on Terror” illustrate how national power elements are deployed to meet threats.

4.4.2 Case Study: The United States

It is, therefore, nuclear power’s application for national power balance that can be illustrated through the United States’ foreign policy. Cold war strategies which the U.S adopted included containment strategies; this entailed balancing against soviet expansionism by using military alliances, economic aid and ideological confrontations. However, in the Post-Cold War era, the U.S has been presented with new threats such as China and regional instability in the Middle East and emergence of non state actors.

Maintaining the balance of foreign policy is therefore one of the most important core concepts of the international relations, especially for states that seek to maintain the stability and power in a challenging world. Drawing upon Realist Theory as its theoretical foundation, this concept particularly emphasizes the ways in which states seek to pursue and achieve security and perpetuate power in an effort to address perceived threats and establish an equilibrium. The role model of the contemporary world superpower – the United States of America – offers an interesting example of how national power resources may be mobilized to attain such a balance. Behind the mask of the military force, the economic power, the diplomacy and the soft power, the U.S has been able to bring the American interests in the complex constantly transforming international politics in face of the new threats.

First of all, the United States has accumulated several approaches designed to maintain its dominance and address threats that emerge. For instance, offshore balancing has provided the U.S with an opportunity to achieve balance in some part of the globe without overstretching the resource. This has been most evident in the Asia-Pacific region where strengthening allies and existence counteracts China’s over hegemonization by strengthening ties with Japan, South Korea and Australia. During the Cold War, that United States used the containment policy that aimed at halting communism through a military alliance, economic support, and propaganda crusade. This is done to the present day in efforts to control Iran’s nuclear capabilities and counter Russian aggression in Eastern Europe. An engagement and enlargement strategy have been primarily based on democracy and has mainly included new powers into the system in the post Cold War world. One can see international entanglement in the economy, for instance, with China as the epitome of this approach as the manner in which it tames competition through partnership.

However, the United States faces major obstacles regarding the implementation of a balanced foreign policy despite its vast resources. The shifts in global power structures where the emergence of multipolarity headed by China, Russia’s comeback as a strong power, and powerful and emerging regional power like India, Brazil amongst others make it difficult for countries to counter or adapt to making them develop new strategies. At home, political polarization, economic considerations, and public weariness with regime change limit Washington’s capacity to maintain a coherent foreign policy. Furthermore, there are new



forms of threat, like climate change, cyber security and transnational terrorism, which cannot be addressed through traditional means of soft, economic, military and diplomatic power.

William Phillips' article, U.S. Foreign Policy and the Military Instrument of National Power: This paper entitled, Military Power as an Instrument of America's Foreign Policy: Important Questions and a Model for Developing Military Engagement Recommendations. Phillips reviews how recourse to force helps accomplish goals at the national level and focuses on the issue of the appropriateness of the use of force. He also puts forward the military instrument decision model, which indicates the role of the military instrument in foreign policy initiatives and underlines the necessity to reconsider goals, values at risk, and possible outcomes of military action. The authors of the article stress the need to maintain proper correspondence between the use of armed force and overall politics and diplomacy in order to deploy military might in a competent and balanced manner and safeguard the American interests on the international level (Phillips, 2011)

A Baum analysis of how nationalism has influenced the foreign policy of United States of America after September 11, 2001 attack. Baum looks into the use of nationalism and patriotism in the United States to justify foreign policy and war, this he analyzes the role of nationalism in the American society into how the American nationalism was used to justify wars in the Middle East and the war on terror. He talks about how nationalism played a big part in instilling a spirit of American supremacy that then dictated security, diplomacy, and relations between countries. The study demonstrates that nationalism was at the center of the foreign policies of countries like the US in the post 9/11 context (Baum, 2015)

The attainment of a correct and balanced foreign policy in a country depends on the capability of the country in utilizing its National Power Resources well in comparison to the United States. Through the coordination of military, economic, and diplomatic power, as well as soft power, it has been able to overcome such challenges and sustain its status in the international system. However, present-day international politics are dynamic and require constant global positioning to identify the next best approach considering shifting alliances and new threats. To the policymakers it is of essence to understand how these components work hand in hand in managing the international relationship and in formulating policies to aid in balancing this complex world. The experience of the United States in managing foreign policy and maintaining interstate relations is useful for each state and can act as an example that other states should follow.

5. Conclusion

National power is an important and inherent factor that influences the effectiveness of a nation's foreign policy. There are basic principles that make the balance of foreign policy possible, and these principles envisage the utilization and efficiency of a state's military power, economic power, diplomacy, and soft power. Collectively, these sources of national power make up the instruments that a state engages in world politics with and use

to deter and deal with threats externally and hence asserts its power in the international system.

Thus, the experience of the United States is invaluable for an assessment of the practical use of national power in achieving the goal of a balanced foreign policy. Of all the global players, the United States' reliance on military, economic, and diplomatic strength provides valuable lessons for analyzing the foreign policy of both the major world powers and small and medium-sized states as well. For these states, the knowledge of how to manage change in the international system and how the elements of national power can be combined is critical in achieving state goals and establishing their position in a world that is gradually transforming.

As the power distribution system in the world goes through transformation, characterized by emergence of new powers, proliferation of risks, and changes of alliance, it becomes even more essential for states to balance their foreign policy. A balanced foreign policy is one where several key concepts apply: internal order, a state's security, and its initiatives and objectives with existing problems in the world. This delicate equilibrium will need to be maintained in order to preserve sovereignty, build cooperation, and project power in the international system. In the environment that is constantly becoming more diverse and unmanageable in terms of distribution of power the ability to harness the specific nation's power will always be valuable in achieving foreign policy objectives no matter the tier of the state.

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