

Power Politics and Welfare Thinking in International Relations

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1. Traditional Power Politics

For thousand years, foreign policy was mostly power politics: great powers wanted to dominate the weaker ones, emerging countries tried to establish a new balance of power, international relations were characterized by struggles for existence between states.

The competition among great powers was the main subject of books dealing with international relations. To cite only a few examples: Wolfgang Windelband published his book about „*The Foreign Policy of the Great Powers from 1441-1919*“ in 1922 with the following chapters:

- the preliminary battles for predominance in Italy (1494-1519)
- the fight against the predominance of Spain (1619-1659)
- the fight against the predominance of France (1659-1815)
- England dominating the world (1815-1919)

Paul Kennedy published his best-seller „*The Rise and Fall of Great Powers*“ in 1988 and put the following events at the centre of his theory:

- The Habsburg Bid for Mastery (1519-1659)
- Finance Geography and the winning of Wars (1616-1850)
- Industrialisation and the shifting Global Balances (1815-1885)
- The Coming of a Bipolar World and the Crisis of the Middle-Powers (1885-1918); (1919-1942)
- Stability and Change in a Bipolar World (1943-1980)

The literature about international relations was dominated by one subject, and that was power politics.

Even today, many history books are written the same way: Brendan Simms's book „*Europe – the struggle for supremacy from 1453 to the present*“ places the theme of “power” at the middle of his account. The first chapter of the book, entitled “Empires,” begins in 1453. In that year, the conquest of Constantinople brought the collapse of the Byzantine Empire, and the English had to abandon their empire in France.

Simms goes on to describe the power politics of Charles V., Louis XIV., Napoleon and many other rulers until today.

Ulrich Menzel from the Technische Universität Braunschweig published “*Die Ordnung der Welt*”, in 2015. Among the predominate states he distinguishes between empires and hegemons. He sought to demonstrate if a country was a hegemonic power or just an empire. Going back to the Song-Dynasty in China (960-1204) and Pax Mongolica (1230-1350) he asks if today the United States should be portrayed as a hegemonic power or an empire.

That shows that even today, foreign policy and history are almost exclusively presented as traditional power politics with traditional goals, traditional means, and traditional players.

The traditional **goals** of foreign policy were to safeguard the sovereignty of the state and to increase the power of the ruler. This was also its basic legitimacy. According to the teachings of Jean Bodin (†1536), the ruler was the sovereign. He was entitled to exert his power in his own discretion, towards his subjects, any other individuals and nations as well. The endeavour of the state to become more powerful was an essential element of the theory and the practice of international relations.

The traditional **means** of foreign policy were *Realpolitik*, *Raison d'état*, and war.

Realpolitik meant the reversal of values in the field of international relations.

Behavior, that in the private realm would be most strongly condemned, would be the highest honour if it served the power of the state: destroying, killing, plundering and waging war.

As the great philosopher Johann Gottlieb-Fichte put it: in dealing with other states there is no law that could hinder any action taken by our sovereign. The one in power is always right.

According to this way of thinking, deals among the monarchs were made without taking into consideration the needs of the people. Provinces and countries, like Poland, were divided and even disappeared from the map, according to the decisions of the Great Powers. The soldier and the diplomat acted jointly: after wars followed peace conferences. As soon as one questioned the newly established order, new wars could ensue.

An almost permanent series of wars was the consequence, if we only look at the “seven world wars” from the Spanish War of Succession to the Cold war. The traditional **players** were the monarchs: they considered themselves rulers by the grace of god. They demanded obedience for the sake of their dynasties; their rule quite often was based on censorship and suppression.

2. Welfare Thinking in International Relations

2.1 What does that mean?

Even if power politics is still an essential part of today’s international relations, a new dimension has developed, occupying an important place within the relations among nations: policies oriented towards an improvement in the standard of living of the people, increasing their welfare and their well-being; insuring human security and human development.

In some regions, like in Europe, those policies have become more important than the traditional endeavour to increase the power of the state. The promotion of the well-being of the people has become an essential part of foreign-policy legitimacy. In this respect foreign policy is primarily not oriented anymore towards the interest of the state, but towards the well-being of its citizens.

This development has become very evident beginning one generation ago: the sudden implosion of the communist system in Eastern Europe in the years 1989-1991 was in large part due to the fact that the standard of living was much higher in the West than in the communist East. The western way of life was much more attractive, especially for the young people: a “cultural revolution” had taken place in the West, not in the East.

The revolution in information and technology made it easier not only to communicate with one another, but also to compare the different economic and social systems. This comparison showed very clearly that the communists had no chance. The predictions of the party chairman Khrushchev in the early 1960 that the communist economies would overtake the west, utterly failed.

2.2 Three examples for welfare thinking in International Relations

- The diplomatic revolution in Europe
- The UN-System
- Globalization

2.2.1. The diplomatic Revolution in Europe

During the last two generations, since the founding of the Council of Europe in 1949, a revolution has taken place in European diplomacy, which has led to drastic changes regarding the goals, the means, and the participants in foreign policy among European states. Those changes also had major repercussions concerning the understanding of power and security.

As far as the **goals** are concerned, it is no longer the aim of foreign policy of a European country to increase the power of the state, but to support the welfare of the people. Foreign policy is now oriented towards the citizen, not the state. Connecting people has become a preeminent task of European diplomats.

The **means** of foreign policy are no longer *Realpolitik* and war. The founding members of the Council of Europe replaced power politics with common values like democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. Those values determine not only the internal structure of European states, but also the relations among themselves. Within the Council of Europe and within the European Union, confrontation was replaced by cooperation. The fields of cooperation include human rights, as well as the protection of the environment, education and employment policies, economic development, and security questions. Most internal political issues became international issues as well.

Traditional security was based on the sovereignty of the state and non-interference from the outside. The UN Charter of 1945 and the Helsinki agreement of 1975 still include those principles. Today, contrary to the principles of power politics, interference in internal affairs takes place concerning the monitoring and implementation of all treaties, regulations and directives concluded by the members of the Council of Europe and the EU.

Welfare thinking has replaced warfare. The logic of war was replaced by the logic of values and well-being.

There is no doubt that the EU has to face some grave difficulties concerning, for example, the Euro or migration. The fundamental reason for those difficulties lies certainly in the fact of “divided sovereignty”: the members of the EU abandoned national sovereignty, and the step towards European sovereignty was not taken. Member states gave up their national currency or their border control, but they were not able to create a common economic policy or a common policy for refugees and migrants.

In addition European aspirations quite often do not correspond to reality: CFSP should stand for common foreign and security policy, which in reality does not exist. CFSP never achieved more than a kind of crisis management. But in spite of all those difficulties the EU has opened a new area of international relations, as improving living standards has become more important than traditional power politics.

2.2.2. The United Nations system

The UN was founded after World War II, but the preliminary work was already done in the early 1940s and heavily influenced by the social and political development in the United States in the decade before: primarily by the New Deal. The UN established new foreign policy goals, which were oriented towards the well-being of the people. The improvement in economic and social conditions, and the promotion of human rights became an essential part of international relations. As Franz Schurmann put it, “the UN should provide security that would protect mankind not only from major wars but also from economic collapse.”

Thereby a new area of international relations was established. Economic and social questions like development and human rights became part of foreign power legitimacy. Franz Schurmann: “Security for the world had to be based on American power, exercised through an international system.” For the economic and social areas, a number of institutions were established, including the following:

- the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)
- UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF)
- UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)
- UN Development Programme (UNDP)
- UN Environment Programme (UNEP)
- World Food Programme (WFP)
- UN Found for Population (UNFPA)
- General Declaration of Human Rights 1948

All those new organizations developed a number of activities and organized international conferences on all levels, such as:

- World Conference “Education for all” (Jomtien 1990)
- World Population conference (Kairo 1994)
- World conference for Social Development (Copenhagen 1995)
- UN Habitat-Conference (Istanbul 1996)
- World Conference against Hunger (Rome 1996)
- Millenium-Summit (New York 2000)
- Conference on Development Financing (Monterry 2002)
- Conferences concerning the protection of the Environment (Rio-Kyoto-Johannesburg)

One could discuss at length what these conferences actually achieved. One thing can be said for sure: for many people who were informed about these conferences, from Latin America to Africa, and from Asia to the Pacific, one idea took hold - people were encouraged to be aware of what they are entitled to. People considered the international community to be responsible for their well-being and their fate.

A great number of **new players** support that drive for new goals in foreign policy. There are countless NGOs promoting human rights issues, development aid, or the protection of the environment. Additionally, the media, quite often acting in conjunction with those NGOs and the transnational companies, set their own agenda.

In the same way, regional and municipal authorities, traditionally concentrated on internal affairs, now form trans-border coalitions in order to promote their policies.

What has been achieved? The promotion of the wellbeing of the people has become an important part of international relations, equal to the questions of peace and security. The people's awareness of what they are entitled to, is prevalent and affects the internal situation of states and also the international cooperation. People all over expect help from the government and from the international community.

Governments and international organizations are judged according to the contribution they can make to achieve those goals.

Issues which in former times were exclusively an internal affair of a country have now become part of transnational discussions and international operations.

The Human Development Index and countless other statistics indicate to what extent personal wellbeing can be compared among different countries. The notion of "national interest" has changed: not only are questions of power and security part of it, but also the respect for values like human rights and the prosperity of the citizens.

2.2.3. The impact of Globalization

There is one decisive question concerning globalization: who wins and who loses? Advocates, as well as opponents, of globalization argue along the lines as to what impact it has on the wellbeing of the people. Which countries are affected in what way, or to what extent can social justice be achieved? The basic question, who profits from globalization, is relatively simple to answer: those who succeed in a world-wide competition, who can use global networks, who know how global mechanisms function. That can be a big pharmaceutical or car company, or also a tennis player or a musician, a global media conglomerate or McDonalds. There are countless statistics which indicate to what extent people profit from global developments or not. Global or regional trade agreements like TTIP (Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership) or TPP (Trans-Pacific Partnership) are analysed to what extent they affect the protection of the environment, working conditions, labour standards and human rights. To quite an extent, a "global empathy" has arisen, concerning natural catastrophes, violation of human rights or sometimes even personal casualties.

New instruments were developed to meet those challenges like the “responsibility to protect,” “humanitarian interventions,” or “regime change”. Sometimes it is not that easy to distinguish between the humanitarian nature of these instruments and their power political implementations. But the humanitarian dimension of international relations exists and is winning momentum. Welfare thinking has become an essential issue for the international community.

3. Power Politics Today

3.1 Power Politics continues to be relevant

There are power political contests and conflicts from the Near East to the Far East and from Central Africa to Central Asia. Sometimes it is possible to manage a crisis and on other occasions it is not. A deal was concluded with Iran; North Korea continues to build its atomic bombs. Some conflicts are frozen and others can break out again any day.

There are conflicts within the Islamic world, and there are conflicts with the Arabic world. Some even speak about a “Clash of Civilizations.” If the terrorist attacks of September 11th 2001 showed what kind of threats we could face in the future, the “war on terror” during the last 15 years, it is sad to say, can hardly be considered a success.

There are pirates, there are failed states, and there is organized crime, from drug trafficking to human trafficking. Only the trade in weapons amounted to \$100 billion in 2012.

And there is a special aspect to power politics: “American exceptionalism.” The United States constitutes the most powerful empire the world has seen since the Romans defeated the Carthaginians in the 2nd Punic War. America, as the chosen nation, plays a special role and has a special destiny. This belief is deeply rooted in American political thinking and goes back to the founding fathers and to puritanical, Calvinistic thinking.

Already one of the first governors of Massachusetts, John Winthrop, spoke of America as “the shining city upon the hill, a model of Christian virtue, which can lead

mankind in a Christian spirit”. George W. Bush was not the first who spoke about the “Axis of evil.” Three hundred fifty years before him, in 1656, Oliver Cromwell declared the fight against the Axis of evil as one of the prime objectives of English foreign policy.

Today, large parts of the US foreign policy establishment are very much convinced, that the US is and ought to be the only hegemonic power in the world. Across party-lines, Zbigniew Brzezinski, Henry Kissinger and Madeleine Albright are convinced, that America’s might should be the source of global security. In this sense, the US spends \$700 billion a year for defense, which is half of all the military spending in the whole world. And the US is ready to use its power. It maintains a force of 1.6 million soldiers; 500,000 of them are deployed abroad in 148 countries on 662 military bases.

Most important: the US sets the rules for itself and for others. Thereby the US attitude is basically different from what often is expected from other countries: the US insists on her sovereignty; is hardly willing to comply with decisions taken by international organisations, and its foreign policy is, if necessary, backed by the military.

In this context, one question is essential concerning international relations: should other countries like Russia, China or India be allowed to have their own national interests and their own sphere of influence? For example, the Russians concerning their “near abroad” or the Chinese in the South China Sea. If those rights are denied and anyone who dares to have dissenting interests is considered on “aggressor,” then the potential for new conflicts all over the world is great.

Every year, the US publishes reports which should show to what extent countries anywhere in the world live up to the rules set by America. Even if there are no immediate consequences, these reports demonstrate, to what extent a government can be considered a member of the “international community” or at least a potential ally. If former empires were mostly ruled by military power, the American Empire relies on rules enforced by Washington.

There are other changes concerning the exercise of power, mostly caused by the revolutions in information and education. Concerning power and security, there are

essential changes in 3 domains:

- there are new dimensions concerning the essence of security and power;
- it has become more difficult to win wars;
- often the theoretical concepts of peace-making do not turn into reality.

3.2. It has become more difficult to exert power

3.2.1. New dimensions of security and power

Exerting power means to force one's will upon someone else. After the revolutions in information and education during the last generations, which improved the knowledge especially of young people and made them quite often more defiant, it has become much more difficult to exert power.

For centuries, international security was to 90 per cent military security, whereas today it is only based on military strength to 10 per cent. In former times, there was one question which dominated international relations: security based on military power. Today many aspects of everyday life concern security, and also international security: from the protection of the standard of living to financial security, from health questions to the security of the environment; there are human rights and human security. All those questions can neither be solved nor decided on the battlefield; they can only be solved by cooperation.

The essence of power has changed in a similar way. Today there are a multitude of players who exert power as mentioned above NGOs, media and transnational corporations. It has become more difficult to legitimize power. Power as well, for hundreds of years was predominantly military power. But today - beside these new players - military power comprises only to 10 percent. In former times there was one issue dominating international relations: who was the strongest. And that issue could be decided on the battlefield. A military victory was at the same time a political victory. Today, a military victory does not mean that the will of the victor can be imposed.

In former times there was one player who exercised power: the monarch, supported by his generals and ministers. To a considerable extent the changes which took place in the international arena in recent years arose because new players have appeared. Besides the traditional actors, the nation states, new players have succeeded to use

their power and their influence. They have created a new way of thinking in which existing structures cannot stand up to the new pressures that have followed.

At the same time, people have become more critical and more defiant. Therefore, it has become much more difficult to exert power. Whereas in former times it was possible to command others, nowadays it is necessary to convince them.

3.2.2. It has become more difficult to win wars.

It has become much more difficult to win wars and to impose one's will upon someone else by military means. War has a physical component, to destroy, and a psychological-political component, to impose one's will. After the democratic revolutions and the information and education revolution people have become more defiant. It has become much more difficult to force one's will upon someone else. Thus, a multitude of issues in the fields of economics, environment or health cannot be solved by military means.

Today foreign policy is also guided by democratic principles. If we want to unite Europe, and if we want to improve the standard of living in the world, we have to appeal to the citizens. Today the formal legitimacy of any policy is based on elections; but the real legitimacy of foreign policy is to increase the welfare of the people by international cooperation. Today it has certainly become much more difficult to wage wars and practically impossible to solve problems by war. Wars nowadays take place in public: in front of the TV camera, observed by human rights NGOs, and they are linked to parliamentary hearings. If one can say that wars were decided up to 90% on the battlefield in former times, today they are only decided up to 10% on the battlefield. Considering the multitude of issues in today's international relations it has become very difficult to formulate clear goals for any war. If we take Afghanistan as an example: the American and Allied troops were ordered not only to destroy the Taliban, but also to improve the economic and social situation in the country, to safeguard women rights, and to set up new system for education. How should soldiers, who are trained "to be a killing machine," achieve all those goals? After the revolution in education and information, it has become almost impossible to defeat

ideas by military means.

More importantly, the home front, the environment at home, has drastically changed. There is a new concept of honour. In former times, even 10,000 casualties in one day were considered as “great” and a great honour for the country. Today, especially in Western countries, we have developed a zero-casualties mentality. Not even professional soldiers are supposed to die on the battlefield anymore. In some countries even the word “war” was replaced by other notions like “no fly zone,” “interventions,” or just that we have to “step in”.

Under these new circumstances problems can hardly be resolved by military confrontation. Military power has been reduced to only one part of the international security structure; many non-military issues can only be solved by cooperation. Security has developed a supra-national dimension. Under those circumstances it has become very unlikely to win a conventional war.

3.2.3. How successful are humanitarian interventions?

Only a few years ago some experts were euphoric and thought humanitarian interventions under the name of “peace-making”, “nation building” or “regime change” could establish a new area of safeguarding human rights. In the meantime the results achieved are rather disappointing:

- “peace making” was supposed to establish peaceful circumstances after internal strife or a civil war. Such effects were undertaken in countries like Afghanistan, in Bosnia, and in Kosovo. After years of military intervention and many billions of dollars spent, Afghanistan has no functioning political system, Bosnia is politically and economically bankrupt, and refugees are still pouring out of Kosovo
- The concept of nation building was also optimistic: historically “nation-building” in Europe took hundreds of years from the “Great Migration” to the Middle Ages. Some thought that could now be done within a few years, in Iraq, Somalia, or Haiti. But reality shows that it takes more to build a nation than money and a military. And a national identity cannot be established by law.
- In the same way “regime-change” was doomed to failure wherever it was attempted. Starting with the false conception that all the evil of a political system

is concentrated in one person-- in Siad Barre in Somalia, Saddam Hussein in Iraq or Muammar al-Gaddafi in Libya. Instigators of regime change were convinced that overthrowing one ruler would change a country. But that did not take into account national interests, ethnic divides, or regional characteristics. In most cases, the result was not the coming of a new democracy, but turmoil and chaos.

Does it matter how we see the world, from a power political and military viewpoint or from a perspective of welfare-thinking? This is certainly not a theoretical question and matters quite a lot. A leader who sees the world as it has been for 1000 years, will always prefer a power politics/military view-point. Someone who concentrates on the personal well-being of the people, also in international relations, will give priority to negotiations and reconciliations.

In Europe a “Diplomatic Revolution” has taken place. The “Logic of War,” prevalent for more than 1000 years, was replaced by a logic of values and property. With 7% of the world population, the EU has become a zone of peace and consumes 50% of the world social expenditures. The “old continent” has become a leader in many ways: from implementing human rights to protecting the environment and from quality of life to human security. The argument that Europe does not count anymore in international relations because its military is weak is not shared by those who find the European way of life attractive. There are certainly millions of people all over the world who want to improve their way of life and expect international relations to make contributions to achieve this objective.

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