

//Enfoques//

**POWER IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS:  
SEARCHING FOR A NEW THEORETICAL  
FRAMEWORK FOR POWER ANALYSIS**

**Part III \***

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In the first article of this series we have introduced the debates on the ontology of power, while in the second one we have presented the main epistemological approaches of the different paradigms. In this third and final article we will deal with methodological schemes for *Power Analysis* in IR, while indicating areas for possible innovation using the “Arab Spring” cases as illustrations.

***Power, Outcomes, and what brings them together***

As we have seen in the last part, the contribution made by Barnett and Duvall with *taxonomy of four dimensions of power* is very helpful as theoretical framework; nevertheless, it is still weak to implement as a methodological tool - it is very difficult to distinguish in a real case what is originated through the structure or the actor, as well as to measure if the specificity is direct or diffuse.

But the same could be expressed about the majority of the mentioned schemes. In fact, Dahl itself warned about the difficulties of combining variables to compare *power relations* and argued that it depends on the requirements of the research.<sup>1</sup> This complexity is even larger when normative factors are included; for example, despite the proposal of Nye of measuring *soft power* through polls and focus groups, he also cautioned about the limits of the intangible variables.<sup>2</sup> Hurt addresses certain ways of skipping the difficulties in measuring the power of legitimacy, such as examining: the rates of compliance, the reasons given for compliance and for non-compliance, the support given by the centers of Power and the need for legitimacy argument (akin to a counterfactual technique).<sup>3</sup> But, once again, no combined power relations framework is presented.

In addition, Lukes argues that *power* depends on the “significance“ of the outcomes, namely, in the capacity of affecting the interests of the agents. He refers to two methods: by changing incentives structures (*indoctrination*) and by influencing interests (*subject freedom*). However, Lukes confesses that the main question remains open: how to use certain power to shape certain preferences?<sup>4</sup>

In conclusion, in these approaches no *power relation* mechanism explains, in a measurable way, how material and normative resources are combined to shape power and influence decisions. Therefore, I would like to subsequently suggest a very simple framework that may allow us to implement the knowledge mentioned hitherto to study specific cases in IR.

In line with the majority of the authors, in order to make *power* measurable I consider that we have to divide it in two variables: *material power* (or simply *Power*) and *legitimation power* (or *legitimacy*). In international politics, the *power* of an actor is expressed by its military (backed-by-economical) resources, and for the scheme it would receive “high” or “low” values. The *legitimacy* of the actors, which is based on their capacity to be perceived as norms-compliers and to build consensus around them<sup>5</sup>, would receive also “high” or “low” values.

A *power analysis* based on the combination of those two variables, as it is shown below in *illustration I*, leads us to the taxonomy of four types of cases, each one ascribed to an “outcome”. It is important to clarify that, for this paper, the outcomes would reflect the domestic situation of the main agent (the State) given an international system; it is a sort of *outside-in analysis* if we take into account Gourevitch’s *second image reversed*.<sup>6</sup> Further work has to be done to adapt this scheme so as to explain the conduct of the State *vis-à-vis* other States as well as to include the domestic sphere of legitimacy.

The first actor, which has high power and high legitimacy, could describe his situation as “*stable*”; that means, the actor would overcome the domestic and external challenges without internal changes and high international costs.

The second actor, having high power but low legitimacy, is considered to be in a “*changeable*” situation. Although this actor is capable of overcoming internal and external challenges, due to the fact that it lacks of support from the other actors he could suffer from high international costs and possibly domestic changes.

*Illustration I – Taxonomy of Power-Legitimacy outcomes*

<b>POWER</b>	<b>High Power</b>	<b>Low Power</b>
<b>LEGITIMACY</b>		

<b>High Legitimacy</b>	“STABLE”	“PROTECTABLE”
<b>Low Legitimacy</b>	“CHANGEABLE”	“REVOLUTIONABLE”

To the third actor, which has low power but high legitimacy, his situation is defined as “*protectable*”. Due to his incapacity to overcome alone the internal and external challenges, this actor may count on the support of other actors to reduce the possibility of domestic changes; otherwise he will suffer from it.

The fourth actor, with low power and low legitimacy, is placed in a “*revolutionable*” situation; that means, this actor is candidate to suffer from internal changes and high international costs at the time he would face challenges.

### ***Testing the Power Analysis framework with the “Arab Spring”***

The phenomenon known as the “*Arab Spring*”, composed of dozens of countries in which massive protests were held, constitutes an outstanding test for the theory. A large quantity of those cases happened in a very short range of time, with all the variety of domestic conditions, reactions from the regime and from the world, as well as different outcomes. This makes those events ideal for the present examination; even though it is just a “sample” of a more deeply study.<sup>7</sup>

Although no State of those that suffered uprisings is considered in a “*stable*” situation at all, Saudi Arabia and Jordan could be mentioned as good examples of Arab countries that combined high *power* (relatively, of course) and high *legitimacy*. Their regimes faced the uprisings from the beginning (mid-January 2011), but were capable of overcoming the internal challenges through a combination of repression and reforms, without suffering changes in their regime and being supported by the international community.

Egypt is probably the best representation of a country whose regime kept high *power* at the moment of facing domestic challenges but received low *legitimacy* from the world; this “*changeable*” situation caused drastic changes at the top of the leadership (including the president, ministers, etc), albeit not of the whole regime (still leaded by the Military Council). Syria seems to be in a similar situation; while the power of the regime is still high, the legitimacy is not low enough to bring to major changes due to the sustained

support of Russia, China and Iran. As a result, Syria constitutes today an excellent test for the power of legitimacy (and norms) in international politics.

Between those countries that experienced a combination of low power and high legitimacy, experiencing a “*protectable*” situation, it is possible to mention Bahrain. Despite its regime was not capable of overcoming the internal revolts alone, it counted with the support of most of the Arab countries in the repression, and the Western approval of the “regional intervention” leaded by Gulf countries around the GCC. Yemen was in a comparable position, but at the end of 2011 the legitimacy of its regime was reduced when the region and the world understood the necessity to remove the President to maintain the remaining, in what was denominated later “the Yemenite option”.

Finally, Libya constitutes the case in which the regime was in a “*revolutionable*” situation, owing to its low *Power* to contain the rapid domestic rebellion and its low legitimacy after the first days of tremendous repression. The international costs were so high that included a military intervention leaded by NATO (with the endorsement of the Arab League), that led to the total collapse of the regime. It is possible to say that Tunisia was in an analogous situation while it did not need for a civil war and an external intervention to consummate finally a revolution (i.e., the complete removal of the existing regime).

## ***Conclusions***

Throughout the paper we were able to observe that the ontological, epistemological and methodological discussions about the complex concept of *Power* maintain their relevance in the main schools of IR, and in some cases even constitute an essential part of their latest developments.

At the same time, the inter-paradigmatic efforts of the last decades are demanding *newpower analysis* approaches; that means, theoretical schemes that would embed a combination of the different factors at stake (material and non-material, resources and interactions, agents and structures) to specific cases of study.

Deeper examinations of the “*Arab Spring*” cases need to be implemented so as to confirm the presented findings, as it was previously said. However, these small samples could possibly reveal that the implementation of a framework that combines both material and non-material resources is possible and, even more, desirable, to a better understanding of the devices of *power* in IR.

- 2 Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power- The Means to Success in World Politics*. p.6
- 3 Ian Hurd, "Legitimacy and Authority in International Politics". *International Organization* 53No2 (Spring 1999), 390-391
- 4 Stephen Lukes, "Power and the Battle for Hearts and Minds", p.492
- 5 This short definition is based on concepts presented in Ian Clark, "Legitimacy in International Society" (London: Oxford University Press, 2005). It includes components both from the structure and the agent.
- 6 Peter Gourevitch, "The second image reversed – the international sources of domestic politics" *International Organization* 32 No4, (Autumn 1978), 881-911.
- 7 An investigation is "under construction", called "*The Arab League and its legitimation role in the Arab Spring*". It focuses on the power of the Arab League to yield legitimacy (or not) in six different cases.

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