

BABEȘ-BOLYAI UNIVERSITY CLUJ-NAPOCA
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DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

**The Power Statute in the International System post-Cold
War. The USA and the unilateralism**

(SUMMARY)

Scientific advisor:

(Prof. dr.) Vasile Pușcaș, PhD

Candidate:

Dan-Ionu □ Cristea

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Power, by means of its role in the International System, has been raising a significant and constant interest, generating debates and controversies among the scholars of political sciences, materialised in a diversity of theoretical approaches to measure its importance. More than a few of these have been marked by the ambiguous nature of power. The topic is particularly interesting, triggering an analysis of power and its distribution in the International System at a time when power is experiencing important transformations after the break-up of the Soviet Union. The dissolution of the Soviet Union has left the United States as a single world superpower whose force cannot be equaled by any other power in history under military, economic and technological aspects. Moreover, at that time, the disparities between the USA and the other states of the world were at their peak. The international system changed almost overnight, experiencing swift and unprecedented transformations. The void created by the Soviet collapse transformed the USA into an indispensable nation during the last decade of the 20th century. The USA were called upon to interfere in each and every continent as if they had been given the mission to solve the differences, punish the villains and remedy all injustices, always as a main actor.

Keeping in mind the particular context of the post-Cold War international system which characterised the relationships, priorities and the course of action of the actors within the system, we based our research on the premise that the main factor of international politics leading inevitably to tensions, crises and conflicts among the actors of the international system is the permanent struggle for power. Today, two main tendencies are present in the world: on the one hand, there is a tendency of the big international actors to exercise their power locally, regionally or globally; on the other hand, there are the games of power consisting in efforts by some states to leave the sphere of influence of other states and reposition themselves in other schemes, with a belief that they can defend and promote their own interests directly and more efficiently. Although the influences and contexts have been diverse and very different, the fundamental nature of international relations has not altered over time, but they continued to be uninterrupted struggles for resources and power among the independent actors of an anarchic system.

Analysing the act of power, our research objectives are to find answers to several questions, such as: How has the international system changed after the end of the Cold War? How is 'power' analysed by the main theories of International Relations? What are the most efficient methods of analysing power? How have the main types of 'power' evolved since 1990 and how much do the new power variables weigh in the new games of power? What is the reaction of the United States to the numerous transformations of the international system? Is there a relationship between the unilateralism and the multilateralism embraced alternatively by the United States and the changes suffered by power in the same timeframe?

The structure of the dissertation is a standard one:

- Introduction: motivation of the choice of topic, presentation of the methods used;
- Summary of the specialized literature and theoretical considerations: conceptual analysis of the notion of 'power', methods of analyzing power in the International System, contemporary paradigms and the notion of power in the International System, elements of power;
- Case-study: the position of the USA in relation to the transformations experienced by the International System post-Cold War, the influence of unilateralism and the transition to multilateralism, the reconfiguration of the distribution of power in the International System, the evolution of the developing states;
- Conclusions (considerations on the dissertation).

The first chapter presents the concept of power in the main paradigms of the International Relations theory. After analysing the contemporary paradigms of the study of International Relations, we have concluded that there are few converging assumptions or features of power. Power is a very controversial concept, with similar interpretations in some cases, but lacking a common base. However, there is a very clear aspect agreed by scholars: although the centrality of power is indisputable, the attempts to accurately define and measure power did not yield the expected results. Studying the literature of International Relations has revealed to us that the concept of power is a central concern of scholars, independent of the different schools of thought. Considered for a long time a concept monopolized by realism, 'power' has gained new meanings due to the diversification of theoretical approaches. A factual-based analysis reflecting historical

realities is compulsory in any research endeavor which attempts to present the international system or to formulate predictions. Precision is a must in a context where the international system is undergoing essential transformations and when theories are forced to find the most appropriate interpretations and analyses. Yet, the difficult adaption to the realities of the international system appears when the schools of thought prefer to stay focused on the concept of 'power' from their own point of view. The new realities require new instruments and a higher tolerance to the opinions that the researcher, faced with contemporary realities, considers false from the start only because they are issued by different schools of thought. Also, in the first chapter we focus on the relevance of the balance of power in the evolution of the contemporary international system, as well as on the importance of institutional cooperation.

The second chapter identifies the methods of analyzing power in the international system, the levels at which this analysis can be carried out and some of the contemporary analyses of power and their results. We aimed at identifying and presenting the main attempts of analyzing power over time, and the necessary analytical tools for analyzing power. We believe that there are no universal methods of analyzing power, but rather directions of research according to the concept of power underlying the analysis and tools specific to a certain facet of power and the space under analysis.

The third chapter analyzes the American power politics post-Cold War and the main factors which influenced it, such as the impact of the preemptive war doctrine on the American power. We sustain that the United States will protect their own interests using either military, or economic or political instruments and will prioritize their national interest above ideals, principles or ethics, no matter what politics they pursue. The doctrine of preemptive war reinvented by the Bush administration and the impulse to promote democracy beyond the US borders remained specific actions of the American power politics.

In the beginning of the second part of the dissertation we analyze the modification of the statute of military power in the calculations of power, as well as the need for an American leadership in solving contemporary global problems. We sustain that the modifications of power in the 21st century will change not only the importance of military power, but also the resources which support it. The United States refused to understand this and continued to invest massively in this type of power. The investments are justified if we assume that the United States are involved at global level and that military power is

probably the most important variable of the American power. Economic resources can yield military power, as well as a behaviour specific to 'soft power'. Economic success can finance military resources not only for exercising hard power, but also for convincing the others to follow up, like in the case of the United States and the European Union immediately after the end of the Cold War. Although economic resources have become increasingly important, it would be wrong to think that military power is no longer an important variable in the power designs. Even if history reaches an 'end', and the use of force among democratic states is becoming less probable, the great impact of such an event would turn the state leaders in the system more responsible about becoming secure from a military point of view. Modern states own the monopoly of the legitimate use of force, and most of contemporary situations make the use of force a last resort. However, even if military power has lost some of its relevance, it will always remain an essential component of power.

The fifth chapter presents the increase in the American unilateralism after 1990, and the advantages and disadvantages it creates, starting from the different geopolitical stakes lost by the United States until the much debated American decline. Under these circumstances, an honorable solution is to choose multilateralism instead of solitary actions, a transition only partially deliberate. At present, the American reconversion into intelligent power seems to be the only possibility of keeping the primacy of power within the international system.

The sixth chapter briefly presents cyber power, a new and less known variable of power, and its impact on international relations. A recurring idea in this dissertation is that power also depends largely on the context in which it exists and can be exercised. This characteristic can be speculated by those who wish to improve the arsenal of their power capabilities by using cyber or virtual power. Cyber power is also a tool at the hand of smaller actors, state and non-state, because its costs are relatively low, and if used smart, it can bring benefits of 'hard' and 'soft' power which would be difficult to obtain in a traditional way. The characteristics of the virtual space and of cyber power can contribute to reducing and recalibrating the gaps of power among actors, which stands out as a good example of what the diffusion of power means at the beginning of the 21st century.

In the end, the dissertation focuses on the fulminant evolution of some states which have been constantly or only briefly in the second range of world powers. We presented

the state-members of the BRIC group (Brazil, Russia, India and China), insisting on their huge economic potential. The dissertation ends with the conclusions of the research.

Soon after the 9/11 events, the mutations of power and the numerous events in the international system have lead, one by one, to abandoning multilateralism and conflict management through institutional tools, a characteristic of the last decade of the 20th century, in favor of the unilateralism rooted in American exceptionalism. The realist transition of the early 21st century was the appropriate response given in hard times, even if the motivation of unilateral actions was not entirely justified. The Obama administration, although often realist, is solving the dilemma of legitimacy created by the anarchic nature of the international system, as well as the American responsibilities for the national interest and the international liberal order which requires the (occasional) use of the power of the United States. Hence, the aggressive American unilateralism is replaced by an ideological and pragmatic multilateralism which supports the international institutions and respects international law, a multilateralism which is neither easy nor always efficient, but pragmatic. No matter what approach they choose, the United States have to reconsider their role in the international system as a smart power, capable of facing the challenges of the 21st century by means of actions which do not harm them, nor the other actors they collaborate with. It is a difficult mission knowing that the American power politics could not put its own interests behind those of the international community.

Among the theories dealing with the issue of power in the international system, institutional neoliberalism best anticipated the present evolution of power in the international system. An innovation of institutional neoliberalism is the particular attention that this paradigm pays to other forms of power apart from the traditional military power. For neorealists, the military power is the most important element of power, whereas for realists the hierarchy of power resources requires a single hierarchy of world powers in all fields, with the most powerful states owning the highest military capabilities. According to neoliberal institutionalists, there is more than one single hierarchy of power resources, and the states use different power resources to influence the results according to the area of their interest. Hence, it is a different and more complex conception than the realist one with regard to what types of resources can be considered power resources.

The approach taken by institutional neoliberalism in relation to power goes beyond the military dimension, but still considers it particularly important. However, it refutes the analysis of power strictly in terms of resources and its correlation to military force. The

next step was made by Joseph S. Nye who defined in a different manner the power potential and the manifestation of power, putting forward the concepts of *hard power* and *soft power*. These concepts make a first clear distinction between power as manifestation or the ability to obtain the results expected and power as resources. If military force and economic power are both examples of hard power based on *sticks and carrots*, there is another indirect way of exercising power. Thus, a country can have the results it intends in the world politics without using military force and threats, because other countries wish to follow its example and admire its values. Luring the other without coercion and making it act according to your own interests is known as *soft power*.

One of the main problems underlined in this dissertation is the unsteadiness of the specialized literature in the analysis of power. The power statute in the international system is still perceived as a reflection of military force or, more accurately, as a conversion of military power and of resources into power as influence. Not long ago, many researchers found concepts like ‘unipolar’ or ‘empire’ not expressive enough to describe the American power in the international system. The management of Iraq after the second Gulf war and the inability to control the insurgent Iraqi forces prompted most of the academic sphere to declare that the United States lost their superpower statute and that the dissolution of international order is a fact. To a certain extent, the latter part of the statement is true, but, in the event that material aspects are the cause, the entire plea referring to the insignificance of the material aspects in the analysis of power becomes merely a good rhetorical exercises, though untrue. On the one hand, the decreasing importance of military power and power as resources is largely discussed, but, on the other hand, China is seen as an ascending power, unanimously declared the future superpower in the International System. The criteria for choosing China to succeed the United States are mainly economic and are based on indexes of power as resources. This analytical reality has been referred to also by Professor Nye in many of his studies on the topic of power in international relations. The above-mentioned approach of power proves that power is still perceived by means of tangible and intangible resources, because the world sees the resources above all.

The United States must reconsider their role in the international system as a *smart power*, capable of facing the challenges of the 21st century. The use of institutions and cooperation could allow the United States, from the position of the most powerful actor in the system, to preserve and enhance their power.