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# The Role Of Power In War, Peace, And Cooperation

Control, influence, and power have always been the topics of choice of important philosophers and thinkers. Machiavelli spoke of it, so did Aristotle and Foucault. The abuse of power, as well, has been a popular topic to debate; George Orwell (1949) depicted the deliberate misuse and exploitation of power and status in his dystopian novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, where portrayals of oppression and tyranny are described as ordinary in a nation that believes, under the influence of an authoritarian government, that "ignorance is strength, freedom is slavery, and war is peace". A similar picture to the one Orwell painted in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is becoming more prominent today because of the ongoing misuse of power and the prevalence of the state of surveillance.

In *The Prince* (1532), Machiavelli acknowledged the indispensable importance of power in maintaining peace of a nation state; " He who neglects what is done for what ought to be done, sooner effects his ruin than his preservation; for a man who wishes to act entirely up to his professions of virtue soon meets with what destroys him among so much that is evil." He then follows it up by justifying the need of manipulative power in leadership, "Hence it is necessary for a prince wishing to hold his own to know how to do wrong, and to make use of it or not according to necessity."

The doctrine of Machiavelli denies the relevance of morality in the political arena, and clearly supports the statement "the end justifies the means" since the 'end' in this case is the maintenance of one's power and position. Machiavelli did not advocate for pursuing evil for the sake of evil, but rather when the only way maintain power is through acting immorally, one must. U.S. diplomat Adolfe A. Berle refers to *The Prince* in his book *Power* (1969) as the "greatest single study of power on record."

However, not all individuals in power follow the Machiavellian doctrine, some abuse their power to influence others, some to promote peace or war, and others to strengthen cooperation.

## Definition of Power

Power is a relative concept, and a few definitions have been constructed for it. According to Robert A. Dahl (1957), political theorist and Sterling Professor of Political Science at Yale, power is defined in terms of a relation between people, and is "expressed in simple symbolic notation". From this definition, a statement of power comparability is developed, or the relativity of power held by two or more persons, animals, or inanimate objects. While Max Weber (1922) describes power as "the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests". In simple words; power is an entity's capability to take upon actions or behave in a certain way that would render all rejection and criticism against it vain and unsuccessful.

## Characteristics of Power

There are several characteristics of power, but they mainly boil down to these four elements:

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1. Power is contextual: People have to conform to rules imposed by a President or a higher authority because the entity in power is in a position to dictate.
  2. Power is dependant on relationships: People trust a certain individual, entity, or party enough to grant them authority over their actions. (e.g. citizens of a country elect a certain President because they trust in his or her ability to bring positive change to the state.)
  3. Power is based on beliefs: People elect certain individuals because they promise to maintain their platform and their ideologies in the rhetoric of their leadership. (e.g. Conservatives vote Republican because the Republican party adheres to their conservative beliefs)
  4. Power is relative and is a derivative of interdependence: People acknowledge that they give power to other people, because they realize that those in power are dependent on whoever gives them power. This symbiosis can bring about co-operation and peace.

### Luke's Three Dimensions of Power

According to Steven Lukes (1974), there are three faces or dimensions to power. The first face of power is the "open face" or the decision-making aspect of power. This involves the ability of direct influence that is acknowledged by the subject. An example of this would be an employer prohibiting his or her employees from smoking. The second face of power is the non-decision making face or the "agenda-setting face", which is covert in nature, where the political agenda is established and the decision-making aspect of power is predetermined by the use of influence. A follow up example would be an employer forbidding smoking because a lobbyist convinced an official to pass a bill which forbids smoking in the workplace. The third and final face is the "ideological power face", which is often times deceptive and dependent on manipulation, where the ideas of people are shaped and formed in ways that could be counter-productive to their own interests. When an assumption on how things "should be" becomes an inherent way of thinking within a society, even when it could harm the majority yet grant the interest of a few select individuals, all three faces of power would be in effect. If all aspects of power are utilized, a nation-state could be influenced to behave in a way that they are wrongfully-convinced is beneficial to them or believe that certain things are objectively good. Those in control usually understand the forth characteristic of power (that is Power is relative and is a derivative of interdependence) and seek to adopt all three dimensions of power so that it's difficult to the average person point out the interdependency, maintaining their authority. Normally when this level of power is achieved, reverting the effect of years of indoctrination tends to be difficult and will be met with severe backlash because of the effective impact of conditioning.

### The Thucydides Trap

Power can promote both peace and war; the former through mutually assured destruction (MAD) where the stakes are too high to engage in a war, thus leaving nation-states in a state of peace through anxiety-induction, and the latter through a what Graham T. Allison (2017) referred to as a "Thucydides Trap", in which a rising power threatens to displace a prominent, ruling one, resulting in the eruption of war. 12 out of the 16 Thucydides Trap instances that occurred ended in war, only 4 having the conflict averted. Allison quotes Thucydides in *The History of the Peloponnesian War*: "It was the rise of Athens and the fear that this instilled in Sparta that made war inevitable". The figure provided depicts the instances of countries falling victim to the Thucydides trap and the results of the power-threats.

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Former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger addressed the Thucydides Trap, dubbing it “a cardinal challenge to world order”. Order and peace in this case would be the result of avoiding a Thucydides Trap.

A century ago, the rise of Germany against the well-established and dominant power of Britain, along with the assassination of Austro-Hungarian Archduke Franz Ferdinand serving as a trigger, prompted the first World War. Today, the United States of America, which is very accustomed to being the ruling power, feels threatened by the rapid rising power of China. The former U.S. President, Barack Obama, acknowledged this issue, and explained that he seeks the same strategy adopted by 20th century America when they were a rising power threatening the United Kingdom; finding common grounds through mutual national interests to avoid war and conflict. Chinese President Xi Jinping stated that he doesn't believe in the existence of a Thucydides trap, but rather that it's the mistake of recurring strategic miscalculation of nation-states.

Allison explains that the current U.S. President feels threatened by China, he reasons that President Trump's campaign slogan “Make America Great Again” is an allegation that America was once great, but no longer is, and infers the role that China plays in this implication. In this narrative, the inevitable rise of China's power brings about the possibility of war. Machiavelli (1532) states that “there is no avoiding war, only postponing it”.

## Power and Corruption

In 1971, the Psychology Department at Stanford University conducted a prison experiment; young college men were arbitrarily divided to play the roles of prisoners and guards to study the impact of the perception of power. A single day into the experiment and the subjects forgot that they were participating in an experiment for \$15 a day, the role they were playing was real to them. The unrestrained power assigned to the subjects playing the role of guards made them brutish and violent, corrupted them, and resulted in the early termination of the experiment (6 days out of 14) after several “prisoners” experienced emotional breakdowns, psychosomatic rashes, and refused food.

Philip Zimbardo, one of the head researchers and supervisors of the experiment, writes that individuals acted according to a preconditioned universalized version of prisoners and guards. The morality and ethics of the guards changed drastically because of the virtual power that they were granted. MP John Emerich Edward Dalberg-Acton's quote (Letter to Archbishop Mandell Creighton, 1887) comes to mind when citing this experiment; “Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Great men are almost always bad men.”

Other forms of power abuse and corruption can be observed when officials misuse their positions to promote ideologies, gain favours, and even to maintain their ranks and standings. According to Transparency International, corruption is defined as “the abuse of entrusted power for private gain, and falls under 3 classifications; grand, petty, and political, depending on the amount of money lost or laundered and what sector the corruption occurred at”. These classifications are defined as follows:

1. Grand Corruption: High-profile power abuse that brings profit and benefit to a few at the expense and harm of many and causes detriment on a large scale to individuals and society. It's worth noting that it regularly goes unpunished.

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2. Petty Corruption: The abuse of entrusted power by public officials through their interaction with citizens. This type of corruption is prevalent at hospitals, police departments, schools, and other basic goods and services agencies.
  3. Political Corruption: The abuse of power done by political decision-makers, mainly in the process of allocating funds and resources, in order to sustain their status, power, and wealth.

Infamous examples of these instances, also referred to as influence peddling, are prevalent in history; from President Nixon's 1970 Watergate and John McCain's 2008 Lobbying scandal to Hillary Clinton's 2016 private email server scandal to cardinals and priests entangled in paedophilic sex-cults, and several other instances where those in power do not feel afflicted using immoral and unethical tactics and strategies for their own personal gain.

To conclude, power has been proven to corrupt and shed away morality from individuals. The sadistic aspects of human nature come to light when people are given high authority and unrestrained freedom, as was the case of the 1971 Stanford Prison Experiment. However, it's been noted and observed in several instances that power does not corrupt inevitably; it is very wrong to assume that all those who are in positions of power are corrupt prima facie, as this implies the logical fallacy of "burden of proof", rendering one's assumption and argument futile.

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