

CATACHRESIS, INTERNATIONAL POLITICS AND MILITARY POWER

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to explain how intangible factors interfere with military power employment. In order to achieve this purpose, discourse analysis was brought as a theory and method to understand the exercise of power and politics in military issues. Throughout the article, it was shown that military power matters, but not for all purposes. The division of international politics into issue-structures provides a field to apply discourse analysis and to understand issues related to the use of military power.

Key words: Coercion. Military power. Politics. Discourse Theory.

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INTRODUCTION

This article uses Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's discourse theory to analyze politics and military power. Why the two concepts and why discourse theory? War is considered by Clausewitz as the continuation of politics by other means. Given this position, it doesn't matter what type of use is being made of military power, politics will continue to be the driving force to war. In turn, military power is also an intriguing issue, sometimes seen as the *ultima ratio* to achieve political goals. Nonetheless, its effectiveness has been debated by the Academy raising questions on whether it's useful for all purposes. Both subjects, nevertheless, are frequently understood with a Realist background as if security issues could be explained only by Realist approaches.

This article restricts its scope to analyze military power in its deterrent and coercive use. It is not concerned with the use of brute force in which military power is used in such a way that the options to the enemy are eliminated and there is no other way but to go to an armed conflict. Another point to consider is that in the deterrent and coercive use of military power, survival is not at stake because if it were the case, all costs would outweigh the fighting waged by the countries involved.

This paper has two goals, which are:

A) To demonstrate that intangible factors interfere with the understanding of power and politics; and

B) To argument that Discourse Theory has greater explanatory power than Contemporary Realism and Neoliberal Institutionalism to analyze the use of military power.

Why those types of concern? First of all, for the most part of Contemporary Realists, States seek to augment their power for granting security. For them, mainly offensive realists and neorealists, power is defined in material terms, discarding any intangible aspect as irrelevant. The post-structuralist approach using discourse as theory and method comes to present a tool capable of analyzing intangible components.

Discourse theory comes out as a way to recognize the value of

intangible factors during the analysis of politics and power. More specifically, this article chose discourse analysis as a tool for understanding the *meaning* given to those topics and the consequences to the way countries understand and wage war nowadays. The concern with *meaning* is due to the fact that for a discourse analyst *meaning* precedes facts; behavior is the result of how people interpret what is ongoing around them. Meaning represents not only reasons for believing but also reasons for acting expressed in an epistemological analysis of knowledge. The theory of discourse used in this article is based on the fact that all the meanings are relational and that to construct a hegemonic discourse, a *nodal point* needs to exist in order to universalize some subject as legitimate. For that reason, this process of hegemony can be compared with rhetorical devices like *catathresis*, a figural term which cannot be substituted by a literal one (for instance: when somebody talks about the *leg of a chair*). Subjects like democracy, justice, peace and people, among others, due to their *emptiness* can be used as *nodal points* to catalyze some ideas around them and then create a hegemonic discourse that starts being considered as natural, normal or as a historical necessity. Thus, *catathresis* is more than a rhetorical device and more than an adornment to language. The fact of naming what is essentially unnamable is what happens in a hegemonic discourse in which the *nodal point*, due to its *emptiness*, can exercise the role of universalizing meanings and making them legitimate. Therefore, the political construction of meanings is essentially *catathrestical*.

A theory is not only a formal model with hypotheses and constructs. It constitutes, first of all, in a simplifier instrument allowing the decision on which factors really matter or not. Theories are not an option. It cannot be said, alleging pragmatism that someone doesn't want to concern with theories, but to stick to the facts. That's impossible. The only way to decide which fact, among millions of possible facts, should be studied in military issues is to adhere to some simplifier instrument that says which facts really matter or not. Pragmatics usually are unaware that they are impregnated of implicit theories and that, for a long time, have seen international politics and the use of military power with bias.

I consider that the epistemological debate is between positivists and interpretists.² Positivists understand that Natural Science laws are akin to Social Science laws. Universal laws in terms of time and space, and

² Interpretist is a term coined by Marsh and Furlong in *Theory and Methods in Political Science* (2002).

without dependence of men are capable to explain what happens in societies. Ontologically, positivists are foundationalists, believing in the independency between subject and object. The interpretists, in turn, believe it does not exist a world out there independent of the observer. The social phenomena exist not naturally, or in a determined way; they are contingent. Their understanding comes from interpretations or meanings attributed to the facts. Therefore, it's not possible to establish causal relations between phenomena that cross time and space. Those distinctions are important because researchers cannot take one position at one time for one project and another on other situations for a different project. These perspectives are not interchangeable because they reflect fundamental different approaches to what Social Science is and how we do it.

The use of military power has been analyzed by Strategic Studies researchers. To defend Strategic Studies doesn't imply a Realism defense. Some elements of Realism would deserve to be kept while others, updated. An aspect, for instance, would be the belief that the main international events can be largely explained by the systemic structure, by which States zeal for their own security. There would be a place for a non-dogmatic Realism to recognize the importance of non-State actors and the impact of values and mental constructs over the State behavior. The Realist tradition describing power as the possession of substantial resources, like richness and military capacity, wouldn't resist to the fact that good military strategies could get considerable political effects using scarce material resources. Strategic Studies are an interdisciplinary activity based on decision processes and on power; its limits, therefore, cannot be restricted to only one academic discipline, such as Realism.

According to Neorealism, countries seek to balance power among them and for this reason they resort to alliances and war to hamper the emergence of a hegemon. The concern with survival is a relevant factor that leads the countries to focus on relative gains in their relations, what practically restrain cooperation between them given that they don't want merely to gain, but to gain more than the other. For some realists, International Relations (IR) are a game of zero sum because the gain of one entails necessarily the loss of the other.

Nevertheless, the assessment of balance of power is not an easy task. Several factors may interfere in this evaluation, making this activity inaccurate. Likewise, some realists warned not to stick to only one aspect of power underestimating the others as this could cause a wrong assessment

of power. There are some aspects that add to power intangible dimensions that go beyond the analysis based on material resources.

Analyzing the relation between factors that interfere in the success of coercion, I understand that States being object of coercive use of power takes into consideration the likely costs and benefits to maintain their resistance. This probabilistic aspect results from the perception or belief by the target State that the threat will be fulfilled. Therefore, the mere possession of material resources cannot be considered as a decisive factor to the triumph of the coercive use of military power. Intangible values like the will of the people from the coercer country to come to blows over the crisis, as well as the history of target countries' reactions in preceding crisis may interfere in the resistance to the use of power.

The reluctance of great powers to use military force in the last five decades arises from the fact that costs, risks and difficulties to apply force are increasing while the benefits diminish. The perception of this practice could lead some countries not to give in before the threat of using military force announced by coercers. This fact would restrain the effectiveness of deterrent and coercive use of military power adding an intangible value to assess State power: the willing to continue fighting even in face of threats.

Hence, in this article, initially will be analyzed Laclau and Mouffe's theory of discourse as an analytical variation inside constructivist approach. Afterwards, the paper will investigate the concept of power and, to achieve this goal, approaches from Contemporary Realism, Neoliberal institutionalism and Discourse Theory will be presented. The use of military power and the interference of intangible factors on it will be discussed by an analysis of the dynamics of coercion, a method of applying military power in the contemporary world.

In order to start the discussion, it's interesting to know the discourse theory developed by Laclau and Mouffe. This approach will be brought as a background to discuss how researchers have used this theory to understand international security issues.

LACLAU AND MOUFFE'S THEORY OF DISCOURSE

Laclau and Mouffe's theory fits in an interpretist epistemological position, being, as well, a tool for analyzing some aspects of the constructivist theory of International Relations. Its convergence with interpretist position is in virtue of its emphasis on meaning, and its affinity

with constructivism is its sociological approach stating that identities are the result of social interactions.

Interpretists oppose to positivists being considered as anti-foundationalists. Interpretists don't believe the relation subject-object is pure. They understand that the way a subject observes the objects is impregnated with idiosyncrasies; the observer carries with himself ideas that were constructed along his life. The observer is not a *tabula rasa* capable of analyzing an object without any external or internal interference (MARSH; FURLONG, 2002).

Wendt's work, *Social Theory of International Politics*, explains the structure of International Relations based on social interaction and shared ideas. Wendt states that "the distribution of capabilities only has the effects on international politics that it does because of the desiring and believing state agents who give it meaning" (WENDT, 2010, P.185). Thus, culture and identity have a crucial role to play in IR understandings. Geertz, writing about culture, makes clear that the way to understand culture is studying the meanings. His position is based on Max Weber's words in which he declares that "man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun" (WEBER apud GEERTZ, 1989, p.4). People interpret the environment where they live. Those interpretations frame their behaviors generating social practices. Discourses are considered as the "combination of language and techniques" to maintain the practices. Thus power operates through relationships rather than possession of capabilities and the exercise of power can be understood as "the ability to reconstruct discourses and shape practices" (KLOTZ; LYNCH 2007, 11).

Laclau and Mouffe's theory of discourse has the capability to explain how meaning is given in issues related to politics and power. As such, discourse theory can describe the processes by which a theme becomes hegemonic and hence makes states, people and institutions adopt certain practices. Whereas IR constructivist approach states that identities and culture are the variables that *cause* States behavior in IR system, discourse analysis explains *how* cultures and identities are formed. Therefore, constructivism presents the *why* of some behaviors while discourse theory has the tools to explicate *how* those variables are constructed. Taking Saussure's (1967) position that meanings are relational and not positive, Laclau and Mouffe initiate their theory. To present the theory, two concepts need to be addressed: hegemony and antagonism. Gramsci's concept of hegemony was studied by Laclau and Mouffe

with a linguistic poststructuralist approach. While Gramsci (1999) saw hegemony as the result of relations of production, in this case, knowledge production; Laclau and Mouffe define hegemony as “a kind of contingent intervention required by the crisis or collapse of what would have been a normal historical development (LACLAU; MOUFFE, 2001, p.7)”.

1 - MEANING AS A RELATIONAL QUESTION

Discourse has its roots in a type of analysis addressed not to facts but to their conditions of possibility. According to this approach, the very possibility of perception, thought and action depends on the structuration of a certain meaningful field which pre-exists any factual immediacy (LACLAU, 1993, p.541). Thus, the understanding of reality depends on the discursive field where the subject is inserted.

Laclau states that the linguistic structure is organized based on the principle that in language there are no positive terms³, only differences. To understand the meaning of father it's necessary to know the meaning of words like mother and son. “This purely relational and differential character of linguistic identities means that language constitutes a system in which no element can be defined independently of the others (LACLAU, 1993, p.542)”.

One necessary aspect to proceed discourse analysis is to understand that the poststructuralist approach doesn't emphasize ideas underestimating materiality. Although it doesn't defend that international or regional structure may be explained only by States relative capacity, as believe neo-realists, poststructuralists understand that neither ideas nor materiality have a meaningful presence if analyzed separately. According to Hansen:

A tank, for example, is not simply a material assemblage of metal and rubber but an object of warfare- or peacekeeping- whose material and social production is situated within an abstract discourse of national security (states should be armed to defend themselves) as well as a specific, local one (we have been threatened by Soviet forces in the past and we have no reason to believe they have changed their military doctrine and conception of themselves as an expansive power) (HANSEN, p.22).

³ Positive term is an expression criticized by Ferdinand de Saussure. It reflects the belief that the meaning of a sign can be achieved independently of the linguistic system in which it is inserted.

Burity, discussing materiality and objectivity within Laclau approach, states that the access to reality is mediated by the symbolic. In this sense, there wouldn't be pure and simply a wall against which somebody could hit, but what could be posed, in discourse analysis, would be the meaning that was constructed: "[...] what makes this object a classroom wall or a prison wall is the system of meaning production that is inseparable of the physical reality of this object (BURITY, p.62). Therefore, adopting a discursive approach doesn't mean that materiality is not important, or that the law of gravity is only an idea, or that somebody cannot feel the materiality of a punched fist. Rather, the point is that:

Newtonian laws can be viewed as a mathematics and physics discourse, which offered a very different construction of the meaning of falling objects than had previously been articulated, and that this discourse was both situated within and helped reinforce the growth of a particular form of positivist, mathematical, and experiential knowledge that differentiated itself from earlier religious and philosophical discourses (HANSEN, p.22).

The use of discourse analysis in International Security Studies has been criticized, mainly due to the Realist emphasis on materiality. Weldes explains that the critics to constructivist approach when listening to expressions like *social construction of soviet threat* understand that the Soviet Union didn't represent, in fact, a threat, but it was a simple construction. Nonetheless, to state that something is socially constructed doesn't mean it does not exist. It cannot be denied that nuclear power exists and its use is capable of killing millions of people. Nevertheless, constructivism, and even poststructuralist are interested on how somebody shares positions like:

[...] the United States are threatened by Russian, but not British, nuclear weapons; [...] Americans are likely to be more afraid of Paquistani than of British nuclear weapons. [...] It is this discursive constitution of the threat represented by nuclear weapons that we refer to as "construction", and it means not that the weapons have been made up but that their meaning has been molded in discourse (WELDES et al 1999, p.12).

Examining the 1962 missile crisis, Weldes argued that it had not been produced in virtue of materiality, i.e. the presence of over 40 Soviet missiles in Cuba, but, rather, by the United States concern to maintain their identity unscathed. In terms of military capacity, the addition of 40 Soviet missiles was insignificant before the United States nuclear power. McNamara, for instance, declared:

What difference would the extra 40 [Soviet missiles] have made to the overall balance? If my memory serves me correctly, we had some five thousand nuclear warheads as against their three hundred. Can anyone seriously tell me that their having 340 would have made any difference? The military balance wasn't changed. I didn't believe it then, and I don't believe it now (MCNAMARA apud WELDES, p.40).

Weldes understands, therefore, that the crisis was constructed around the discursively formed identity of the United States as the guardian of freedom and democracy in the Western World (WELDES, p.42).

In discourse analysis all identities are established related to differences:

Any identity, whether of an individual, a state, or some other social group, is always established in relation to a series of differences that have become socially recognized. These differences are essential to its being. If they did not coexist as differences, it would not exist in its distinctness and solidity (CONNOLLY apud WELDES et al., 1999, p.11).

Taking this point of view, it's possible to show Laclau and Mouffe's concepts of subject and identity. As said before, Ferdinand de Saussure (1967) linguistic theory was used by Laclau and Mouffe to elaborate their discourse theory. They, like Saussure, understood that meaning is relational. Consequently, identities are also relational. The relation between subjects is characterized by *Otherness*. Differently from an essentialist approach, the authors highlight accident and contingent as the main issues to be addressed while studying identity in lieu of essence. Essence, according to Silvia Dapía, is defined as "[T]he set of properties

or features of an object that we identify when we provide a complete and accurate definition of that object" (DAPÍA, 2000).

Accident, on the other hand, refers to the properties, features, or events that characterize an object but whose presence or occurrence is not viewed as necessary for the constitution of the object as such (DAPÍA, 2000). Being relational, identities cannot be meaningful without the other, thus the accident, not the essence, is considered as the necessary condition of possibility for the existence of the object, as such. Hence, Laclau and Mouffe follow Derrida, considering the outside no longer as accidental, but rather as *constitutive*. When the outside begins to negate the entity's identity and questioning its very existence, the relation between the entity and its *constitutive outside* becomes the site of a struggle leading to Laclau and Mouffe's theoretical principle of antagonism (LACLAU; MOUFFE, 2001, p.127-134).

2 - ANTAGONISM, HEGEMONY AND IDENTITY

To go on with discourse analysis explanation, it will be presented the following concepts: articulation, antagonism, logic of equivalence, logic of difference, and hegemony.

To start with the definitions of those terms, the concepts developed in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (HSS) are necessary to continue the explanations:

[...] any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice. The structured totality resulting from the articulatory practice, we will call discourse. The differential positions, insofar as they appear articulated within a discourse, we will call moments. By contrast, we will call element any difference that is not discursively articulated (LACLAU; MOUFFE, 2001, p.105).

In order for identity to exist, it needs to result from the articulatory practice. From the time an element is articulated, it loses its *floating* characteristic and becomes a moment. The structure that comes from those articulations is called discourse. But identity is never complete; there is always a *lack* inside it, that's why society is impossible in Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory. "If the social does not manage to fix itself in the intelligible and instituted forms of a society, the social only exists, however,

as an effort to construct that impossible object” (LACLAU; MOUFFE, 2001, p.112). The fixation of meaning is never complete; that’s the reason identity has a *lack* inside itself. Due to this partial fixation of meaning, society is impossible. (LACLAU, 2007, p.35).

Nodal points are “privileged discursive points” capable of fixing partially the meanings around them (LACLAU; MOUFFE, 2001, p.112). Chain of equivalences can be better understood after knowing the concepts of logic of equivalence and difference.

[...] logic of equivalence is a logic of simplification of the political space, while the logic of difference is a logic of its expansion and increasing complexity. [...] the logic of difference tends to expand the syntagmatic pole of language, the number of positions that can enter into a relation of combination and hence of continuity with one another; while the logic of equivalence expands the paradigmatic pole- that is, the elements that can be substituted for one another- thereby reducing the number of positions which can possibly be combined (LACLAU; MOUFFE, 2001, p.130).

The logic of equivalence capacity to simplify the political space is in virtue of the fact that the differences concentrate under a reference point, a nodal point, a general equivalent. In a chain of equivalence composed by a, b, and c, such elements are equivalent “with regard to something identical underlying them all” (HERSCHINGER, 2011, p.22). The logic of equivalence establishes practices by drawing frontiers, dividing the discursive space into two antagonistic camps- the good versus the bad, the Self versus the Other: the evil, barbaric terrorist/drug abusers versus the good citizens/ the civilized international community (HERSCHINGER, 2011, p.23).

Hegemony is a process by which certain meanings are fixed and, since then, seen as *natural* or *necessary*. Due to antagonisms between discourses, other meanings may show up in opposition to those then existing in an anti-hegemonic process. Hegemony, therefore, is considered a “kind of contingent intervention required by the crisis or collapse of what would have been a *normal* historical development (LACLAU; MOUFFE, 2001, p.7). According to the Essex School, hegemony is the “dichotomization of a discursive space by conferring a particular meaning

upon antagonistic poles (HERSCHINGER, 2011, p.23).

Identity is considered as “subject positions” taken in certain discourses (LACLAU; MOUFFE, 2001, p.115). When somebody takes a decision, he is revealing his subject position and so, his identity. Identity is less about “who we are” or “where we came from”, however, it’s much more about “what we might become”, “how we have been presented” and “how we might present ourselves” (HERSCHINGER, 2011, p.25).

This brief exposition of Laclau’s discourse theory does not aim to give a full explanation of his thoughts. Nevertheless, those fundamental premises are capable to provide a background to compare how theories of IR conceptualize power and politics.

POWER AND POLITICS: CONTEMPORARY REALISM, NEOLIBERALISM AND DISCOURSE THEORY APPROACHES.

According to Taliaferro there are two strands in contemporary realism: offensive realism and defensive realism. Mearsheimer’s approach can be considered as offensive realism whereas Taliaferro’s position as defensive realism. For defensive realism, although the international system is anarchic and confrontational it doesn’t imply that States always seek relative gains. On the other hand, offensive realism purports that anarchy and security dilemma will always lead States to seek expansionist foreign policies as a way to guarantee their survival (TALIAFERRO, 2001).

For explaining Contemporary Realism this paper will focus not only on defensive and offensive realism. Neorealism will be analyzed in order to give a comprehensive explanation about the Realist tradition.

1 - NEOREALISM

The concept of power brought by Waltz and Mearsheimer, opposes to the North American classic definition: “A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do (DAHL, 1957, p.202-203)”. According to Waltz, power has to be defined in terms of material resources and not by results arising from its use. Therefore, Dahl’s definition doesn’t fit political requirements because it conceptualizes power as a cause, confusing process with results. Power would be a cause among others which cannot be isolated. Measuring power by the achievement of results leaves aside unforeseen effects,

neglecting much of the political aspect of the analysis. Power constitutes the means and the result of its use is uncertain. For Waltz, a subject is powerful as far as it affects others more than is affected. He mentions the words of the Canadian Prime Minister about the relation between Canada and the United States by saying that "it's like sleeping with an elephant, independently on how friendly and humorous is the animal (WALTZ, 1988, p.280-281)". About military power specifically, Waltz states that it's important, but not for all purposes, presenting the Vietnam War as a clear demonstration on the limits of military power (WALTZ, 1988, p.277).

It's important to emphasize that Dahl's concept of power is not the only to foster debates. For example, Hart presents three concepts framing Dahl's position as *control over actors* and the Realist Scholl as *control over resources*. Resources to Hart, however, may be both tangible and intangible, what puts him in a different position from the Realists (HART, 1976, p.289-291).

Nonetheless, Morgenthau declares that some mistakes are committed when evaluating State power. One of them is to attribute importance to only one factor. He discusses about the trust on military power, considered in terms of quantity and quality of men and equipment, stating that militarism underestimates the intangible characteristic of power. Without those intangible elements a powerful Nation could threaten other States, or dominate them by an overwhelming force, but it couldn't govern what was conquered by, and it wouldn't obtain the willing acceptance of its government. Morgenthau compares the failures of Sparta, Germany and Japan with the success of the Roman and British politics. Since the beginning of the modern State system in the XV Century, any Nation has got to impose its will over the rest of the world using only its material strength (MORGENTHAU, 1986, p.203-205).

2 - REALISM: DEFENSIVE AND OFFENSIVE

Mearsheimer defines power basing largely on military terms due to the emphasis that offensive Realism gives to strength. For him, military power is based on the size and on the strength of a State Army and on the support given by Air and Naval forces to this Army. For measuring power, Mearsheimer resorts to quantify the population and the richness of a country. His richness analysis is not based on the Gross National Product, but on the level of industrialization, for highly industrialized countries usually have reserves of richness to spend on defense, differently of semi-industrialized.

He considers, also, that only States with advanced industries are capable of producing large quantities of sophisticated weapons necessary to military survival in war (MEARSHEIMER, 2001, p.56-57).

About the definition of power based on results, Mearsheimer states that by Dahl's concept, the most powerful State would be the one that prevailed in a dispute. Although he agrees that intangible factors may represent the success of a war, he presents three reasons for opting to assess power on material resources. Firstly, to focus on results makes balance of power evaluation almost impossible before a conflict, for the balance only could be determined after knowing the winner. As a second argument, Mearsheimer says that the assessment of power by results may lead to inappropriate conclusion as, for instance, to state that in the Vietnam War, The United States were less powerful than North Vietnam. And in third place, such approach confuses one of the most interesting aspects of International Relations, i.e. how power, that constitutes a means, affects political results that are the end. Nevertheless, there would be little to say about it if power and results were indistinct, there wouldn't be any difference between means and ends (MEARSHEIMER, 2001, p.59-60).

Taliaferro, a defensive realist, brings out the same neorealist concept of power. Nonetheless, he believes that intangible factors like misperception and risk aversion may be considered as variables that interfere with the way States promote their foreign policies (TALIAFERRO, 2001). This position seems like constructivist approach on identities. According to Wendt (2001), some identities are considered as pre-social, not being explainable as relational (Self and Other), like in the discourse theory epistemology (HANSEN, 2006, p.24).

3 - INSTITUTIONAL NEOLIBERALISM

Keohane disagrees with Mearsheimer's and Waltz's positions about not relating power to results. Keohane criticizes Waltz for not accepting Dahl's definition of power in terms of causality. Speaking about results, Waltz says that "power is one cause among others from which it cannot be isolated (WALTZ, 1988)". Keohane argues that such position doesn't allow falsifying this power theory, according to the epistemology of Karl Popper and Imre Lakatos, since anyone can claim that other factors not presented a priori, could have affected the outcome. Moreover, Keohane believes that the definition of Waltz, "to affect others more than they affect

you”, can result in the absurdity of assigning full power to the person or government that is less responsive to an external stimulus, regardless of their abilities to achieve their purposes (KEOHANE, 1989, p.69). A country that, theoretically, was isolated from the international system, even without having considerable richness, could be deemed powerful.

Being power in the heart of the Realist theory, Keohane exposes in his theory critics to the postulate of fungibility of power, starting from the classical Realist definition of power resources: population, geography and economics, in which military resources have their relevance. According to Realist theory there is a division of themes in International Politics, whereby come the ideas of high and low politics. Subjects related to security and war are in the frame of high politics whilst commercial relations, environment and Human Rights are characterized as low politics. State power is measured in a general way, supposing fungibility among the power resources. States with reasonable industrial production are, or may become, military powerful States (KEOHANE, 2001).

However, does international system have a simple structure, as explains neorealism, or does International Politics address several topics and for each topic there's a specific structure? Keohane states that even Waltz is ambiguous when he declares that military force is a decisive factor in International Politics: “differences in strength do matter, although not for every conceivable purpose”; “military power no longer brings political control, but then it never did” (WALTZ apud KEOHANE, 1989, p.54).

The Realist approach about fungibility of power would be able to foresee that when conflicts happen between Great Powers and smaller States, the Great Powers should prevail. However, it has not been North American experience in the last two decades, in Keohane's conception. He claims that the United States lost the Vietnam War and was for over a year unable to assure the return of its diplomats held hostages in Iran (KEOHANE, 2001).

According to Keohane, the International Politics has some characteristics that interfere with power conception. He states that there are multiple channels in International Politics that result in interstate, trans-governmental and transnational relations. In this complex interdependence, the actors that operate in these channels are important not because of their activities in pursuit of their own interests, but also because they act as transmission belts making government policies in several countries more sensitive to each other (KEOHANE, 2001, p.22).

Keohane points out *issue-structure* theories. These theories would explain better international reality in which military force, though still important, couldn't be considered on the top of power resources hierarchy (KEOHANE, 1989, p.55). Keohane is based on Kissinger's words describing the situation in 1975:

[...] progress in dealing with the traditional agenda is no longer enough. A new and unprecedented kind of issue has emerged. The problems of energy, resources, environment, population, the uses of space and the seas now rank with questions of military security, ideology and territorial rivalry which have traditionally made up the diplomatic agenda (KISSINGER apud KEOHANE, 2001, p.23).

Macedo, also, emphasizes the *issue-structure* theory in his comments:

Indeed, Japan is a much more important player than Israel to the world financial stability, but this is far more relevant than that for peace in the Middle East. This change of thinking entails that the international system should have several structures, perhaps one for each theme on the international agenda (MACEDO, 2002, p.115).

Each topic on the international agenda would have an *issue-structure* in which countries would possess certain level of vulnerability. Vulnerability refers to the capacity of a State to impose the rules of the game, the clause *ceteris paribus* in some topic of the international agenda. Before a set of rules that leads certain player to a disadvantageous situation, it's likely that the player will attempt to change the rules, if the costs are reasonable. Vulnerability applies to sociopolitical as well as to political-economic relationships (KEOHANE, 200, p.13-16).

Given those theoretical aspects from Contemporary Realism and Institutional Neoliberalism, it's relevant to understand how discourse theory can explain the use of military power.

THE EMPLOYMENT OF MILITARY POWER SEEN BY THE DYNAMICS OF COERCION

1 - THE DYNAMICS OF COERCION

Thomas Schelling presented a theory about coercion during the Cold War. In his work he made clear the difference between applying the brute force and the coercive use of military power:

There is a difference between taking what you want and making someone give it to you, between fending off assault and making someone afraid to assault you, between holding what people are trying to take and making them afraid to take it, between losing what someone can forcibly take and giving it up to avoid risk of damage. It is the difference between defense and deterrence, between brute force and intimidation, between conquest and blackmail, between action and threats (SCHELLING, 1966, p.2).

Schelling's approach is based on game theory. Therefore, there is an emphasis on the interaction between the actors involved, what brings the dynamic aspect to his theory. Some authors say that his ideas were the cause of failure in the operations perpetrated by the United States during the Vietnam War vis-à-vis his defense of the threat of escalating risk against the enemy (SCHELLING, 1966, p.99). Such aspect was perceived in Operation Rolling Thunder, when the US made progressive attacks over several targets expecting that North Vietnam, acting as a rational actor, got into conclusion that the benefits to continue to fight for the conquest of the south wouldn't compensate the costs and the risks of the attacks escalation. The critics to this strategy was that the time lapse between the operations, characteristic of a risk escalation, gave sufficient time to Vietcong recover their supplies and the willingness to go on fighting (PAPE, 1996, p.184-187).

Byman and Waxman define coercion as:

[...] the use of threatened force, and at times the limited use of actual force to back up the threat, to induce an adversary to behave differently than it otherwise

would. In short, coercion is about manipulating an adversary's policy choices and decision making. [...] In virtually any military crisis, both parties (or more) will attempt to coerce each other (BYMAN; WAXMAN, 2002, p.30).

Coercion doesn't mean destruction. Strategies of coercion are more successful when threats don't need to be carried out. Although usually some destruction makes part of coercion, its success occurs when the adversary gives in while yet has power to resist. Coercion can be better understood in contrast to brute force: "[...] brute force succeeds when it is used, whereas the power to hurt is most successful when held in reserve. It is the threat of damage, or of more damage to come, that can make someone yield or comply (SCHELLING, 1966, p.3)".

Robert Pape states that coercion seeks to change the behavior of States that still have the capacity for a military organized violence (PAPE, 1996, 13). Coercion, as well as deterrence, aims to affect the behavior of an opponent by the manipulation of costs and benefits. Deterrence, however, aims to persuade a State not to initiate a specific action due to the fact that perceived benefits don't offset the costs and risks estimated. Coercion is about persuading an opponent to stop a current action or start a new course of action changing his calculus of costs and benefits. Pape presents the following equation to describe the logic of coercion: $R = B p(B) - C p(C)$ in which R = value of resistance; B = potential benefits of resistance; $p(B)$ = probability of attaining benefits by continued resistance; C = potential costs of resistance; $p(C)$ = probability of suffering costs. For both benefits and costs, one has to take into consideration the likelihood they will occur. Pape adds that the credibility that the damage will be imposed is the minimum that could be required for a successful coercion (PAPE, 1996, p.17). Thus, it's added to the equation an intangible element: the belief that the damage will be imposed.

According to Pape, there are two types of coercion, by punishment and by denial. The first seeks to reach the civilian population directly or indirectly, or even the destruction of military personnel in large numbers. The second aims to deny to the military adversaries the means to continue the conflict, thwarting the fulfillment of political objectives. After analyzing several international conflicts, Pape stresses that the coercive use of military power as punishment rarely works (PAPE, 1996, p.12-13). Mearscheimer presents the same concepts that Pape, however he names them as

deterrence based on punishment or denial (MEARSCHEIMER, 1983, p.14).

After the Cold War, academic debates about coercion changed their focus from the employment of nuclear threat to the use of air power and economic sanctions as tools of coercion. The shortcomings of the US using coercive power in North Vietnam, of Russia in Chechnya and of Israel in Lebanon have raised the question on the real meaning of power. Many of the military resources the US and other Great Powers possess are of little or no utility when on conflict negotiation tables. Willingness and credibility have as much or more importance than balance of power. There are certain weaknesses that emerge in the dynamic of coercion and that have been exploited by the weaker (BYMAN; WAXMAN, 2002, p.31-32).

In deciding the coercive use of military power, the US, for instance, face some challenges. Among the ones cited by Byman are restrictions to the use of force that come from domestic politics, limitations imposed by alliance partners and difficulties related to humanitarian intervention (BYMAN; WAXMAN, 2002, p.20). All of those limitations have to be taken into consideration during the strategic military planning. Nonetheless, they aren't measurable material elements, though they have great implications for the conduct of military campaign and for the evaluation of relative power. Thus, how is discourse theory capable of providing the tools to analyze intangible factors in politics as well as in power evaluation?

2 - DISCOURSE THEORY AND THE EMPLOYMENT OF MILITARY POWER

According to the points presented, more than materiality, what matters when analyzing power and politics are the meanings given to them by countries facing certain issues. The identities of players in the international system interfere with the way they relate with each other. The belief on fungibility of power ignores the complexity and fragmentation of politics nowadays. In this paper, the military power is analyzed in the context of Keohane's *issue-structure* theory.

As previously discussed, identities are understood as subject positions inside discourses. They result from the antagonism between them as identity is relational and not positive (having a meaning in itself). Identities are not given *a priori*, but are constructed by interaction among States. Moreover, for each theme of the international agenda States have a specific subject position. From this point of view, politics and power will

depend on the discourses they are embedded at some moment of history. Military power matters but not to solve all the issues in the international system. Besides that, it should be emphasized that intangible factors are relevant for the employment of military power. Target countries need to *believe* that the coercer is capable and *willing* to use his power (BYMAN ; WAXMAN, 2002). Therefore, the understanding of military power use has to take into consideration the discourses that are antagonizing each other in certain military issues. The discourse analyst shall research the identities of the States or political institutions involved in the issue. Many authors have used discourse analysis to study international security. Barry Buzan, for instance, presents his theory of securitization:

The way to study securitization is to study discourse and political constellations: When does an argument with this particular rhetorical and semiotic structure achieve sufficient effect to make an audience tolerate violations of rules that would otherwise have to be obeyed? If by means of an argument about the priority and urgency of an existential threat the securitizing actor has managed to break free of procedures or rules he or she would otherwise be bound by, we are witnessing a case of securitization (BUZAN; HANSEN, 2010, p.214).

Securitization is the way the States find to turn certain issues a threat to their survival. That's a political act in the sense that this "discourse" legitimates the use of power, mainly the military, to the point of considering as tolerable the breaking of norms. In the securitization theory, there are three main components: the securitizing actor, the audience, the referent subject and the referent object. Securitizing actor, in general, is a State authority that is assisted by a political elite that takes part in the security decision process, which is identified in the theory as audience. The referent object is the target that is threatened and needs to be protected, and the referent subject is the actor that threatens the target State (BUZAN; WAEVER; WILDE, 1998).

In the use of military power, both audiences in the coercer and target State, have discourses in which they are embedded and that can interfere with the perception and willingness to fight or resist coercion. The discourse analyst, therefore, needs to find out the nodal points and the chains of equivalence/difference in order to explain how subject positions

are taken and, in this way, State identities are formed. Hence, discourse analysis is relevant to understand threat perceptions as well as political elites and population's willingness to fight.

The points about the understanding of politics and power by Contemporary realism, Neoliberal Institutionalism and Discourse Analysis were presented. The dynamics of coercion and the use of military power were analyzed through the lenses of discourse theory. Therefore it's relevant to finish this paper reviewing the main topics here discussed.

CONCLUSION

Politics and power are social constructions, in the sense that the intangible factors related to them bring about the meanings by which countries interpret and behave in the international system.

Material factors are not enough to explain how and why States take decisions about the issues debated in the international agenda. Discourse theory, following a poststructuralist approach, emphasizes how meanings interfere with the way international players conduct themselves in the international arena. Some realists have conceded that their theory's explanatory power cannot be achieved only by analyzing material resources. Defensive realism opens an opportunity to use discourse theory when it considers other intangible factors like misperception and risk aversion as variables that influence State's foreign policies.

Discourse theory has a greater explainable capacity due to the fact that it allows the explanations of not only the formation of results' causal chain but also of how identities are created molding States' interests and behaviors. By the way, this point differentiates discourse theory from classical constructivism.

Hence, discovering how hegemonic discourses are constructed to securitize certain issues, or to convince audiences in the international arena about the legitimacy of some arguments, is essential to understand International Politics.

CATACRESE, POLÍTICA INTERNACIONAL E PODER MILITAR

RESUMO

O objetivo deste artigo é explicar como fatores intangíveis interferem no emprego do poder militar. Para atingir este propósito, a análise do discurso foi trazida como teoria e método para entender o exercício do poder e da política em questões militares. Durante o artigo foi mostrado que o poder militar importa, mas não para todos os propósitos. A divisão da política internacional em estruturas de temas fornece um campo para aplicação da análise do discurso e para compreender questões relacionadas ao emprego do poder militar.

Palavras chaves: Coerção. Poder militar. Política. Teoria do discurso.

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