Four Types of Power in International Relations

Coercive Power, Bargaining Power, Concerted Power, and Institutionalized Power

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“I study power so as to understand the enemy.”\textsuperscript{1}

— Stanley Hoffmann

The meaning of the word ‘power’ seems like a will-o’-the-wisp: it tends to dissolve entirely whenever we look at it closely. We are sure we meant something by the word and have a vague idea what it is: but this understanding tends to fade away upon examination, until ‘power’ seems nothing more than a “giant glob of oily ambiguity.”\textsuperscript{2}

— Peter Morriss

\textsuperscript{1} Hoffmann 1993: 9.

\textsuperscript{2} Peter Morriss 2002: 1, (citing Dahl 1957: 1056).
Power is a central concept in international relations (IR), but its meaning is contested. This is, at least in part, due to the fact that definitions of the term often do not explicitly recognize that power has multiple meanings. Despite the centrality of the concept of power to the field, therefore, we still don’t understand it well enough. Some scholars see “the difficulty of reaching a consensus on the most appropriate way to define and measure such an elusive concept”\(^3\) as a significant obstacle to social scientific progress.\(^4\)

Power as a concept has received less attention in IR theory than one might think until fairly recently. While there have been heated conceptual debates among some scholars, a majority has treated the concept as if it was not particularly problematic. It has too often been considered as the primary domain of realism and has predominately been understood as control over resources, others, and/or outcomes (usually defined in terms of military, economic, or technological capabilities).\(^5\) Many scholars, on the other hand, increasingly recognize that such reductionist conceptions of power are inadequate.

Progress in our understanding of power, in my view, depends on changing the focus of theory development from quests for consensus on the definitions of overarching concept to research agendas that are aimed at progressive refinements of distinctions between different types of power. Different types of power interact with other key variables in different ways and we need to draw conceptual distinctions in order to isolate these divergent effects. Inferences arrived at in one study are not necessarily transferable to another if the meaning and type of power is not constant. Our understanding of the most important question in IR is hampered by our failure to grasp the complexity of the different meanings of power.

The aim of theoretical engagement with contested concepts is not to defend a particular conceptualization against all others, but to contribute to the development of more clearly delineated sub-categories based on distinctions shown to be relevant for a specific purpose. Social scientific terms are tools and that, as such, they are created with specific purposes in mind. What dimensions of power are most relevant for a distinction between different types of power depends on the interests and concerns that motivate us to the study of power in the first place. This also means that there is no set number of types of power and that different typologies are not necessarily in direct competition with one another.

Drawing distinctions between types of power is not a new project, of course. Many such distinctions have been proposed. In the last couple of decades alone scholars in IR have developed terms like hard power, soft power,\(^6\)

\(^3\) Schmidt 2007: 46.
\(^4\) Two edited volumes that were published in the last decade provide an excellent overview of this topic: Barnett and Duvall 2005 and Berenskoetter and Williams 2007.
\(^5\) See for example Schmidt 2007.
and smart power,\textsuperscript{7} compulsory power, institutional power, structural power, and productive power,\textsuperscript{8} normative power,\textsuperscript{9} and network power.\textsuperscript{10} Add to that distinctions and terms developed in political and social thought more generally, like power over vs. power to,\textsuperscript{11} power with,\textsuperscript{12} conflictual vs. consensual power,\textsuperscript{13} dispositional vs. episodic power,\textsuperscript{14} the three faces of power, symbolic power,\textsuperscript{15} and communicative power,\textsuperscript{16} and it is not surprising that power has been called an essentially contested concept. Maybe we should be more surprised that many scholars of IR are still using the concept as if its meaning was unproblematic.

In this paper, I distinguish four different types of power in international relations: coercive power, bargaining power, concerted power, and institutionalized (or: political) power. Adding a new typology makes sense only to the extent that they shed light on distinctions relevant to research and practice that are not yet sufficiently understood. My typology is ultimately motivated by a desire to develop a clearer understanding of the distinction between power and violence. Power is often understood in terms that are very close to coercion and violence, but we also intuitively understand that the use of violence can undermine power and that it can be a substitute for power. While it is difficult to imagine political life without the relations of power, we have to hope that violence can be contained. The tendency of our terminology to blur the distinction between power and force/violence is problematic on both theoretical and practical political grounds.

My typology, therefore, focuses not only aspects of power that are associated with domination, coercion, oppression, exploitation, military might, and violence, but also on those facets of power that relate to the capacity of people to join forces and, as Hannah Arendt puts it, “act in concert.” In its institutionalized form, power also reflects the capacity of a collectivity to shape, stabilize and administer political order. While coercive power and bargaining power depend primarily on resources, concerted power depends on collective action and support; institutionalized power seems to depends on some form of legitimacy and at least passive support.

While the relationship between power and violence defines the purpose for my typology, the distinction between the different types of power proceeds along two dimensions: The first dimension is related to control and commitment and the second dimension involves institutionalization.

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\textsuperscript{7} Nye 2011.
\textsuperscript{8} Barnett and Duvall 2005.
\textsuperscript{9} Diez and Manners 2007.
\textsuperscript{10} Grewal 2010.
\textsuperscript{11} Morriss 2002.
\textsuperscript{12} Allen 1999.
\textsuperscript{13} Haugaard 2002.
\textsuperscript{14} Morriss 2002.
\textsuperscript{15} Bourdieu 1989.
\textsuperscript{16} Habermas 2002, Risse 2000.
First Dimension: Control, Interdependence and Commitment

The distinctions I delineate here are ideal types and it is probably more accurate to imagine the types as blending into one another on a continuum along a dimension related to control. They are not usually as neatly separated from one another in the real world and often occur alongside one another by the same actors even in the same interactions.\(^7\) If we think about the continuum between these ideal types as analogous to colors and imagine coercive power, for example, as red, bargaining power as blue, and concerted power as green, most of political life happens in the various shades in between and it is hard to know where exactly to draw the line, so I am drawing an analytic (read: somewhat artificial) distinction them in their imagined pure forms (see Figure 1). It would no doubt be possible to identify additional forms of power in between these three ideal types. Manipulation, for example would probably be located somewhere between coercive power and bargaining power, whereas I would place persuasion between bargaining power and concerted power.

\[\text{Figure 1: Dimension of Control}\]

On the one end of the spectrum the actors (A and B for now) seek to control the outcome or the other. They strive for unilateral control and they are willing to use the resources they have at their disposal to get what they want. As long as at least one actor holds on to the goal of controlling the outcome or the behavior of the other, compromise and bargaining are not really seen as options. At this end of the spectrum, actors use *coercive power*.

When A and B are either similar enough in strength or so interdependent that unilateral control over outcomes is impossible and neither side can impose their will without making concessions, they can open up a bargaining range by shifting their strategy from unilateral control to attempting to get the biggest possible “piece of the pie.” *Bargaining power* then decides which side gets the

\[\text{\(^7\) There is some overlap between this distinction and the three-fold distinction between power over, power to, and power with proposed by Amy Allen (Allen 1999). However, as I mentioned before, I find the distinction between power over and power to difficult to maintain and the distinction between power to and power with is also not clear enough for my purposes.}\]
more of what they want. Within IR the concept of bargaining power is most commonly seen in neoliberal institutionalist theories.

*Concerted power* is the form of power that is generated horizontally between people who, as Arendt puts it, “act in concert.” It is the capacity of a mobilized group to act together in the pursuit of common goals or in support of common values. The generation of concerted power requires commitment and some minimal trust. The commitment could be directed towards the relationship between the actors or towards a shared goal. Whereas coercive power and bargaining power depend on strength, resources and implements, concerted power depends on numbers and conviction. Concerted power is not necessarily benign - once it is generated between A and B it can be used to back up coercive power against a common target.

**Figure 2:** Direct Types of Power

These first three types of power are direct, or active types of power, whereas the fourth type, institutionalized power (or: political power) refers to a type of power that is institutionalized, delegated, and, therefore, less direct. As the name indicates, institutionalized power is distinguished from the other types along the second dimension: Institutionalization. Figure 1 represents an illustration of the difference between the three direct types of power in the most basic terms. The illustration only considers the interaction between two actors, A and B, and shows the direction in which the actors attempt to assert control in the exercise of power.

The four-fold classification I suggest here is not intended to compete with other classifications of different types of power—unless they were created for the same purpose, in which case we should ask which of these distinctions helps us get a better handle on the phenomena of interest. A more concretely example might help to clarify what I mean: the terms that I distinguish here are not in any direct competition with the four-fold distinction proposed by Barnett and Duvall
between compulsory power, institutional power, structural power, and productive power.\textsuperscript{18} Barnett and Duvall call power that works through interactions of specific actors “compulsory power” if the relationship is direct and “institutional power” if the relationship is diffuse. My first three types of power would probably all be called compulsory power in their terms, because they are primarily concerned with direct interactions between specific actors. It is less clear how my fourth type might fit into their categories.

Several definitions of power terms that have been proposed in the literature are motivated by concerns that are similar to mine and, arguably, try to capture similar distinctions. There are affinities between the purpose that motivates my typology and the motivations expressed by Joseph Nye, Daniel Deudney, David Lake, and a variety of scholars who focus on the notion of international governance. My motivation fits within a wave of re-thinking power in IR that can be seen as a response to changes in international landscape in the last couple of decades. Developments in world politics have made it increasingly clear to a variety of scholars within the discipline that our conceptual toolkit is no longer up to the task of capturing important realities of power relations in international affairs.

Lake captures one aspect of the changed realities that, in my opinion, has motivated not just his study of international authority and my interest in concerted power, but also other recent attempts to re-think the concept of power:

The core assumption of the discipline of international relations is that the system is anarchic or devoid of authority. But if the international system is anarchic, and states lack authority over one another, how could the nonexistent authority of the United States get weaker? What did it mean to say that the legitimacy of the United States was fraying or that the allies were defying Washington when commonsense definitions of these concepts were ruled out by our established theories of international relations?\textsuperscript{19}

Typologies that are created for similar purposes can be compared and brought into dialogue. Such dialogue should be aimed at developing an increasingly more refined and more useful conceptual toolkit.

**Coercive Power**

*Coercive power* is the power of the ‘strong’ (A) to impose their will even against resistance on the ‘weak’ (B). Coercive power, as I define it, encompasses power as strength, power as control over resources, over others, and/or over outcomes—and this primarily to the extent that they are exercised against resistance. It is the power of A to impose their will unilaterally, and even against resistance on B, to get B to do something B would not otherwise do,

\textsuperscript{18} Barnett & Duvall 2005.

\textsuperscript{19} Lake 2009: ix.
and/or to get the outcomes they want without offering something in return. B’s resistance does not have to be explicit or overt. If A imposes its will on B without regard to B’s interests, we would call it coercive power even if B made no observable attempt to resist. There is a presumption, however, that B’s compliance is not voluntary, that B prefers a different outcome, and would resist if they could.

Coercive power is closely associated with strength, force and violence. Strength, in this context, can be direct physical strength, or it can be based on implements and resources, like military might or economic power. A uses coercive power when they rely on physical strength or implements, i.e. on the threat or use of force to get B to act in A’s interest. Coercive power is the realist power par excellence. In international relations coercive power is the type of power most closely associated with military might. The relationship between A and B in these scenarios is a competitive and instrumental one. Coercive power is zero-sum. What B gains in relative strength or resources is automatically a loss for A.

The power exerted by Athens against Melos is a fairly pure example of coercive power. Another prominent example is the (practically) unilateral military intervention of the United States against Iraq in the second Gulf War. More recently, the indiscriminate use of force by Gaddafi’s government against the Libyan protesters may already have crossed the line from coercive power to outright violence (I am not sure exactly where to draw that line), but the Security Council mandated NATO airstrikes are a clear example of coercive power. This is a particularly interesting example, because the coercive power in this case is backed by concerted power. Other examples of the use of coercive power range from the bully in kindergarten, to military dictators, or imperial powers.

The difference between my definition of coercive power and Weber’s or Dahl’s definition of power more generally is that, in my view, it does matter what A’s ‘opportunity to assert his will’ against B is based on and that it matters whether B’s compliance is voluntary or not. If A gets B to do something B would not otherwise have done by relying on exchange, persuasion, co-option, or the authority of an office, it might constitute an instance of power, but not one of coercive power as I define it.

The elements of will and control are particularly important in considering the distinction I propose to draw here, i.e. the distinction between the aspects of power that are inescapably linked to violence and oppression, on the one hand, and those aspects of power that are required for stable peace, political autonomy, and individual and collective empowerment, on the other. The first, which concerns the will of the relevant actors, is implied as an essential element of relations of power in some of the most influential definitions of power. We can think about relations of power in terms of the question of who is more likely to have his will prevail in a contest of wills. While will is explicitly mentioned in Max Weber’s definition who, as you recall, defines

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20 Related terms are power over, and compulsory power.
power as "every opportunity to assert one's will in social relations even against resistance, no matter what this chance is based on,"\(^{21}\) the connection between power and interest is stressed more often in the recent literature. Lukes, for example, makes interest a central element of his definition of power when he states that “A exercises power over B when A affects B in a manner contrary to B’s interests”\(^{22}\) and goes on to distinguish 'real interests' from 'false consciousness'.\(^{23}\)

I focus here on the connection between power and will rather than power and interest, because will is more clearly and directly tied to political action and, thus, more relevant for my purpose, and because I prefer not to have to distinguish between ‘real interests’ and ‘false consciousness.’ The term will suggest that the relevant actor not only has a certain interest, but is also aware of it and motivated to act on it. The focus on will, therefore, suggest actively engaged agents, whereas an actor can have an interest in something, without necessarily being consciously aware of it or motivated to act on it. A may assert their will against B’s ‘real interests’ without exercising coercive power, if B is uninformed, unmotivated, or simply not aware of the underlying conflict of interest. To be sure, I agree with Lukes who argues that it can be:

> the supreme and most insidious exercise of power to prevent people, to whatever degree, from having grievances by shaping their perceptions, cognitions and preferences in such a way that they accept their role in the existing order of things, either because they can see or imagine no alternative to it, or because they see it as natural and unchangeable, or because they value it as divinely ordained and beneficial.\(^{24}\)

However, I would want to call this an exercise of coercive power only if an identifiable actor A pursued a specific course of action aimed at specifically preventing B from becoming aware of their ‘real interests.’ When power plays a more indirect role, i.e. in situations, where “the bias of the system can be mobilized, recreated and reinforced in ways that are neither consciously chosen or the intended result of particular individuals’ choices,”\(^{25}\) I suggest the use of terms like domination, structural power, structural violence, or institutional power.

The importance of the dimension of control is nicely illustrated by a slight difference in Dahl’s encyclopedia entry on power compared to the more well-known version of his definition: instead of using ‘A’ and ‘B’, he uses ‘R’

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\(^{21}\) Weber, Fundamental: 152 (my emphasis).

\(^{22}\) Lukes 2002: 45.

\(^{23}\) Lukes 2002.


\(^{25}\) Lukes 1974, 2005: p.21 or 24?
for the *responsive* unit in this context and ‘C’ for the *controlling* unit.\textsuperscript{26} On the spectrum that relates power to will and control, attempts at unilateral control and imposition of will are at the coercive end, whereas the joined control and the formation of a common will are at the concerted power end.

The threat or use of force is often seen as a particularly effective way to assert control over people or outcomes. However, the use of or threat of force or violence is ‘the most intrinsically effective means’\textsuperscript{27} for A to impose its will on B\textsuperscript{28} if and only if (1) the superiority in strength or capabilities of A relative to B is so extensive that A can safely disregard B’s attempts to resist, and (2) if A is interested purely in the outcome of this particular interaction and has no interest in the relationship with B as such. The first condition explains why the Melian dialogue presents such a pure example. The second condition suggests that the use of coercive power is most likely if A regards the interaction with B purely as a means to an end rather than as an end in itself.

**Bargaining Power**

*Bargaining power*, as I stated above, is closely related to coercive power in that it also relies on implements and resources. The difference is that B is ‘strong’ enough (endowed with sufficient resolve and resources) that A cannot impose his/her/their will unilaterally. Interdependence is, in my view the key driver in the lateral shift from the use of coercive power to the use of bargaining power. It is at the point of significant interdependence between A and B that unilateral control over outcomes becomes impossible and A can no longer impose its will without making some concessions to B. One form of this can simply be B’s ability to impose significant costs on A—even in cases where the superiority of A’s coercive power is not in doubt.

The relationship between A and B here is still a competitive one and bargaining power is still zero-sum for the most part. The distribution of bargaining power may be almost even, highly unequal, or anything in between—as long as neither side can safely disregard the will of the other and neither side can assert unilateral control. The bargaining power of both sides is not directly related to their respective military strength. Coercive power resources are often of limited use in bargaining situations if the threat of force cannot be credibly or legitimately used as a bargaining chip.

In the ideal-typical case of bargaining power the question is not which side is able to impose their will on the other, but which side gets the bigger piece of the pie. Like coercive power, bargaining power relies on resources and implements. Actors are pitted against one another and the outcome is determined by a combination of capabilities (resources), resolve, and skill. One reason to distinguish the two types of power is that A can no longer consider B simply as

\textsuperscript{26} Dahl 1969.
\textsuperscript{27} See for example Baldwin 1979
\textsuperscript{28} A and B can be individuals, groups, or states.
an object or a means to an end. To the extent that B is able to impose costs on A, it also forces A to recognize B as a subject. The relationship between A and B can range from openly hostile to friendly, or it can be indifferent.

With respect to the issue at stake A and B act as rational, self-regarding actors and the side with the larger share of bargaining power gets more of what they want. Within IR the concept of bargaining power is implied in neoliberal institutionalist writings. Bargaining power is the relevant type of power, when we ask about the shadow of the future, the factors that makes cooperation more likely, when we consider ‘life at the pareto frontier,’ when we analyze the ways in which institutions reduce transaction costs, and so on.

Keohane and Nye’s influential Power and Interdependence provides a thorough analysis of the type of power that I call bargaining power. The body of literature that has built on this classic is extensive.29 My reading of David Lake’s conception of authority in international relations suggests that authority in his terms, might correspond (more or less) to institutionalized bargaining power. I have nothing new to contribute to the analysis of bargaining power. I would like to stress once more, however, that the basic argument that it is only a particular kind of power and does not cover the whole spectrum of what we regularly refer to as power relations.

### Shifting from Coercive Power to Bargaining Power: Afghanistan as an Example

The shift in strategy of the United States in Afghanistan in relation to the Taliban is an example of the interaction between coercive power and bargaining power and the shift from the exclusive use of coercive power to a mixed strategy that includes bargaining. On the 20th of September in 2001, President Bush spoke before a joint session of Congress declaring war on terrorism. President Bush made issued five strict demands towards the Taliban regime of Afghanistan. He insisted that “these demands are not open to negotiation”30; thus, explicitly committing to the use of coercive power. He declared openly that the United States was ready to take any kind of military action: “I have a message for our military: Be ready.”31 By early October, it was clear that the United State would not consider negotiation unless the five demands were met.

The United States toppled the Taliban regime by late 2001/early 2002. Since then the U.S. has continued to be involved in Afghanistan. The cost of remaining in Afghanistan increased each year, both militarily and economically. According to on news source, by May 31st 2012 “more than 1,900 American soldiers are dead, over 15,000 wounded, and we have spent roughly $1 trillion so far.”32 These numbers show that the Taliban have been successful in fighting back and imposing costs on the United States. These costs, it seems have

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29 Milner and Moravcsik 2009 is an excellent collection of more recent contributions.  
31 Ibid  
32 [http://www.usnews.com/opinion/mzuckerman/articles/2012/05/03/us-credibility-on-afghanistan-is-dubious-and-suspect](http://www.usnews.com/opinion/mzuckerman/articles/2012/05/03/us-credibility-on-afghanistan-is-dubious-and-suspect)
prompted a shift in U.S. strategy: the U.S. is now ready to negotiate with the Taliban.

The Taliban released a statement stating that they want to “open a political office for the purpose of negotiations with the international community.” According to the New York Times, “the idea behind the office is to give Afghan and Western peace negotiators an ‘address’ where they can openly contact legitimate Taliban intermediaries.” The Taliban’s statement “was welcomed by the White House as a concrete signal that U.S.-led efforts to inject momentum into Afghan peace talks.” According to the French channel 4, the Taliban opened their office in Qatar on January 3, 2012. Since then, U.S. officials have started the negotiation process. Both sides are now relying on bargaining power within the context of the negotiations. The United States can use the Taliban prisoners in Guantanamo as a bargaining chip, and the Taliban can use the peace negotiation process as their bargaining chip. Coercive power, of course still plays a role in this interaction and it sets limits to the negotiation. However, at the negotiation table itself, a different form of power is used than on the frontlines of the military campaign.

When the U.S. agreed to come to the same table with the Taliban representatives to negotiate the future of Afghanistan the U.S. granted the Taliban certain degree of recognition as an actor with at least a limited degree of legitimacy. I wonder whether recognition of the other as equal in kind (to some extent?) is a prerequisite or part of the process in shifting from coercive power to bargaining power.

**Concerted Power**

I am probably in disagreement with nearly everybody in that I do not believe that power grows out of the barrel of a gun. I know that from Mao to the ultra-right everyone thinks so. But I think that out of the barrel of a gun grows violence, and immediate obedience, which then immediately ceases when the gun is removed. This is not power.

—Hannah Arendt

Concerted power is a form of power that is generated horizontally

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33. http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/jan/03/taliban-open-political-office-qatar
37. Arendt, IP: 213 (my emphasis). See also Arendt, OV: 113 and 137.
between people who, as Arendt puts it, “act in concert.”  

It is the capacity of a group to establish and/or shape a political order or to change the contours of an existing political order. Because I see the need to distinguish power that is based on more passive support from the type of actively mobilized power suggested in Arendt’s examples of the student protests and the American Revolution, I suggest the term concerted power for the range of the phenomenon that Arendt simply calls power that is neither delegated nor institutionalized.

Concerted power is not hierarchical within the group in which it is generated; unlike instrumental power it is never the property of an individual, but always belongs to the group. Arendt explains that the “extreme form of power [what I call concerted power] is All against One, the extreme form of violence is One against All.”  

Whereas coercive power and bargaining power depend on strength, resources and implements, concerted power depends on numbers and conviction. However, numbers as such are not sufficient, the will of the members of the group must be mobilized and engaged and they must present a united front.

Concerted power depends on the ability of those who act in concert to organize and coordinate their actions. It is possible, therefore, for a well-organized, united minority with strong resolve to generate more concerted power than a passive, unorganized or divided majority. This is an aspect of concerted power that Arendt does not investigate further and that would be a fertile subject for future studies.

Concerted power can also be used by the group to act together in the pursuit of common goals or in support of common values. In that sense, concerted power is the capacity of a collectivity to affect something or achieve outcomes. However, once a group has generated concerted power, it can also be used to support and increase bargaining power or coercive power in relations with non-members. Concerted power can be generated at the level of the individual, between other non-state actors, between state agencies across borders, or between states. It can be generated within states or across state boundaries.

Concerted power is the capacity to shape the political or social order of a community, to determine the “rules of the game,” the constitution, the norms, institutions, and laws. We take order for granted, as Fukuyama says and as I mentioned earlier, but all political order is based on institutionalized concerted power. Arendt identifies concerted power as the condition sine qua non of political order and I agree. It is a capacity that can be used to stabilize an order, to defend it, or to change it. In that sense, concerted power can be seen as much in the capacity of the slave holders of the South to uphold the system of slavery, as in the capacity of the protesters of the Arab Spring to challenge the existing political order.

I define concerted power as a capacity to act in concert (with Arendt).

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38 Arendt 1972 OV:143.
39 Arendt, OV: 141.
rather than as a capacity to achieve common goals or to ‘get things done’, because there is no guarantee that concerted power will prevail if it is met by resistance in the form of coercive power or violence (or even the concerted power of an even more numerous or more united group). As Arendt puts it so clearly: “In a head-on clash between violence and power, the outcome is hardly in doubt. If Gandhi’s enormously powerful and successful strategy of nonviolent resistance had met with a different enemy—Stalin’s Russia, Hitler’s Germany, even prewar Japan, instead of England—the outcome would not have been decolonization, but massacre and submission.”40

The reference to Gandhi in this quote invokes one of Arendt’s prominent examples of “power” in her terms. I already mentioned the more recent example of the concerted power generated by peaceful protesters in the wave of demonstrations that swept the Middle East in the Arab Spring of 2011. Other examples of concerted power generated between individuals include the fall of the Berlin Wall, protesting monks in Burma, political campaigns organized by NGOs like Amnesty International, Greenpeace, or Avaaz.org. But even terrorist movements rely on concerted power within the group or network.

An early example of concerted power in the interaction between states was the Concert of Europe.41 It generated just enough concerted power to keep a minimal peace for a limited time, but it arguably did demonstrate that it is possible for states to come together and create a framework for more stable interaction between them. The most obvious example today is, of course, the European Union. The European Union is a particularly interesting case, because the process that led to its creation can be seen as a textbook case of Arendtian “acting in concert” where the aim literally was nothing other than to enable these countries to live together in peace.42 The process of widening and deepening of the EU illustrates the continuous engagement, deliberation, and commitment by the members to one another and the commonly agreed upon laws and procedures that keeps the power structures intact.

The example of the EU can be compared with examples where the concerted power that is generated is more “shallow,” like the Non-Aligned Movement, or ASEAN.43 The EU example shows a process of painstakingly slow, but always deliberate shaping of the emerging political order in small steps but, over time, resulting in an astonishing extent of horizontal binding, and of voluntary surrendering of portions of sovereignty and control to the group. If we compare this to protests movements during the Arab Spring44, the contrast between the slow and cautious process of generating concerted power between the European nation states, on the one hand, and the sudden, drastic outburst of concerted power between the protesters in the Middle East, on the other hand, is striking on the surface—but underneath the surge of the concerted power of the

40 Arendt 1972 OV: 152.
41 Elrod 1976
44 See for example: Anderson 2011
protesters, there must have been a slowly growing shared sense of the need for change.

Studying these different examples through the lens of concerted power brings up a range of hypotheses regarding the extent of identification of the members with the group, the depth of their commitment to it, the role of the ability to communicate—especially concerning the role of the new social media, the question of how specific or diverse the interests are that bring the members to the table in the first place, whether the common ground that the members abstract from their chaos of differences are positive or negative (like a common enemy), how binding the commitments are and what makes them so, the degree of trust, is it possible to generated concerted power over a negative consensus, and if so, would the power thus generated be “less powerful” than concerted power generated towards the attainment of a common goal.

The example of the EU also raises the question of the interaction between the generation of concerted power and the process of institutionalization. It seems at a superficial glance that it may be necessary to balance the size and diversity of membership with depth of commitment to the collectivity. Is it necessary for a concerted power to be generated and then institutionalized in stages? Does the speed of institutionalization vary with the pre-membership cohesion of the group? The Arab Spring raises other questions as well: what does it take for concerted power fill the power vacuum that threatens after a successful revolution? What does it take for concerted power to carry beyond the overthrow of the old regime to the establishment of a new order? There is a lot more to be said on all of these examples, and I very much hope to do that in the near future!

Second Dimension: Institutionalization.

The three ‘active’ types of power need to be distinguished from a type of power that is so pervasive in the political life of ‘well-ordered’ societies that one could simply call it political power, though I have for now chosen to use the less laden term institutionalized power. We take it for granted in domestic politics. It is the capacity to implement decisions, enforce rules, provide essential collective goods and achieve collective goals. Unlike coercive power and bargaining power, which are based on strength, capabilities, resources and implements, political power, like concerted power depends on support and numbers, and cuts both ways.

Institutionalized power is the generalized capacity to govern an existing political order. In Arendtian terms it is the power in organized communities that often appears in the guise of authority. She describes it as a type of power that demands unquestioning recognition for which neither coercion nor persuasion is needed. It is the capacity to implement decisions, enforce rules, provide essential collective goods and achieve collective goals. This type of power is also related to what David Lake calls authority, although there is an important difference, since authority for Lake originates in a vertical social contract,
whereas political power, as I define it, can be derived from a horizontal social contract as well.

In a further step of developing this typology I am hoping to develop a more detailed analysis of the differences in institutionalized power depending on which form of direct power, coercive, bargaining, or concerted becomes institutionalized.

**Institutionalized Power**

*Institutionalized power* is the generalized and institutionalized capacity to govern within an exiting political community, to provide essential collective goods like order, security, and to pursue collective goals. This definition is inspired in part by Talcott Parsons’, who defines power like this: “Power then is the generalized capacity to secure the performance of binding obligations by units in a system of collective organization when the obligations are legitimized with reference to their bearing on collective goals and where in case of recalcitrance there is a presumption of enforcement by negative situational sanctions–whatever the actual agency of enforcement.”

Unlike Parsons, however, I do not want to understand power as a ”generalized medium” in politics analogous to money as generalized medium of exchange in economics.

The difference between concerted power and political power is that institutionalized power is, as the name indicates, institutionalized and delegated, whereas concerted power is the capacity of actively engaged actors to participate collectively and *directly* in the political process. As delegated power, institutionalized power, on the other hand, is exercised on behalf of a collectivity by individuals who are, as we say, *in power*.

Institutionalized power is two-way power in the sense that it is not under the complete control of those who exercise it. It is on loan and it is dependent on the support of those over whom it is exercised. Political power is delegated power; it never “belongs” to those who exercise it. In a way, one could say that it is the capacity to wield the accumulated political will of a politically organized collectivity.

While institutionalized power is generally exercised by a few (often over many), is based on, at the very least, passive toleration of the existing order by the majority. It depends on acquiescence, suffrage, unquestioning obedience, recognition of authority and adherence to the rules. Arendt points out that the exclusive focus on men’s desire to rule has obscured the interconnected and no less prevalent desire of men to submit to the rule of others and to obey commands.

In a way, I see it as institutionalized acquiescence or consent. In accordance with the model of the social contract, individual actors surrender their inherent power or sovereignty to the group. Institutionalized power

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45 Parsons 2002: 78.
remains, as Arendt insists so forcefully, the property of the group, but it can be exercised by individuals who are empowered by the group. However, since it is institutionalized, it is more stable than concerted power and less attached to the particular members of the group that brought it into existence. It seems that individuals for the most part are not even very aware of their own power. They often hand it over passively and abide by the rules of those who govern them. Resources serve as a basis for the acquisition of political power and power gets distributed to and executed by those who are rich, strong, charismatic, who have status or traditional legitimacy.

The accumulation of “passive” power is supplemented by resources and by force and can become quite irresistible. But the fact that we can talk about the “abuse” of power and that blatant abuse of power can lead to an overthrow of those “in power” still indicates very clearly that the foundation for power lies not in the resources, but in the people who submit willingly (if passively or unthinkingly). If “the people” withdraw their consent, the foundation of power is shaken. While political power is most common within organized collectivities, concerted power is more common at the international level than at the domestic level, because states are more reluctant to delegate part of their political autonomy, and thus, are more likely to stay actively engaged in political processes.

In everyday language we tend to use the term ‘power’ interchangeably for the different types of power and are often not even aware of the distinction, but, when we look more closely, ordinary language use does support the distinction and provides us with a clear-cut way of distinguishing concerted and political power, on the one hand, from coercive and bargaining power on the other. There is a simple test to determine whether a real world phenomenon is an instance of political power or one of the other types: Any time we can meaningfully ask about the legitimacy of an exercise of power we are looking at institutionalized or concerted power. Anytime we can wonder about a possible ‘abuse’ of power it also implies that we are dealing with institutionalized power. It is only possible to talk about an abuse when there is such a thing as a ‘proper’ use – and that implies delegated power.

It is only in the context of political power that questions of legitimacy arise. The question of legitimacy does not apply to power that unilaterally generated and based on capabilities or resources. When the strong do what they can etc, we can discuss the moral standing of their actions, but not whether they were legitimate. The concept of legitimacy is as central to the study of power as it is puzzling. General definitions of power usually do not entail references to legitimacy. And yet, as soon as write about power in a political context, questions of legitimacy seem to pop up almost automatically. In one encyclopedia entry on legitimacy, the author goes as far as to claim that “[n]o discussion of the concept of power could be complete without reference to legitimacy.”\(^{46}\) The link between considerations of legitimacy and political power is very important and requires a much more extensive analysis than I can offer in

\(^{46}\) Dogan 2004: 110.
Political power is a precondition for the possibility of ordered societies. It is a condition sine qua non for peace and for justice. Political power, when it is willingly accepted by those over whom it is exercised, when it is legitimate its origin and in its exercise, and when it is generated in the interaction between people or states and used towards the fulfillment of common goals, plays a necessary role in the fight against violence, injustice, and war. Concerted power and political power can exist even in the absence of a centralized monopoly over the legitimate use of force or a form of centralized and supreme authority. In fact, I believe that the inverse is true and political power must be available to provide enough order and stability that the legitimate use of force can become the monopoly of the governing authority.

**Empirical Applications and Future Research**

Conceptualizations are tools and the typology I develop here is valuable only to the extent that it helps us better see and understand relevant social phenomena. In this concluding section of the thesis I will sketch out a number of empirical applications. While I do not have the time or space in this context to develop these applications in any detail, they can serve as illustrations and they also suggest avenues for future research.

Arguably, if there is institutionalized concerted power in international relations, we should be able to recognize some of the aspects highlighted by Arendt when we look at international institutions through the lens of the refined conceptual toolkit (at least I hope to convince you that this is so). We should be able to see, in other words, evidence for the importance of speech and persuasion, for the importance of mutual recognition as equals, for the mutual guarantee of rights, for the importance of the possibility of dissent, for voluntary surrendering of control (portions of sovereignty) to the group in an effort to generate a power structure that precedes and outlasts all aims, for the possibility of creating checks and balances in the process of institutionalizing concerted power.

Some of the paradoxes that have provoked the renewed interest in the conception of power appear in a different light when we consider them through a lens of the distinction between different types of power that I have developed here. The so-called “paradox of power,” for example, can be easily explained if we take seriously that there are different forms of power that have different implications and follow a different logic with respect to effectiveness of commands, ability to assert one’s will even against resistance, questions of legitimacy, and the relations between power and violence. The paradox evaporates if we understand that coercive power cannot generate concerted power and often undermines political power.

The concept of concerted power can help us understand the impact of
non-state actors, NGOs and transnational networks: What Habermas calls Arendt’s communicative conception of power is different in its focus not just from hard power, but also from soft power or social influence. It shifts the focus from attempts to change preferences to the potential for real-world impact of (ordinary) people who “act in concert” and explains how individual actors without access to the classical power resources can make a significant difference if they act together. For example, RESULTS, a nonprofit, grassroots organization in the US that has received relatively little direct media coverage has done more to put Muhammad Yunus’ Grameen Bank on the map than any other organization (his own words) and has made remarkable achievements in targeting actions to increase the US commitment to effective anti-poverty strategies. What organizations like this one do and why and how they can be effective can be understood quite well within the framework of an Arendtian conception of power.

The puzzle of ‘powerful mice’ can also be examined from the perspective of this typology. The fact that weaker states win asymmetric conflicts significantly more than expected according to theories that rely on the commonly accepted definition of power is of particular importance, because in the current era of U.S. military hegemony, the most likely challenges to U.S. security are asymmetric conflicts ranging from intervention in interstate conflicts, troubled states, and civil wars to terrorism. The most well known explanation for this puzzle hinges on the concept of resolve (or audience costs). While this explanation is plausible, we don’t fully understand the phenomenon of audience costs yet and this theory does not explain why victories by the weaker states increase over time. Arendt shifts the focus to the support (or lack thereof) of the people behind the combatants as a crucial factor in the effectiveness of violent means: “Everything depends on the power behind the violence,” she says, and “as for actual warfare, we have seen in Vietnam how an enormous superiority in the means of violence can become helpless if confronted with an ill-equipped but well-organized opponent who is much more powerful.” If coercive power against an “other” is made more effective when it is backed by concerted power from within, we would have to go beyond the resolve of the decision-making unit to understand why weaker states sometimes win wars against stronger opponents.

The typology also suggests hypotheses about the stability and independent effect of international institutions: To the extent that my four-fold distinction adds a compelling dimension to our understanding of the phenomenon, it generates new hypotheses about the conditions for stability and effectiveness of international institutions (broadly defined). If actors in international affairs (and I would not restrict this to states) can generate concerted power that is not based on military means, but on a conscious effort to structure the public space ‘in between’ them and commit to binding rules, then

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47 See [www.results.org](http://www.results.org) for more information.
48 Arendt 1972: 148
49 Ibid.: 150 (my emphasis).
this power can be used for the achievement of specific ends, but even more importantly for the preservation of the structures of interaction that gave rise to it in the first place. Concerted power can be generated horizontally in the absence of a centralized supreme authority. Once generated, this power can be institutionalized, vested in international institutions and organizations, and delegated—thereby providing stability to international order. Concerted power can be institutionalized in such a way that checks and balances are created and these checks and balances can provide stability even in the face of shifting distributions of coercive and bargaining power among states and other actors. Let me illustrate this point very briefly using the example of the change in the institution of sovereignty that can be seen in the erosion of the norm of nonintervention and the gradual emergence of the notion of the responsibility to protect.\(^{50}\)

The institution of sovereignty can, in my view, be explained in terms of a process of institutionalizing concerted power. If we grant for a moment that an institution that it represents political power—or more precisely, if we were willing to say of an international institution without headquarters, permanent staff, or a secretariat that it represents power—then sovereignty would surely be one of the most likely candidates. Sovereignty as institutionalized power continues to create and shape the space in between the individual members of the community of states, who are both pulled into and separated by it, and who reproduce the political power that is embedded in this institution in their interactions with one another, and, thereby, keep it alive.

A number of aspects that are highlighted in Arendt’s analysis of power map on to this example surprisingly well. The story gets even more interesting, when we consider the process through which states are changing this institution, by acting in a way that has fairly straightforward similarities with what Arendt would call “acting in concert.” There is an element of natality, the ability to begin something new, in this case the deliberate attempt by a number of actors to start a process of change. There is plenty of speech, persuasion, arguing about formulations, finding common ground, in the process of drafting a new framework for a change in the definition of the rights and responsibilities associated with sovereignty. The process of binding begins with debates about specific formulations that are written into a draft, and cumulates with the historic commitment to a fundamental change in the rights and responsibilities associated with sovereignty, the Responsibility to Protect, at the 2005 World Summit. And the process of institutionalization has begun, in my view, when the UN Security Council invoked the new norm to justify NATO airstrikes against Gaddafi’s government in Libya.

Last, but not least, the distinction between these different types of power adds a dimension to explanations of stable zones of peace and the so called “democratic peace.” One of the questions that has been a driving force for me is the question whether and how it might be possible for us to escape from the threat of war and violence? If the question is “how to get to Denmark?” for

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\(^{50}\) See for example Bellamy 2010.
scholars who study development and democratization, the question for me has probably always been: “how do we get to perpetual peace?” When I say “perpetual peace” I mean a stable basis for interactions in international affairs in which violence is a marginal phenomenon, used only to deal with ‘criminals’ and outlaws, i.e. those states, organization, and individuals who resort to violent means and threats in order to challenge the social order.

The popular answer is provided by the democratic peace, but I am not convinced that we have actually cracked the democratic peace puzzle. There are many partial explanations and compelling arguments, but ultimately, I feel that buying into these explanations full-heartedly requires giving up realist insights and warnings—without being able to really explain how we get around them. In my view, the concept of power holds the key.

To my mind, Kant still provides the most compelling theory about stable peace (the many partial or even misleading interpretations of his thoughts in the democratic peace literature notwithstanding). A careful reading of Kant shows, however, that the conditions he specifies (whether he actually did think they were realistic or not) must be based on assumptions about the nature of power that he does not state explicitly. I believe that the distinction between the four types of power may shed new light on these questions and enable us to specify new testable hypotheses about the conditions for and limits of democratic and stable peace. Like Kant, I would emphasize republicanism and not democracy as such, since the possibility of a separation of powers is critical.

The democratic peace proposition (DPP) states that democracies (or: liberal democratic regimes), for some appropriate definition of democracy (or liberal republicanism), rarely (if ever) go to war with one-another. If we take the democratic peace proposition as an empirical “fact” (i.e. as a statistically significant correlation between the variables ‘democracy’ and ‘war,’ we can interpret it as a probabilistic phenomenon that does not justify long-term expectations about stable peace under changed circumstances. The theories and explanations for the DPP taken together (and several of them also taken alone) are more than sufficient to explain the statistical findings.

If, on the other hand, we want to go beyond explaining the statistical correlation and understand it as something more stable and more predictable—as a qualitative change in the relations between democratic states (that meet a set of criteria that need to be derived from the theorized causal mechanism)—I believe that the theories of the DPP that have been advanced so far are (as they are explicitly stated up to now anyway) are not sufficient.

A convincing theoretical basis for stable peace must incorporate an explanation for checks and balances of power on a basis that are inherently more stable and less prone to the spark a security dilemma than the realist version. That is where the concepts of concerted power and political power comes in. Concerted power provides a basis for the creation of stable security communities even while we take realist concerns very seriously. In this context, it is not possible for me to make a strong case that concerted power and political power hold the key for an explanation of the DPP that explains the observed empirical
regularities, provides grounds for the believe that this is a stable peace, while at the same time acknowledging the limitations of the theory. There is a lot of work to be done and I am looking forward to refining the conceptual distinctions I have developed here and bringing them to bear on empirical analyses along the lines I have described in these concluding sections.
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