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Power Politics in International Relations: A Reflection on the Obligations and Legitimacy of Authority of Major World Powers

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Abstract
One of the stark realities of international politics is the inequality of states in the face of professed equality as articulated in the sport and letters of international legal regimes such as the charter of the United Nations. This situational reality affirms the fact that regardless of what states profess; they cannot be regarded nor treated equally, considering the variance in their geopolitics, military, economic, political and socio-cultural matrix. Some states are major or superpowers while some are medium or small power, bringing to the fore the relational or relative nature of power subject to conditions of change. The transposition of rank and statics of states is possible with the result that states that were once great powers may become regional or medium powers and vice versa. This assertion confirms the position of the realists that power is the fundamental touchstone and a foundational tenet of the fames of international politics. This paper reflects on the concept of power politics, its pattern and the ranking of states in the international system. Its central thesis discusses the major obligations of major world powers and the legitimacy of their authority in the game of global politics since the emergence of nation-states in 1648 and the Congress of Vienna of 1815. The paper argues that the idea of power politics rests on the maxim that power remains an instrument of national security and sometimes a tool of aggression by states. The research was the adoption of primary and secondary studies. This information was derived thereof were collected and analysed before their usage with the application of an analytical approach. The paper concludes that the history of international politics is the history of power. Politics, an appreciation of Thrasy's maxim is that "Justice is the interest of the stronger or might is right".

Introduction
In its base, essentials[1] power politics is a demonstration of conflictive and competitive relationships among states[1]. The major elements of international politics are made by the development in which the conflict of states is informed by canons of realism other than fairness and justice. In this light, power politics can be seen as the conduct of relations among

states using force on the threat of force with little or no regard to the principle of rights and justice. Power politics rests on some philosophical assumptions such as: First, there are no absolute rights and justice in the relations of states; second, national interest, interdependency and reciprocity are the major dynamics that drive inter-state relations; third, self-help is the rule of action as each state has only as many rights as it can exert itself; fourth, relations of the states are determined by the expediential interaction of their respective capabilities as considerations of power govern the outcome of the state interface and fifth, factors of determines the questions of right in the save that might make right[2].

These assumptions professed by statements in fantastic forms are seriously adhered to in the practice of statecraft.[3] This paper, therefore, explains the nature and implications of

power politics within the context of the obligations of major world powers and the legitimacy of their authority. To this end, the paper is structured in five parts. Part one discusses the pattern of power politics with a focus on the pattern of balance of power and the challenge of the revisionist states since 1919; while part two examines power politics during the Cold War and non-alignment eras and the trend toward multipolarity. Part three focuses on the ranking of powers in the light of great and super powers-status while part four centres on the central thesis of the paper – the obligations of major world powers and the legitimacy of their authority while part five is the concluding remarks.

The Pattern of Power Politics and Balance of Power

International Politics is the struggle for power considering the inescapable fact that power is the brain behind the politics among states. It's argued by Spykman, that Preservation and improvement of the power position of states in relations with other states remains the primary goal of a state[4]. Power politics portends that inter-state relations are determined by the factors of power and war is the last alternative that states make their will prevail. This conforms to the realists' position that the essential consequence of power politics; is logically positive that force is the major factor in interstate relations. Bearing in mind that power politics is the base of international order, it goes on to confirm that its patterns have been changing from time to time in light of these changes, the paper considered in detail the pattern of power politics in the context of the balance of power.

The pattern of balance of power emerges when the major powers are in agreement on the prevailing shape of their relations within the international system. This agreement is always a result of a combined force of the concert exerted upon international political space by the major powers. This pattern of power politics first emerged in the Vienna Congress of 1818 when the great powers of that epoch, courtesy of the concert of Europe took upon the task of maintaining international peace. However, this pattern was disrupted as a result of the First World War in 1914[5]. The concert failed because of its inherent structural weaknesses, the mismatch of diplomatic instruments and the lack of political will by the major powers. Also, the interests of small states were given little or no consideration and decisions taken were based on political expediency instead of justice[6].

Also, another pattern of power politics emerged between 1919 and 1939 – the pattern of the challenge of revisionist states – Japan, Italy and Germany. This pattern of power politics was different from the pattern of the balance of power. This pattern came as the result of the victorious powers of World War I who preferred the suppression of Germany and the development of their interest of divergent nature. For instance, Italy though a victorious power became a revisionist state under the leadership of Benito Mussolini. Germany initially accepted the terms of peace of the Treaty of Versailles though under duress but later became a revisionist state under Adolf Hitler[7].

However, historical development took a radical turning point after 1930. Japan challenged the Paris Peace Plan of 1919 and 1922 at Washington by embarking on the raid of Manchuria. Italy expressed its grievances against the Treaty of Versailles and went on to invade and occupy Ethiopia and Germany repudiated the Paris Peace Plan. These made Germany, Japan and Italy revisionist powers, challenging and trying to recast the structure of the international political system in line with their natural interests.

They denounced the collective security system of the League of Nations and threatened international peace and security. The interest of the major world powers to apply the required diplomatic instruments. They chose the course of appeasement aimed at the destruction of communist Russia by Germany, Japan and Italy. This course of action failed and invariably gingered Hitler Germany and other revisionist states which resulted in the

outbreak of the Second World War and a radical change in the pattern of power politics. The dominant dimension pitched the revisionist states against the status quo[8].

Power Politics and Pattern of the Cold War

The failure of the League of Nations, the outbreak and the end of the Second World War brought another pattern of power politics - The Cold War. The concept of great power also gave way to the concept of superpower with the emergence of the United States of America and the then Soviet Union as two rival powers with ideological rivalry. One major feature of this pattern of power politics was the creation of the bi-polar world system manned by the two superpowers, splitting the international order into two opposing and rival camps – the capitalist market and the communist-controlled system facing and defecting each other was the hallmark of this pattern of power politics. This pattern of power politics used various means to bring states within the orbit of their influence, having its unique form of balance of terror. The volatility and ambiguities of the balance of power gave rise to problems of proxy wars, asymmetrical advantages and interventions in the politics of other states. This era also witnessed an arms race and nuclear armament, almost bringing the world to the brink of global nuclear conflagration, for instance, the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1961[9].

Amidst this era of balance of terror backed by mutual assured destruction came another pattern of power politics – the pattern of non-alignment. the emergence and increase in number of the non-aligned states created a new pattern of power relations. Here medium and small-range powers developed a common interest and ideology as a response to the superpower involved in the game of world politics[10]. However, these states were weak in terms of military power and economic viability but played their international politics under the aegis of the United Nations System. This pattern of power politics was hallmarked by the rise in the importance of the General Assembly of the United Nations, the increasing militancy of small states like Iran, and North Korea, among others and the colonialist bloc in global politics.

Elements of the bipolar world system led to the trend of multiplicity with the emergence of China as a major world power. President Nixon's visit to China in 1971, the conclusion of some bilateral agreements amounted to the international recognition of the Chinese Communist Regime and the taking away of the Permanent seat of the United Nations Security Council from Old China (Taiwan) and giving to the new China (People's Republic China) gave official approval of China as one of the major world powers with the power of veto in global politics[11]. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the accession of regional powers like Brazil, India, and European states to international society brought with it a multipolar world system and a new world order.

Ranking of Powers in International Politics

The use of terms like "medium powers", "major powers" and "superpowers" denotes the ranking of states into groups. Such a hierodule setting is based on the economic viability and military powers that the state possesses. Besides, the superpowers and major powers are known for their large populations, technological capacity, and military-industrial complex which translate to military strength. Whereas Medium and small powers have smaller populations and industrial as well as military strength. Military strength remains the yardstick to measure the position of states in international politics. For instance, it is the progress of China in the area of militarisation that gave her the status of a major power. It is therefore a known fact that in the modern state system, states are graded according to the size and quality of their military arsenals, including manpower[11].

Based on the fact that every state or organization is an embodiment of power, the modern state system places a high premium on power and military power is one of the most important elements of the natural power of states. All social systems pay much attention and

devote many resources to military power and its organization. The military strength of states must be such that it is sufficient to deter external aggression, disrupt a just order and even be used to overthrow an unjust order.

Germany became a major power in the 19th century in Europe after defeating France in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870. Japan earned international recognition after defeating Russia in 1905 and Italy was seen as a medium power until it annexed Ethiopia in 1936. The Soviets earned the title of a superpower with the defeat of Nazi Germany in 1944 and India became a regional power when it defeated Pakistan in the war of 1965 and 1971. The defeat of some Arch states by Israel in 1967 testified to the military superiority of the state of Zion and the withdrawal of American forces in Vietnam was an indication of the growing military power and relevance of China[12]. In the ranking of powers in the international system, states are either superpowers, great and major powers or medium and small powers. In this paper, the emphasis is on great or major powers and superpowers in line with its central thesis.

Major World Powers and Power Politics

In the international system, the role of major actors in the game of powers matters, though not all states play the same role. However, great power institution is the major power structure of the nation-state system and higher significance is attached to major world powers as far as the game of international politics. Conceptualising the idea of great powers, Morgenthall opines that a great power is a state which can have its own will against a great power. This means that the differences of power express themselves in the ability of the great power to improve its will upon the small power. Leopold Ranke also posits that a state is a great or major power if it is capable of involving itself in a war, even a Great War, to maintain itself as well as maintain the balance of power in the international political system. Martin Wight affirmed "A great power can afford to take on any power whatever in single combat"[13].

Based on the views of these Scholars, one can identify some basic features or preconditions of great or major powers which include; possession of great military power, process of self-selection, outstanding international economic development, membership of the executive class of international organization such as the security council of the United Nations, and the ability to initiate or prevent a war in which some other states are involved and involve in the pacific settlement of international disputes.

Superpowers and Power Politics

One of the changes that were ushered in by the Second World War in the international political system was the supersession of the concept of great powers with that of a superpower. Johari opines that a superpower is a major power that has no rival capable of preventing it from imposing its will upon small powers. The emergence of the United States and the erstwhile Soviet Union gave a picturesque account of superpowers – the essential conditions for being a superpower include possession of comparable numbers of thermos – nuclear weapons, technological and economic power sufficient for maintaining or increasing nuclear capability, a large military forces backed by a huge population [14].

Johari has identified four major features of superpowers, these include:

- Nuclear might and alliance system. One of the hallmarks of a superpower is the capability to produce and possess more powerful nuclear and thermonuclear weapons, bringing more and more states of the world into an alliance or defensive system – the NATO and WARSAW PACT led by the United States and the former Soviet Union are good examples of this defence arrangement.

- Capability of starting or preventing a world war: - One of the issues that promotes a major power to the rank of a superpower is its capability to start a great war or stop it. This quality places them as wreckers and great responsible for the world.
- Extra special rights and deities: - Superpowers have extra privileges and obligations in the realms of international politics. They are seen as custodians of the high level of aimed strength and great responsibility of the international system. What accords them this recognition is their emergence as a new class of power distinct and superior to the conventional European great powers, with the ability to handle adequately and effectively managerial and leadership roles in the international system in such a way as to avoid situations in which the power might be employed[15] and
- Ability to prevent another world war:- An important feature of a superpower state can be seen in the cautionary disposition to avoid or prevent another world war. They may be involved in many crises to the point of issuing threats or taking steps to defeat the machinations of each other but does not worsen the situation beyond a point of no return – American involvement in the Vietnam war and Cuban missile crisis are good cases in history[16].

The remaining part of the paper is the explanation of the major obligations of major world powers and the legitimacy of their authority in the game of power.

Obligations of Major World Powers and the Legitimacy of their Authority

Three basic obligations of major powers readily come to mind. These are structuring and restructuring of the nation-state system, maintenance of international peace and security, and preservation of hegemonic position. These three rights are discussed below:-

Structuring and Restructuring of Nation-State System

The modern nation-state system is a product of major powers. A few major powers in Europe played vital roles in the Treaty of Westphalia of 1648, the Treaty of Utrecht of 1713 and the Vienna Treaty of 1815. The Concert of Europe was a group of fire European powers, a club of major powers who were involved in the First World War At the end of the war, they with the United States as a new entrant, reconstructed old states and constituted new ones. They redrew frontiers, installed and conformed rulers and government, shifted populations, reassigned colonies and drew up new rules of international law and relations. Issues that would have taken years of rigorous negotiations and bargaining were sometimes[17] settled in hours of discussion among the heads of governments of major powers[18].

Maintenance of International Peace and Security

Major powers indeed caused great wars and they also took adequate steps to erect pillars and structures of peace. For instance, when the major powers of Europe defeated Napoleon in 1815, they established the concept of Europe. After the First World War, they came up with the League of Nations. After the Second World War, the major powers founded the United Nations. In all three structures of global peace, Britain, Russia, the United States, France and China participated in these endeavours. The League of Nations emerged in 1919 courtesy of the great effort of the United States under President Woodrow Wilson. The United Nations was spearheaded by American President Roosevelt, British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill and Russian Prime Minister, Joseph Stalin, among others[19].

In the post-war era, the United States played a key role in preventing war in Korea, the Soviets helped in preventing the aggression of Britain, France and Israel on the Suez in 1956, among others. These are concrete examples of major world powers working towards the maintenance of international Peace and Security. Furthermore, the Security Council of the United Nations have five permanent members who were the founding states of the organization and club members of the extant major world powers. The task of maintaining international peace and security which is entrusted to the Security Council of the United Nations automatically places on the doorstep of Britain, Russia, the United States, France and China the role of the custodians of global peace. They often met and decided on matters affecting global peace and security.

Preservation of Hegemonic Status

Major world powers desire to preserve their positions in line with the first law of nature – self-preservation. They achieve this by adopting three strategic measures: First, they always desire to extend their sphere of influence to almost all parts of the world. For instance, the United States adopted and implemented the Monroe Doctrine to cover the entire Latin America, Japan initiated the Greater East Asia Co-prosperity and Russia adopted the Brezhnev doctrine of the solidarity of the Asian States. These measures were geared towards preserving their hegemonic position in the international system[21]. Second, major powers always make great and concerted efforts to bring more states of the world into its defence or alliance system. The expansion of NATO Eastward is a recent case propelled by the United States and its allies. Third, major powers take the necessary measures to prevent other powers from developing or increasing their status to join the club of big powers. The adoption and ratification of the Non-Nuclear Proliferation Treaty was a measure taken to prevent other powers from joining the Nuclear Club by developing and producing nuclear weapons.

The major powers are always ready to play the role of international policeman. The case of the United States underscores this position as it plays the role of the custodian of freedom and democracy. Moreso, they are all out to prevent the conditions of direct and mutual military confrontation, conscious of the principle of mutual assured destruction. In the same vein, they discourage other states from being on par with them and can go all out to achieve this purpose[20]. According to Modelski, the great powers have shown themselves to have several interests in common. They have an important stake in peace, not only because their position of authority rests upon the ability to maintain peace but also because as the largest producers of military power, they are most likely to carry the unpredictable expenses of war and suffer the punishing cost of its campaigns in a nuclear exchange, they would be the first to suffer devastating damage. As great powers, they also have interests that set them apart from non-great powers such as maintaining great power institutions, keeping smaller powers in their proper places and preserving their special prerogatives[21].

Considering the reality of these rights of major powers in the international system, one pertinent question that should be addressed is the legitimacy of the authority of these major powers. Morally, these legitimacies are questionable since they operate outside the prescient of equality and morality. It is morally wrong for one to talk about the legitimacy of the authority of major no stretch of the imagination can one appreciate the role of major powers in destabilizing political and economic development through their covert and overt means in smaller states. However, Modelski has articulated two main reasons to justify the legitimacy of the authority of major powers. He argues on the procedural expectation that it is right for some states to exercise leadership in international space and to take initiative in emergencies. In times of crisis, all eyes are on major powers. Their action or inaction matters

so much to all others. Other states accord them attention and visibility and their use or abuse of their privileged status has impactful consequences in the international system[22].

Modelski also asserts that in concrete terms, the decisions of major powers must be in line with global values and mores. Their disposition must be seen as solutions to international issues of the day. Historically, he further states that each of the great peace settlements were embodiment of value consensus. Westphalia came with the principle of sovereign independence, Utrecht proclaimed the principle of balance of power, Vienna brought the principle of legitimacy, Versailles acclaimed national self-determination and starting from the Atlantic Charter, Democracy became the ruling model of the post-war era[23]. It is in light of these developments that one can appreciate the veto provision of the charter of the United Nations that enables the permanent members of the Security Council to stop others from forcing the executive arms of the international organization to wrong decisions.

Johari opines that authority is the moralized aspect of power. He argues that the authority of major powers should be legitimate only when it is enforced within the compound interest of international morality. To lend credence to the position of Johari, Modelski once again concluded that – The quality of great powers' actions determines the moral quality of world politics. If their policies are cruel, selfish and short-sighted, they do not only demean themselves but also bring out the worst in government and men around the world. When radiate a spirit of generosity and stand for enduring values of order and Justice, they have a chance of warming the spirit of the age.[24]

Conclusion and Policy Prescription

It is common knowledge that one cannot separate power from politics and that the state exists to exert power through the instruments of government. It is against this background that international politics has been hallmarked by the principle of balance of power. Political Power exists in the world to be used by states either to lesser or greater degrees. This is so because peace and war are two facets of international politics. The former exists when the power relationship of major powers is in a state of equilibrium and the latter exists when the power relationship among them is thrown out of balance[25].

International Politics is all about the perpetual search and struggle for power using the instruments of financial control, diplomacy, propaganda and military strength, among others. The game of power politics that manifests in the institutions of major world powers cuts across the principle of equality of states by erecting a hierarchy order of the powers in the global space and always prompt power-hungry states to surpass others in the game. This lends credence to the fact that the international system is marked by cumulative inequalities[26].

However, opponents of power politics have criticized it as a great foe of international peace making the prospects of global peace to be in a state of disturbance. This is because tenacious attachment to the ethics of power politics blinds the statement of the world and they fail to understand the stark reality of the international system. A handful of states (major world powers) see themselves as the sole custodians of international peace and security and formed a clique to settle or resolve all problems in the international space in line with their respective national interests. These epoch-making and epoch-ending instruments have brought smaller powers into the circle of major powers and the same vein have expelled or relegated temporality or permanently major powers to the footnote of international politics[29].

In sum, international politics cannot be divorced from power politics despite its shortcomings. However, the remedial alternative is to pop up the structures and organs of international organizations so that the physical power of the few can be tamed by the moral force of the many to the best interest of all. If the rule of law can govern the municipal space, it is possible to govern the international space[30]. What is required to make it work is the

genuine commitment of all actors in the international system. However, what is obtainable today demonstrates that the rule of law so professed by major powers stipulates that power politics suits the dynamics of the international system based on the right of the stranger, and in line with the principle of Thrasymachus that Justice is the interest of the stronger or might is rights[31].

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