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Psychopolitical Effects of Globalization on Power: When Weakness Becomes Strength

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Title: Psychopolitical Effects of Globalization on Power: When Weakness Becomes Strength

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Abstract. Globalization of science, technology, and culture may be changing conceptions of political power.

As alluded to in "The Psychology of Controlling Control" (IBPP, 1(9), January 24, 1997) power is the ability and motivation to manage the disparity between the real and ideal--between what one is and what one desires to be, between what one has and what one desires to have. Because we live in a world of infinite need and finite resources, because we need people to meet some of our needs as surely as these people are also power competitors, conflict is the currency of human relations.

There seem to have been three common techniques to obtain power in the sphere of international affairs. They are the development, maintenance, and employment of (1) military strength, (2) economic strength, and (3) strong values--the last encompassing political and religious ideologies which influence belief systems and behaviors.

These techniques, as can be seen, share strength as a characteristic. As can be noted through newspapers, journals, books, and web sites on international affairs. They are still highly valued among political leaders. However, with globalization there seems to be a rising frequency of employing areas of weakness as a viable power technique. In essence, weakness is more often becoming strength.

As one example, the government of North Korea has an extremely weak economy, basic difficulty in feeding its people (related to the loss of substantial aid after the Soviet Union's disestablishment and to severe flooding), and seemingly ever-weakening social cohesion even with rigid totalitarian controls. Yet North Korea has been able to induce the willing provision of aid--especially food and light-water nuclear reactors--from countries it stridently berates through its propaganda. Why is this? The governments of the United States (USG), South Korea, and Japan (among others) fear two phenomena related to North Korea's weaknesses--(1) the sudden implosion and destabilization of North Korea leading to a massive and sudden immigration of hungry, impoverished hordes or (2) the risk of implosion and destabilization reaching such a high level that a massive North Korean attack or invasion of South Korea and even proximal and distal countries occurs.

As another example, the collapse of the Mexican peso precipitated an emergency financial intervention by the USG during the first Clinton administration. This intervention had less to do with helping out an ally or noblesse oblige and more to do with preventing an even greater influx of illegal immigrants from Mexico into the US and loss of support for further hemispheric integration of economies exemplified in the North American Free Trade Agreement. Inadequacies in Mexican counterdrug efforts--even blatant and prevalent corruption--often elicit additional foreign aid. Here it's as if too little power or too much power in counterdrug efforts may endanger additional power afforded by the USG.

A third example concerns the nuclear energy and nuclear weapons industries of Russia. Extremely lax safety and security procedures and inadequate funding have induced significant financial aid from the

International Bulletin of Political Psychology

USG. The aid has been forthcoming to prevent (1) theft of nuclear technology, knowledge, and materials for terrorist purposes and (2) future Chernobyl-type accidents.

All three examples also facilitate the provision of additional power from others to foster a nurturant environment for previously awarded power to blossom forth. And still other examples could be cited including (1) the Iraqi government's using its people's suffering and its financial debts to France and Russia as leverage to weaken United Nations (UN) economic sanctions and facilitate a more acceptable UN-approved deal to sell oil, (2) Rwandan Hutu soldiers in Zaire using the suffering of noncombatants to obtain varieties of material support, and (3) Cuban and Haitian immigrants choosing to be in harm's way--e.g., through unseaworthy craft and through walking, running, and swimming in dangerous environments--to activate the alleged humanitarian tendencies of relatively prosperous governments. (Note that this article does not analyze whether the securing through weakness of military, economic, or even values from others actually contributes to power--even if this is the intent. For example, is "welfare dependency" actually independence through welfare?)

As globalization increases and the world becomes more independent, the words of a past-Speaker of the US House of Representatives become more and more germane. As Tip O'Neil observed, "All politics is local." So, too, the repercussions of real and feigned weakness are having more impact in more localities and more often transduce weakness into strength. So, too, the political analyst's task of separating true suicidal attempts from more adaptive suicidal gestures--low from high ability and motivation to manage the disparity between the real and the ideal--is becoming increasingly difficult. Perhaps, the ideal for leaders may be more often combining rationality and emotionality, strength and weakness, masculine and feminine, and even sadistic and masochistic elements of relationship. It is not so much that the meek shall inherit the Earth, but that the inheritors are becoming more aware of a peculiar sort of strength. (See Gagnier, T.T., & Robertiello, R.C. (1993.) Sado-masochism as a defense against merging: Six case studies. *Journal of Contemporary Psychotherapy*, 23, 183-192; Jorstad, J. (1991.) Contemporary leaders: Power and powerlessness. *Leadership and Organization Development Journal*, 12, 21-31; Pieranunzi, V.R. (1993.) The hermeneutics of power and powerlessness in psychiatric nursing: A Heideggerian phenomenology. *DAI*, 54(1-B) 168.) (Keywords: Control, Foreign Policy, Globalization.)