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The Future of Noncoercive Statecraft and International Security ^[1]

Is the current international system failing humanity? If we aspire to uphold the principles of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" within our nation, it may be time to extend similar aspirations to all nations. In essence, for the mere purpose of ensuring one nation's security prosperity and wellbeing, governments also need to refrain from jeopardizing them for other nations. But currently, this principle does not seem to guide the international community's approach to statecraft which is dominated by military attacks, economic coercion, and information warfare, killing of civilians directly with bombs or indirectly through blockades and sanctions.

Indeed, a review of the existing literature suggests that the international system and the world order are facing significant challenges, from great power competition to violent extremism. The rise of nonstate and subnational actors, transnational threats such as climate change, the resurgence of authoritarianism in many countries, and the advent of new technologies further

strain the established international system. International institutions like the United Nations and the World Trade Organization have been criticized for their inability to adapt to such changes and demands quickly enough and in ways that ensure public trust in such institutions. Additionally, while notions such as soft power seem to be overused and underdefined, the desire to enhance noncoercive statecraft and embrace nonviolent foreign policy remains notable. But our systems of international affairs do not seem to have evolved enough to address such needs.

As the study and practice of international affairs continue to evolve, the field can embrace a more creative and innovative approach that extends beyond the mere adoption of new technologies. This evolution can manifest through the design of novel systems and metrics in world affairs. This means updating our definition of success, progress, and power in world affairs as well as ways that we measure them within a newer and more rigorous system for noncoercive statecraft. The redesigned systems and metrics should possess the resilience to address complexity while remaining straightforward enough to be accessible to a diverse spectrum of stakeholders.

As we reimagine statecraft to be more humanly decent and less violent, we need to have better ways to analyze and compare coercive and nonviolent tools of statecraft systematically, comprehensively, and logically. We need to develop operationalized definitions for notions such as power, influence, and appeal. In my recent research, I draw on definitions of power, force, and movement from the field of physics to help guide the thinking about power and influence in international affairs.

In physics, we understand that concepts such as energy, force, momentum, and power are highly related to and transform one another, but they are not the same thing. Force can be coercive through mechanisms such as warfare and sanctions, or it can be noncoercive such as attraction and appeal generated through public diplomacy, international collaborations, cooperation, or aid. As such we can refer to attraction force as a type of force that can cause the behavior, knowledge, or attitude of a target audience to “move, stop, or change speed or direction” because they are persuaded rather than coerced to do so. But power involves more than just force. It depends on how quickly and easily an actor can cause the change that it seeks in the target through its force. Influence, like the concept of “work” in physics, is generated when force is used and successfully moves an object.

Ultimately, in noncoercive statecraft, the most effective and efficient way to enhance one’s power and influence is through international collaboration.

Many forces are at play in international affairs, and if one actor is not powerful enough, even if it asserts force, it is less likely to be influential. In physics, when work has not taken place, power cannot be calculated. But work can take place due to multiple forces and factors, and unless all such factors are known, calculating the power of a specific actor to create change is impossible. What is possible is the measurement of power assets, as they can suggest how powerful an actor could be, hypothetically.

I define three categories for power assets: Legitimacy, Authority, and Competence.

Legitimacy is a category that includes factors such as beliefs, values, policies. For example, having great conviction in humanity, human decency and showing goodwill are significant components that shape legitimacy. Authority is another category which is associated with the likes of governance, institutions, official representation, and credence. Competence refers to another category that includes factors such as capital, geography, skilled labor, expertise, technology, networks, alliances, and international connections. Even though there could be some overlap between these categories, there is a clear distinction among them based on the nature of the contextual factors, how they are assessed, and used.

In addition to measuring power assets, measuring attraction force is also possible in the field of physics, which could guide the thinking about how attraction is assessed in international relations. Drawing from my research and analysis, it becomes evident that attraction hinges on concepts like perceptions of legitimacy, authority, and competence. In simpler terms, the evaluation of attraction revolves around the knowledge, judgment, and attitude of the receiving audience.

Ultimately, force and power are relational notions: they depend on both the actor and the target audience through the relationship between them. Hence, a successful mechanism of statecraft that enhances attraction power, force and influence is one that builds and manages relationships. Ultimately, in noncoercive statecraft, the most effective and efficient way to enhance one's power and influence is through international collaboration. In summary, there are two takeaways to point to as we imagine the future of noncoercive statecraft to benefit humanity: 1) the role that nonstate actors, including diaspora groups and subnational actors such as cities, are most notable; 2) collaborations are most effective when the purpose is to benefit all human beings, regardless of nationality, in the pursuit of common hopes for humanity, happiness, life, and liberty.
