

## Balance of Power: An Overview

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**Abstract:** *The concept of balance of power in international relations is an ancient and much-discussed topic. For almost three centuries, this concept has generally been used in the context of the interpretation of the system that prevailed in international politics from 1648 to 1914. International politics and international relations of that time were analyzed on the basis of balance of power. Palmer and Perkins said that the principle of balance of power is a fundamental principle governing international relations. According to them, as long as international politics is influenced by a nation-based state, balance of power will continue to be a fundamental principle. It has always been a cause of peace and order in history. If balance is maintained, there will be no aggression or war and therefore peace will be achieved automatically. This article highlights the method of maintaining balance of power, arguments in favor of balance of power and arguments against balance of power.*

**Key Words:** *State, Peace, Balance, Aggression, War.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION:

In a world where many nations exist with different levels of power and where each nation tries to maximize its power, there is a tendency to balance the whole system. In other words, different nations manage in such a way that no nation or alliance is strong enough to dominate others because a rival alliance maintains balance of power. It is believed that as long as such a balance is established, there is peace and the independence of the small nation is protected.

### 2. DEFINITION:

It is really difficult to define the balance of power. Different scholars have defined it differently.

- i. "Balance of Power is such a just equilibrium' in power among the members of the family of nations as will prevent any one of them from becoming sufficiently strong to enforce Its will upon others."- Sidney B. Fay
- ii. "Balance of Power is an equilibrium or a certain amount of stability in power relations that under favorable conditions is produced by an alliance of states or by devices."- George Schwarzenberger
- iii. "Balance of Power is such a system in which some nations regulate their power relations without any interference by any big power. As such it is a decentralized system in which power and policies remain in the hands of constituting units."- Inis Claude
- iv. "Balance of Power means "the maintenance of such a just equilibrium between the members of the family of nations as should prevent any one of them from becoming sufficiently strong to impose its will upon the rest."- Lord Castlereagh
- v. "Whenever the term Balance of Power is used without qualification, it refers to an actual state of affairs in which power is distributed among nations with approximately equality."- Hans. J. Morgenthau

### 3. CONDITIONS OF THE BALANCE::

Disagreements exist among the scholars as to the precise conditions of the balance of power system. However, the following are generally regarded as the essential prerequisites of a balance of power system: i. There are several sovereign independent states. ii. There does not exist any centralized, legitimate and powerful international authority controlling the states. iii. Power must be distributed in such a fashion that no one can be stronger than all the remaining combined. The distribution of power should be relatively unequal so as to differentiate the states into three categories : great powers, middle powers, and smaller powers, iv. There exists continuous but controlled competition among mutually acceptable governing elites of the states for scarce world resources, influence and values; that is, all states constantly seek to maximize power. v. States have no long-term ties or alliances. vi. The great powers must be satisfied with the existing hierarchy in the international system.

#### 4. FEATURES OF BALANCE OF POWER:

The balance of power is always temporary and unstable. It also changes with the change of time and conditions and gives way to another system of balance of power. So, the balance of power can not live long. The balance of power is usually in favor of stability. So those who benefit from it are usually in favor of it and those who see their own loss oppose it. History has witnessed many wars due to this opposite motivation of the states. The balance of power is not a gift of God. It is the result of the active intervention of states. Whenever a state anticipates that a balance is being drawn against it, it must act quickly. It must be prepared to take the necessary steps, including the risk of war, if it is determined to protect its vital interests, which, if inactive, would be in danger. Thus, it is the result of diplomatic activity, not the gift of God. A democratic state usually does not want to participate in the game of balance of power except in times of crisis. On the other hand, a dictatorial state is always interested in expanding its dominance so other states avoid it in building balance of power.

#### 5. FORMS OF BALANCE OF POWER:

The balance of power can be flexible or rigid. An alliance is said to be flexible when one state can easily change its policy and its relations with another state as needed. When an alliance cannot change their relations as required, then it is called rigid. In the aftermath of World War II, relations between the US Alliance and the Soviet Union became rigid. On the basis of the number of participants in the balance of power system, many have divided it into three categories – bipolar, tripolar and multipolar. When two states or alliances play a key role in maintaining balance of power, it is known as bipolar. This balance of power developed in the aftermath of World War II. When three states play an active role in maintaining balance of power, it is called tri-polar. When more than three states are actively involved in maintaining, it is called multi-polar. Such a balance of power originated in eighteenth and nineteenth-century Europe. It is global when all countries participate through a network of alliances and counter alliances.

Power balance can be simple or complex. Simple balance of power is the balance of power formed on the basis of only two opposing strong alliances. The balance of power formed during the post-World War II period, based on two conflicting camps led by the United States and the Soviet Union, is a perfect example of simple balance of power. On the other hand, if some almost equal power states maintain their balance of power by competing among themselves individually, then it is called the complex balance of power. Since the middle of the last century, China and Soviet Russia have gradually become rivals, and the politics of balance of power has evolved from simple to complex. From the geographical point of view, energy balance can be divided into local, regional, continental and world wide. The balance of power formed between two neighboring states is called local balance of power like the balance of power between India and Pakistan.

#### 6. METHOD OF MAINTAINING BALANCE OF POWER:

Balance of Power is not automatic. It has to be secured by the states following this policy. In fact, there are several methods by which states try to secure and maintain balance of Power.

**6.1) Alliances and Counter-alliances:** Alliance and counter-alliance formation is considered as a major method of balance of power. An alliance is a device by which a group of nations enters into a military or security agreement to increase their own strength as opposed to the strength of their opponents, creating a favorable balance of power. Whenever a state or alliance in Europe has become more powerful and has tried to upset the balance by adopting an aggressive policy, other states have united against that state or alliance for the purpose of maintaining balance. When Germany, Austria and Italy joined the Triple Alliance in 1882, the balance of power in Europe was severely disrupted. In response, Russia, France and Britain gradually resolved their differences and formed a counter-alliance called Triple Entente. After the Second World War, the communist countries formed the Warsaw Pact against the Western alliances like NATO, SEATO etc.

**6.2) Armaments and Disarmaments:** Over time, the balance of power has created some ways and methods, techniques and devices through which it can be achieved and maintained such as armament and disarmament. The main instrument for achieving balance is the arms. Whenever a nation increases its power, its opponents have no choice but to enter into arms race. If the first nation can maintain its power, the balance of power will be upset, but if its opponents can consolidate their power through their own arms, then the balance of power will be maintained. Like weapons, disarmament can destroy or restore the balance of power. The states concerned may agree on a proportional reduction of their weapons to stabilize the balance of power between them. But in reality, disarmament is rarely used except for the defeated forces after a general war. Although the victorious powers often resort to it to maintain a favorable balance of power, its overall role is disappointing.

**6.3) Divide and Rule:** The aim of this policy is to maintain the balance of power by keeping the opposing forces weak without allowing them to unite. This is a negative approach. However, this principle has been widely applied in the history of the world. The Romans followed this policy to maintain control over the scattered nations. In modern times, Great Britain has used this principle extensively to maintain its colonial empire. Since the seventeenth century France followed this policy towards Germany. By creating divisions between Hindus and Muslims, the British created disunity among the Indians and thus weakened India and maintained their authority.

**6.4) Compensation:** Compensation as a common device involves the annexation or division of territory. The Treaty of Utrecht of 1713 that terminated the war of the Spanish succession endeavored to maintain balance through territorial compensation. Austria, Russia and Prussia divided Poland three times in 1772, 1793 and 1795 in such a way that the power of each increased almost equally.

**6.5) Buffer States:** A small state between two rival states is called a buffer state. This small state keeps the two rival states away from each other and alleviates the possibility of war. Afghanistan has played for a long time the role of buffer state. Since Afghanistan was located between the British Empire and Russia, there was no war between England and Russia in that region. In Europe, Belgium and Holland have played the role of buffer states between Germany and France. Palmer and Perkins said that buffer states are of great importance because of their great cushioning effect between great powers.

#### **7. BALANCE OF POWER: ARGUMENTS IN FAVOR:**

- The policy has paved the way for the establishment of international peace and has forced various states to move away from the path of war. Due to the balance of power between the rival states, no one dared to attack the other.
- In the present day, many small countries have been able to maintain their independence and sovereignty due to the balance of power. Whenever a large power seeks to usurp the independence and sovereignty of a small state, other states come to the aid of the state for fear of breaking the balance of power.
- In the present day, various international organizations play an active role in maintaining world peace and security. But in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when no such organization existed, balance of power was the only way to maintain world peace and security.
- As a result of the balance of power, no powerful state or alliance of the world has been able to extend its dominance over the world. For this reason, at present, international relations have the opportunity to develop in cooperation with many countries.

#### **8. BALANCE OF POWER: ARGUMENTS AGAINST:**

- Since the evaluation of a nation's national power is always uncertain, no nation can be dependent on the balance of power. Every nation has always kept secret about its power. Since all nations have safe margins, the balance of power at a given time is always unreal.
- The dominance of power in the hands of one state or group of states does not necessarily threaten world peace or the independence of any nation. Unipolarism caused by the collapse of one superpower (USSR) and the continued presence of the other superpower (USA) has in no way disturbed international peace and security or the balance of power. The dominance of a state in contemporary times is a reality and yet there is peace and peaceful coexistence.
- The balance of power assumes that a few equally strong states exist. In reality no two states have or can have equal power. It involves the concept of balance which is actually unbalanced and subject to continuous change.
- According to critics, balance of power does not always help maintain international peace and security. Attempts to maintain balance of power have often led to war, destroying peace. That is why peace-loving people like Woodrow-Wilson think that It is not a balance of power, but a well-organized general effort is needed to maintain peace in today's world. Similarly, Jawaharlal Nehru could not rely on the principle of balance of power; So he formed a non-aligned movement. In fact, the people who are interested in maintaining world peace oppose the policy of balance of power without supporting it.
- According to the concept of balance of power, each state can measure its power. But in reality it is difficult to measure the strength of national power. National power consists of many elements, such as geographical elements, economic status, social cohesion, national confidence and governmental efficiency. These elements are always changeable. That is why it is not easy to compare the national power of different states. When

different allied states try to balance power with each other, it is difficult to measure the national power of the allied states.

- The practical application of the theory of balance of power is difficult because of the uncertainty in the measurement of national power. Since it is very difficult to measure the national power of different rival states, not every state tries to achieve the same power as its rival. In reality they try to gain more power than that. Thus the rival states became embroiled in a relentless arms race. The result of such an arms race is war. The idea of balance of power is dangerous from there.
- The principle of balance of power assumes that the states of the world can form or leave alliances at will in the interest of power. But in reality no country can form an alliance or leave the alliance in this way. The relationship of one state with another is based on political, economic and psychological basis.

## 9. CONCLUSION:

At present the concept of balance of power has lost much of its legitimacy but its effectiveness is still significant. As long as the international society is based on the politics of power, the balance of power will be a relevant concept. The emerging importance of collective security, international law, and international organizations like the United Nations has further relegated the balance of power to the background. Many contemporary scholars believe that law and its enforcement should depend more on morals, the consensus of nations, public opinion, the United Nations, and collective security than on a mechanism of balance of power. They also consider that collective security and international organizations can better maintain world peace in the present circumstances. With the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States was the most powerful country in the international system. The principle of balance of power cannot work in a unipolar system. But this unipolarity operates within the framework of the emergent multipolarity comprising Germany, Britain, France in Europe and Japan, India, China in Asia and all above Russia, though economically weakened, rivals United States of America in nuclear capabilities. Palmer and Perkins said that Even if a super-national world body is formed, the balance of power will continue. G.H. Synder said that the concept of balance of power in international relations is still a central theoretical concept. It is said that the balance of power is still relevant, valid, and meaningful, although in a different context.

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