

## **5. BALANCE OF POWER**

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### **MEANING**

It has been traditionally the most powerful device of power management. In Kautilya's Arthashastra, we find a full fledged development of the concept of balance of power.

### **DEFINITIONS**

- Sidney B.Fay, "it is such a 'just equilibrium' in power among the family of nations as will prevent any one of them from becoming sufficiently strong to enforce its will upon the others."
- George Schwarzenberger, "it is 'equilibrium' or 'a certain amount of stability in power relations' that under favorable conditions is produced by an alliance of states or by other devices. Balance of Power is of universal application wherever a number of sovereign and armed states co-exist."
- Hans J.Morganthau, "it refers to an actual state of affairs in which power is distributed among nations with approximate equality."

### **NATURE OR CHARACTERISTICS**

- It signifies some sort of equilibrium in power relations which is subject to constant ceaseless change.
- It is temporary and unstable
- It is to be achieved by the active intervention of men.
- Favors status quo
- A real balance of power seldom exists. It comes to an end when war breaks out.
- The objective view of historians holds balance of power as a situation in which the opposing nations or groups of nations are almost equal in

power. The subjective view of a statesman holds BoP as a situation involving freedom to join one side other according to its own interests.

- It is not a device of peace but admits war as the means for securing balance.
- In it, the big powers are the actors and the small powers are either the spectators or the victims of the game.
- Multiplicity of states and not eliminating anyone in a war are the two fundamental features of the BoP.
- National interest is its basis.
- Security and peace are the main purposes of the BoP.

### **METHODS OF BALANCE OF POWER**

- **COMPENSATION** – it usually entails the annexation or division of the territory of the state whose power is considered dangerous for the balance.
- **ALLIANCES** – it is a device by which a combination of nations creates a favorable BoP by concluding military or security pacts or treaties aimed at augmenting their own strength vis-à-vis the power of their opponents. An offensive alliance seeks to upset the balance in favor of its embers whereas; the defensive alliance seeks to maintain balance which is in favor of its members.
- **INTERVENTION AND NON-INTERVENTION** – intervention is a dictatorial interference into the internal affairs of states with a view to change or maintain a particular desired situation. Non-intervention involves deliberate non-action in a particular situation which is considered to be harmful to the other competing opponents.
- **DIVIDE AND RULE** – it has been resorted to by all such nations who try to make or keep their competitors weak by keeping them divided or by dividing them.
- **BUFFER STATES OR ZONES** – the major function of a buffer is to keep the two powerful nations apart and thus minimize the chances of clash and hence to help the maintenance of balance.
- **ARMAMENTS AND DISARMAMENTS** – armaments are used as the means for maintaining or securing the favorable position in power relations in the world. Now-a-days, disarmaments and arms control are regarded as ideal devices for maintaining world peace and security.
- **THE BALANCER** – the balancer is a nation or group of nations which remains aloof from the policies of the two rivals and the opponents

and plays the role of 'the laughing third party'. Each contending party tries to win over the support of the balancer. If any party to the balance becomes unduly weak resulting into a threat to the balance, the balancer joins it and helps the restoration of balance.

### **MERITS OF BALANCE OF POWER**

- It is a source of stability in international relations
- It helps continuous adjustments and readjustments in relations without any grave risk of war among nations.
- It ensures multiplicity of states.
- It guarantees the freedom of small states.
- It discourages war.
- It checks imperialism
- It is a source of peace in international relations

### **DEMERITS OF BALANCE OF POWER**

- BoP cannot ensure peace. In fact several wars were fought in the name of preservation of BoP.
- Preponderance of one power can also secure peace.
- It has a narrow basis. It fails to give proper weight age to other socio-economic, cultural and moral factors.
- Equality of number of states is a myth
- Nations are not free to break alliances at their will.
- It is uncertain<sup>1</sup>.

### **RELEVANCE OF BALANCE OF POWER**

The following structural changes in the international relations have adversely affected the role of BoP –

- End of European domination of international politics
- The rise of propaganda, psychological and political warfare as instruments of national policy
- Emergence of ideology as a key factor in post war international relations
- Reduction in the number of major powers.

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<sup>1</sup> Bull, The Anarchical Society, p.58

- The emergence of bipolarity and its recent transformation into unipolarity
- The disappearance of imperialism and colonialism
- Disappearance of the 'balancer'
- The change in the concept of war like 'total war'.
- Emergence of global actors' like UN.

Many of its critics like Earnest Haas<sup>2</sup>, A. Appadorai and others go to the extent of describing it as a totally obsolete concept. But the concept of BoP despite having lost much of its validity is still a meaningful concept. Palmer and Perkins make an optimistic prediction about the continuance of BoP. To quote them, "as long as the nation states system is the prevailing pattern of international society, BoP policies will be followed in practice, however roundly they are damned in theory."

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<sup>2</sup> Haas and Whiting, Dynamics of International Relations