

**THE CONCEPT OF BALANCE OF POWER , ITS CHANGING NATURE AND  
RELEVANCE IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

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**PREFACE:**

The balance of power is The Realist concept to ensure peace in Anarchical International relations and often treated as The Axiom of International politics. In absence of World Governance states opt for self help in order to ensure survival. They try to increase their capabilities relative to one another through their internal efforts of self strengthening or external efforts of alignment and realignment with other states( Kenneth Waltz) . It is based on Westphalian World Order and believes that Sovereignty is sacred concept of International Politics.

Treaty of Utrecht ( 1713) Formally recognized the Concept of Balance of Power and Period of 1815 to 1914 is Called as “Golden age of Balance of Power” by A.P. J. Taylor. It led to decade of a Peace in war torn Europe. World War 1 is Considered as the result of Change in Balance of Power. With rise of Nuclear Weapons and Non State Actors, In post Cold war era ,the relevance of Balance of power is being Questioned.

As a Concept, Idea of Balance of Power is either modified or challenged by various Scholars. It is a murky and vague Concept and its nature is changing as per the time .

**OBJECTIVES:**

1. To Understand the basic Meaning of Balance of Power.
2. To study the range of Methods employed to Set a Balance of power.
3. To acknowledge the Evolving nature and scope of Balance of power

**MEANING OF BALANCE OF POWER :**

Morgenthau, The Father of Classical Realism, Defined Balance of Power in four ways. 1. It is actual State of Affair. 2. It is approximately equal Distribution of power. 3. It is a policy aimed to establish certain state of Affairs. 4. It is any distribution of power . Moreover to this, Ernst Haas postulated eight different meanings of the concept including Equal or unequal Distribution of power, Domination of one state that act as Balancer, Characterized by instability and war etc.

When any state or bloc becomes , or threatens to become, inordinately powerful, other states should recognize this as this as a threat to their security and respond by taking equivalent measures, individually and jointly, to enhance their power ( Claude) . Thus various analysts have investigated the various alternative ways in which the phrase has been used throughout its long history.

Claude has aptly remarked that it us an ambiguous concept as it has so many meanings. Similarly, Schleicher ibserves , “ It is virtually meaningless” .

**BALANCE OF POWER POLICIES :**

The best balance is one which leaves one’s own state free while constraining all the others. This, however, is extremely difficult to achieve. Organski identified six methods by which states might attempt to maintain the balance of power, these being to arm , to seize territory, establish buffer zones, from alliances, intervene the internal affairs etc.

1. ALLIANCE –It is the most logical way to promote a Balance of power. It provides the states a capacity for flexibility and rapid reaction to threats. Ex. Alliance bwte8Axis powers ( Germany, Japan, Italy, Hungary) in 1939-45

2. THE RESORT TO WAR - war is an instrument to preserve or restore a Balance of power.( Metternich) . Ex Russia's War in Ukraine.
3. ARMAMENT AND DISARMAMENT: Increase in Military expenditure , Cutting edge defense technology acquisition etc. Ex. Treaty of Versailles imposed Disarmament measures on Germany like limiting the German Army to lakh men etc.
4. PARTITION AND COMPENSATION –Mostly weak states are vulnerable to this. Ex Poland was partitioned between rapacious neighbours three times during eighteenth century and once in the twentieth.
5. BUFFER STATE- Establishing Buffer state so that two major powers don't come in direct confrontation. Ex Poland acted as buffer state between Russia and Germany.

#### **CHANGING NATURE OF THE BALANCE OF POWER:**

The term Balance of power suggests equilibrium which is subject to constant change. Though , it also involves disequilibrium. In practice the balance of power has proved to be temporary and unstable. It favors status quo in in power positions of major powers. It is used as a policy, as a system, as a status, and as a symbol. At a times, it is also used as a propaganda ploy.

It has conflicting aims. Primarily it aims to preserve peace . But at a times, it has also tended to increase tensions between nations and to encourage wars. The balance of power is mainly a big power game and big powers are neither interested in peace nor in stability but in their security . It admits to the existence of some balancer state or states or an organization.

Balance of power was notably seen during the Renaissance, as Italian city-states endeavored to prevent powers from dominating the region. David Hume maintained that Greek politics game as a distinct expression of notion of balance of power. In the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the Duke of Milan Francesco Sforza and ruler of Florence Lorenzo de' Medici actively pursued policies aimed at balancing power. In 16<sup>th</sup> century England Geld the Balance between France and The holy Roman Empire. However, balance of power theory was formally codified as a principle of diplomacy by Hugo Grotius and his contemporaries in the 17<sup>th</sup> century as mercantilism grew and international competition for resources and land expanded.

In The nineteenth century Napoleon Bonaparte confronted Britain and other European nations during this century. After successive wars spread over the years, Britain and her Allies finally restored the Balance of power . In twentieth century, when a delicate balance in the Balkans was disturbed, it led to the first world war. In inter war period, the doctrine was still followed, though in theory, it was incompatible with the concept of Collective security. But finally it proved stronger than the collective security embodied in the league of Nations. It provoked series of alliances, counter alliances, thereby leading to second World war .

The post war trends reveal that the balance of power has ceased to perform the traditional role that it played in the Euro centric World order in both its theoretical and practical aspects. Stephen Waltz modified the concept of balance of power to "Balance of threat." According to him countries actually balance the threat. Amount of Power to be built rely on its threat perception. Realists Introduced the idea of " Asymmetrical Balancing " of Non state Actors like Terrorist Organizations by states. T. V. PAUL talked about Soft Balancing by NAM countries during Cold war Bipolarity. The coalition of like minded countries checked the actions of super powers through economic, diplomatic, cultural and institutional means.

### **RELEVANCE OF BALANCE OF POWR:**

Woodrow Wilson criticized the Balance of Power as it gives a protection against measles; but creates conditions for plague. It converts regional war between two countries into a world war. He, rather, proposed the alternative of Collective Security. Jawaharlal Nehru Called Balance of power as 'Nervous state of peace'.

The ambiguous concept of balance of power is said to be lost its relevance since the end of Cold War. The new forces like nationalism, New techniques of warfare, Globalisation, rise of complex interdependence ( Robert keohane and Nye) etc have made the balance of power to naïve and too complex phenomenon. The emergence of nuclear weapons has made the classical assumptions of the Balance of power invalid. In this context Bernard Brodie Argued that Go for nuclear deterrence than balance of power, as even Superpowers can not harm you. For example Nuclear programme of North Korea .

Further, growth of norms, values, International law and institutions, like United Nations have relegated the Balance of Power to the background. There is rise of 'Security Community ' in Europe, South East Asia.

However, The balance of power is a mechanism of managing power. It is still relevant, although its relevance would depend on how far its mechanism is modified to suit the changing conditions. As long as multi -nation state system exists, the balance of power politics will continue to be followed by the nations' practices. It is to be noted that, though there's rise of non state actors, they are actually proxies of the Nation states. Following Unilateral World orders for some period after End of the Cold war, World is moving towards multi lateral world order. Thus balance of power is still relevant.

Moreover to this, Nuclear weapons are not meant to be used. Hence the conventional weapons will never go out of relevance. Hard balancing still exists at regional level. China's rise and its competition with the other major powers like the United States, India, Japan, and Australia have pushed these other powers to view China as a threat to their security. Therefore, as stated under the framework of balance of power, nations are balancing against a power that is deemed as a threat to their security. Thus revival of QUAD, formation of AUKUS support the structural framework of the balance of power.

### **CONCLUSION :**

Palmer and Perkins observe: that in its heyday, Balance of power was a basic feature of the nation-state system. As long as the nation-state system is the prevailing international society pattern, the balance of power policies will be followed in practice; however, roundly, they are damned in theory. In all probability, they will continue to operate, even if effective supranational groupings, on a regional or world level, are formed. David Hume has rightly held that The Balance of Power is a 'common Sense '. Thus , so long common sense remains, Balance of Power will remain.

#### References

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