

BALANCE OF POWER

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Introduction:

- It is one of the concepts of International relations which has dominated inter-state behavioural pattern for 4 centuries from 15th to 19th century.
- IT is a basic principle of international relations.
- Power and its distribution is a major determinant of international behaviour.
- It is a theory of peace by preventing war.

Meaning of Balance of Power:

- In ordinary sense it means there is at least a rough equilibrium of power between various nations.
- A large number of nations with varying degree of power exist and each nation tries to maximise its power.
- To achieve this end various nations form groups so that no single nation or other group of nations become strong enough to dominate others.
- The power of one group is balanced by the other opposing group.
- So long as there is balance of power between the antagonistic group, there is peace.

Definitions:

- George Schwarzenegger describes “Balance power as an equilibrium or certain amount of stability in international relations”
- “Such a just equilibrium in power among the members of the family of nations as will prevent any one of them becoming sufficiently strong to enforce its will upon others” – Sidney B. Fay.
- “It is an actual state of affairs in which power is distributed among several nations with approximate equality.” – Morgenthau.

Definitions...

- There are two types of balances –
 1. Simple balance, which exists between two nations or any two group of nations of nearly equal power.
 2. The multiple balance exists between many nations or groups of nations balancing one another.
- This theory is nothing but the application of checks & balance in the inter-state relations.
- It is based on the simple principle that effective antidote to power is power only.

Characteristics of BOP:

- The concept of BOP exhibits the following characteristics –
 1. **Equilibrium:** The term Balance of power suggests equilibrium –balance. This equilibrium is subject to constant change from equilibrium to disequilibrium.
 2. **Temporary:** The BOP is never static it is dynamic. It is highly unstable and temporary.
 3. **It is a diplomatic contrivance:** The concept of BOP is man made. It is manipulated by diplomats and not a gift of god.

Characteristics....

4. **Tends to favour status-quo:** It favours status-quo of power relations of nations.
5. **Elusive:** The real BOP seldom exists. Its real test is war. And if war takes place, it means that the real BOP was not there. It appears to be elusive.
6. **Highly a subjective concept:** It is a highly subjective concept. It is difficult to say when the balance is reached.

Characteristics....

- 7. It is a game of great powers:** This game is meant for big powers and the small powers are the victims and big powers are its benefactors BOP is the game played by the big powers to increase their hegemony.
- 8. The concept of Balancer:** To keep the balance, it requires a balancing power for the successful operation of the system.
- 9. It is a policy:** BOP is sometimes identified as a policy. It is primarily meant to preserve and promote peace.

Techniques/Devices of BOP:

- Following are the devices for maintaining the BOP –
 1. **Alliances and Counter-alliances:** It is one of the traditional instrument to strengthen one's position versus the opponent.
- When a state feels that it cannot defend itself against another big state, it enters into alliance with other states weak and powerful.
- Alliances are of two types – offensive and defensive.
- Defensive alliance aims at restoring the balance.

Alliances & Counter Alliances....

- Offensive alliances aims at upset BOP in favour of its members.
- The alliances are built up out of necessity of common interests and directed against a common enemy.
- The alliances may break up after the objective is achieved.
- Alliances generally lead to counter alliances.
- For example, Axis powers v/s Allied powers during the II world war, NATO V/s WARSAW, etc.

2. Compensation:

- Compensation of territory is another device practiced to maintain the BOP.
- Compensation includes the division of the territory of the enemies and distribute it among the victors as compensation for war damage.
- Partition can also be used as an instrument for the maintenance of BOP.
- Example, in 1772 Poland was partitioned between Russia, Prussia & Austria so that relative power of each of the three major states of the time could be maintained.
- After the world war II Vietnam, Korea and Germany were partitioned for similar reasons.

3. Armaments & Disarmaments:

- Both armaments and disarmaments are connected with the maintenance of BOP.
- Military preparedness is the best means of national defense which may lead to arms race.
- Again to attain BOP consistent efforts at disarmament are essential.
- NPT, SALT, START talks are attempts at disarmaments and arms limitations so as to maintain BOP between two super powers in the later part of the 20th century.

4. Intervention & Non-intervention:

- These techniques are used as a last resort when other techniques failed to achieve BOP.
- Intervention means intervening in the internal affairs of another country by a powerful nation (balancer).
- Example, UK in the position of a balancer utilized this method to maintain the European balance.
- The ultimate form of intervention is war.
- Italy and Germany intervened in the Spanish civil war of 1936-39 but Britain and France followed a policy of non-intervention in the Spanish civil war.
- Nations of Asia and Africa adopted the principle of non-alignment which is a pattern of neutrality to balance the two great power block. (non-intervention also means neutrality).

5. Divide and Rule:

- The technique of divide and rule has often been employed to maintain the balance of power in Europe and elsewhere.
- This technique is as old as that of Kautilya, Machiavelli and others.
- England used this technique successfully to keep India under subjugation.
- England also used this technique in its relation with European states.
- Russia wants to keep Europe divided so as to secure its hegemony.
- Thus, it could be seen that this techniques of divide and rule used often so as to maintain BOP.

6. Buffer States:

- These are states which are set up between two large & unfriendly nations.
- These states keep large and unfriendly nations apart in order to minimize the chance of conflict between them.
- Generally buffer states are weak states but enjoy but enjoy strategic importance for the major powers.
- For example, Poland was a buffer state between Russia and Germany.
- Belgium and Holland were also buffer states between France and Germany before I World War.
- Buffer states have the cushioning effect between great rival nations. E.g. Afghanistan was a buffer state between Russia and Great Britain.

Criticisms:

1. It is pointed out that **BOP does not necessarily bring peace but encourages wars**. A feeling of inferiority provides motivation for wars.
2. This theory assumes that **all actions of states are motivated by the consideration of increasing their power**. However it is a fact that there are other considerations like cultural & economic interests which also influence the actions of the states.
3. One more assumption of **the principle of BOP is that the states are static units which is not true**. But the fact is that the states are dynamic and the power increases through its own efforts and not necessarily through outside intervention.

Criticisms.....

4. **BOP can postpone war but cannot permanently maintain peace.** More-over, it keeps the entire world divided and in fear of another. It indirectly encourages war in the form of intervention.
5. This theory **goes against the principle of international morality and justice** as it attaches more importance to self interest and force.

Utility of BOP:

1. In the first place, it has greatly contributed to the **preservation of International peace** in the absence of collective security.
2. Secondly the BOP has greatly contributed to the **preservation of the independence** and sovereignty of the smaller states and also the modern state system.
3. It **helped in the effective enforcement of International law** – it has ensured obedience to international law through the existence of equilibrium among various groups of nations.

Conclusion:

- Today, US plays the role of sole balancer in world politics.
- So it operates not in the traditional sense but differently.
- **BOP is the only guarantee for short term peace and helps in containing the hegemony and universal imperialism.**
- It also sets rational limits to expansionism.