

B.A.L.L.B. 6th semester
political science

UNIT:2nd

TOPIC:Principal Assumptions and
Postulates of Balance of Power:

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Principal Assumptions and Postulates of Balance of Power:

The Balance of Power rests upon several fundamental postulates and assumptions.

(a) Five Principal Assumptions:

1) Firstly, Balance of Power assumes that states are determined to protect their vital rights and interests by all means, including war.

(2) Secondly, vital interests of the states are threatened.

(3) The relative power position of states can be measured with a degree of accuracy.

(4) Balance of Power assumes that “balance” will either deter the threatening state from launching an attack or permit the victim to avoid defeat if an attack should occur.

(5) The statesmen can, and they do make foreign policy decisions intelligently on basis of power considerations.

Major Postulates of Balance of Power:

- (1) A nation following balance of power is prepared to change its alliances or treaties if the circumstances may so demand.
- (2) When a nation finds that a particular preponderance of power is increasing menacingly, it gets prepared to go to war for maintaining the balance.
- (3) Balance of Power postulates that no nation is to be totally eliminated in war. War is aimed only at the weakening of power of the violator of the balance.
After war a new balance of power system is achieved. The basic principle of Balance of Power is that excessive power anywhere in the system is a threat to the existence of others and that the most effective antidote to power is power.

Major Methods of Balance of Power:

I. Compensation:

It is also known as territorial compensation. It usually entails the annexation or division of the territory of the state whose power is considered dangerous for the balance.

For examples the three partitions of Poland in 1772, 1793 and 1795 were based upon the principle of compensation. Austria, Prussia and Russia agreed to divide Polish territory in such a way that the distribution of power among them would be approximately the same.

In the latter part of the 19th century, and after each of the two world wars of the 20th century, territorial compensation was used as a device for weakening the powers of the states whose actions had led to a violation of the balance. It was applied by the colonial powers for justifying their actions aimed at maintaining their imperial possessions.

II. Alliances and Counter Alliances:

Alliance is a device by which a combination of nations creates a favourable balance of power by entering into military or security pacts aimed at augmenting their own strength vis-a-vis the power of their opponents. However, an alliance among a group of nations, almost always, leads to the establishment of a counter alliance by the opponents

EXAMPLES

After the Triple Alliance of 1882, a rival alliance—The Triple Entente, was slowly formed through bilateral agreements over a period of 17 years (1891-1907).

In post-1945 period, alliances like NATO, SEATO, Warsaw Pact emerged as devices of Balance of Power. The first two were established by the USA and the third one was organised by the erstwhile USSR for strengthening their respective power positions in the era of cold war.

III. Intervention and Non-intervention:

“Intervention is a dictatorial interference in the internal affairs of another state/states with a view to change or maintain a particular desired situation which is considered to be harmful or useful to the competing opponents.

Some times during a war between two states no attempt is made by other states to intervene. This is done for making the two warring states weaker. As such intervention and non-intervention are used as devices of Balance of Power. Mostly it is used by a major power for regaining an old ally or for picking up a new ally or for imposing a desired situation on other states. British intervention in Greece, the US intervention in Grenada, Nicaragua, Cuba, Korea, Vietnam, and (Erstwhile) USSR’s interventions in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Afghanistan can be quoted as examples of interventions carried out by the big powers.

IV. Divide and Rule:

The policy of divide and rule has also been a method of balance of power. It has been a time honored policy of weakening the opponents. It is resorted to by all such nations who try to make or keep their competitors weak by keeping them divided or by dividing them. The French policy towards Germany and the British policy towards the European continent can be cited as the outstanding examples. The rich and powerful states now do not refrain from using divide and rule for controlling the policies of the new states of Asia, Africa and Latin America.

V. Buffer States or Zones:

Another method of balance of power is to set up a buffer state between two rivals or opponents. Buffers, observes V.V. Dyke, “are areas which are weak, which possess considerable strategic importance to two or more strong powers, Buffer is a small state created or maintained as a separating state i.e. as a buffer state for keeping two competing states physically separate each stronger power then tries to bring the buffer within its sphere of influence but regards it as important, if not vital, that no other strong power be permitted to do so.

The major function of a buffer is to keep the two powerful nations apart and thus minimise the chances of clash and hence to help the maintenance of balance.”

VI. Armaments and Disarmaments:

All nations, particularly very powerful nations, place great emphasis on armaments as the means for maintaining or securing a favourable position in power relations in the world. It is also used as a means to keep away a possible aggressor or enemy.

However, armament race between two competitors or opponents can lead to a highly dangerous situation which can accidentally cause a war. In this way armament race can act as a danger to world peace and security. Consequently, now-a-days, Disarmaments and Arms Control are regarded as better devices for maintaining and strengthening world peace and security. A comprehensive disarmament plan/exercise involving nuclear disarmament can go a long way in strengthening the balance (peace) that exists in international relations.

VII. The Holder of the Balance or the Balancer:

The system of balance of power may consist of two scales plus a third element 'holder' of the balance or the balancer. The balancer is a nation or a group of nations, which remains aloof from the policies of the two rivals or opponents and plays the role of, "the laughing third party."

The rise of unipolarity after 1991, involving the presence of only one super power has now further reduced the chances for the emergence of a balancer in international relations.

These are the seven major methods or devices of Balance of Power. These have been traditionally used by nations pursuing the policy of a balance of power.

