

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

UNIT:2nd

TOPIC: Critical Evaluation of Balance
of Power

DR.MUKTA JAIN

INSTITUTE OF LAW

DATE:7/4/2020

Critical Evaluation of Balance of Power:

Balance of Power: Arguments in Favour:

(1) A Source of Stability in International Relations:

Balance of Power provides stability to international relations. It is a device of effective power management and peace. During the past 400 years it was successful, at most of the times, in preserving peace.

“Balance of Power has many a times prevented war. War breaks out only when any state assumes excessive power.” —Fredric Geniz

(2) It suits the real nature of International Relations:

Balance of Power is in tune with the dynamic nature of international relations. It helps continuous adjustments and re-adjustments in relations without any grave risk of war among states.

(3) Ensures Multiplicity of States:

Since Balance of Power postulates the presence of a number of major international actors (7 or 8 even more), it ensures multiplicity of nations and their active participation in preserving balance in international relations.

(4) Guarantees the Freedom of Small States:

Balance of Power ensures the preservation of small and weak states. Its rule that no nation is to be completely eliminated, favors the continued existence of all states. Each state feels secure about its security in the balance of power system.

(5) Balance of Power Discourages War:

Balance of Power discourages war because each state knows that any attempt to become unduly powerful shall invoke an action, even war, by all other states and hence, it keeps its ambitions under control.

(6) A Source of Peace in International Relations:

Finally, Balance of Power is always a source of peace and order in international relations. It supports status quo in relations. Between 1815-1914 it successfully prevented war.

Balance of Power: Arguments Against:

(1) Balance of Power cannot ensure Peace:

Balance of Power does not necessarily bring peace; it failed to prevent the domination of small states by the big states. It was not successful in preserving the security of small states. In fact, in the past, wars have been fought in the name of preservation of Balance of Power.

The three periods of stability—one starting from 1648, the second from 1815 and the third from Treaty of Versailles (1918), were preceded by continuous warfare and by the wholesale elimination of small states starting with the destruction of Poland, and followed by a large number of isolated acts of a similar nature.

(2) States are not Static Units:

Each state always tries to secure more and more national power.

They increase their power through military aggressions, seizure of territory and alliances. They can change their power from within by improving social organisation, by industrializing and by mobilizing internal resources. So the traditional mechanism of the balance of power is not the only cause responsible for an increase of power.

(3) Preponderance of One State in the world can also secure Peace:

A preponderance of power in the hands of one state or group of states does not necessarily threaten world peace or the independence of any nation. The unipolarism resulting from the collapse of one super power (USSR) and the continued presence of the other super power (USA) has not in any way disturbed international peace and security or power balance. In contemporary times the preponderance of one state is a reality and yet there is peace and peaceful coexistence.

(4) Narrow Basis:

The concept of Balance of Power is based upon a narrow view of international relations. It regards power-relations as the whole of international relations. It gives near total importance to preservation of self and national-interest as the motives of all state actions. It fails to give proper weight age to other ends—social, economic, cultural and moral, that provide strong motives to international relations.

(5) Equality of a number of States is a Myth:

Balance of Power presupposes the existence of a number of equally powerful states. In practice no two states have or can have equal power. It involves the conception of equilibrium which is in fact disequilibrium and is subject to continuous change.

(6) Nations are not free to break Alliances:

The theory of the balance of power can also be criticized on the ground that it wrongly assumes that nations are free to make or break alliances as and when they may desire for the main consideration of balance of power.

(7) Uncertainty of Balance of Power:

Morgenthau criticizes Balance of Power for its uncertainty. Balance of Power is uncertain because its operation depends upon an evaluation of power of various nations. In practice it is not possible to have an absolutely correct evaluation of power of a state.

(8) Balance of Power is Unreal:

Since the evaluation of the national power of a nation is always uncertain, no nation can afford dependence upon the balance of power. Each nation always keeps a secret about its power. Since all nations keep safe margins, the balance of power at a particular time is always unreal.

(9) Inadequacy of Balance of Power:

Balance of Power in itself is an inadequate device of international peace and security. It even accepts war as a means for maintaining a balance. Fear cannot be a real basis of international relations.

