

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

UNIT:2nd

TOPIC:Balance of power its
meaning,nature,method,relevance

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What is Balance of Power?

Some writers define it in terms of equilibrium where as others in terms of “preponderance” or “disequilibrium”. Some define it as a principle of action while others define it as a policy or system.

Balance of Power is an equilibrium or a certain amount of stability in power relations that under favourable conditions is produced by an alliance of states or by other devices.” —George Schwarzenberger

“Balance of Power is such a system in which some nations regulate their power relations without any interference by any big power. As such it is a decentralized system in which power and policies remain in the hands of constituting units.” —Inis Claude

Nature of Balance of Power

1. Some Sort of Equilibrium in Power Relations:-

The term Balance of Power suggests ‘equilibrium which is subject to constant, ceaseless change. In short, though it stands for equilibrium, it also involves some disequilibrium. That is why scholars define it as a just equilibriums or some sort of equilibrium in power relations.

2. Temporary and Unstable:

In practice a balance of power always proves to be temporary and unstable. A particular balance of power survives only for a short time.

3. To be Actively Achieved:

The balance of power has to be achieved by the active intervention of men. It is not a gift of God. States cannot afford to wait until it “happens”. They have to secure it through their efforts.

4. Favours Status quo:

Balance of power favours status quo in power positions of major powers. It seeks to maintain a balance in their power relations. However, in order to be effective, a foreign policy of balance of power must be changing and dynamic.

5. The Test of BOP is War:

A real balance of power seldom exists. The only test of a balance is war and when war breaks out the balance comes to an end. War is a situation which balance of power seeks to prevent and when it breaks out, balance power comes to an end.

6. Not a Device of Peace:

Balance of Power is not a primary device of peace because it admits war as a means for maintaining balance.

7. Big Powers as Actors of BOP:

In a balance of power system, the big states or powerful states are the players. The small states or less powerful states are either spectators or the victims of the game.

8. Multiplicity of States as an Essential Condition:

Balance of Power system operates when there are present a number of major powers, each of which is determined to maintain a particular balance or equilibrium in their power relations.

9. National Interest is its Basis:

Balance of Power is a policy that can be adopted by any state. The real basis that leads to this policy is national interest in a given environment.

CHARACTERISTICS OF BOP

- CONFLICTING AIMS
- UNSUITABLE FOR DEMOCRACIES
- TEMPORARY
- ACTIVE INTERVENTION
- DIFFICULT TO DETERMINE EXISTENCE
- SUBJECTIVE AND OBJECTIVE APPROACHES
- EQUILIBRIUM
- BIG-POWER GAME
- STATUS QUO
- THE BALANCER
- OPERATION QUESTIONABLE

Role and Relevance of Balance of Power in International Relations:

In contemporary times, Balance of Power has lost much of its utility due to several changes in the international relations. The following changes in the international relations as well as in the traditional balance of power system have adversely affected the role and relevance of Balance of Power as a device of power management in International politics.

(1) End of the era of European Domination and the dawn of era of Global Politics:-

The structure of international politics has undergone a radical change from the classical period. From a narrow European dominated international system it has come to be a truly global system in which Asian, African and Latin American states enjoy a new and added importance. Today Europe is no longer the centre of world politics. European politics constitutes only one small segment of international politics. This changes has considerably reduced the operation ability of balance of power.

2. Emergence of Ideology as a Factor of International Relations:-

The new importance of ideology and other less tangible but, nevertheless, important elements of national power have further created unfavorable conditions for the operation of balance of power.

3. The Bipolarity of Cold War period and the new era of Unipolarity:

The bipolarity (presence of two super powers and their blocs) that emerged in the cold war period reduced the flexibility of the international system. It reduced the chances of balance of power whose working requires the existence of flexibility in power relations, alliances and treaties. Presently unipolarity characterizes the international system.

4. The End of the Era of Colonialism and Imperialism:

Another big change in the structure of balance of power has been the disappearance of imperialism and colonialism: It has limited the scope for the exercise of power by the European powers, who in the past always worked as the key players of the principle Balance of Power.

5. Disappearance of the “Balancer”:

The rise of two super powers the disappearance of the “holder of balance” or the “balancer” considerably reduced the chances of balance of power politics during 1945-91. Traditionally, Britain used to play such a role in Europe. The sharp and big decline in the power of Britain in the post-war period compelled it to abandon its role of balancer between the two super powers. No other nation or even a group of nations was successful in acting as a balancer between the USA and the (erstwhile) USSR. The absence of a balancer further reduced the role of balance of power in post-war international relations.

6.The Emergence of Global Actors:

The rise of the United Nations and several other international and regional actors in international relations has given a new look to the international relations of our times. The presence of the UN has made a big change in the structure and functioning of the international system. With a provision for collective security of international peace and security, the United Nations constitutes a better source of peace. Due to all these changes in international relations, Balance of Power has come to suffer a big decline. It has definitely lost much of its relevance.

In contemporary times, Balance of Power has ceased to be a fully relevant and credible principle of international relations. However, it still retains a presence in international relations, more particularly, in the sphere of regional relations among states.