

SUBJECT: POLITICAL SCIENCE III

COURSE: BA LLB SEMESTER III

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MODULE: MODULE V, BALANCE OF POWER

Structure:

- Concept of Balance of Power
- Methods of maintaining balance of power

CONCEPT OF BALANCE OF POWER

A State of stability amongst two or more contending powers is referred as the balance of power. In international relations, maintaining of equilibrium amongst the states or alliances to prevent or check on attaining absolute power by other state or a group of states is termed as the balance of power. The primary objective behind the balance of power remains to limit a state or a group of states from imposing their authorised or illicit will upon other countries in the region as well as global state system. In this manner, an international or regional order is maintained whereby different geostrategic moves from any state are significantly checked and balanced by others. No doubt, realists, and neo-realists have primarily used the concept of BOP in international relations. However, its history is as old as human civilisation. Since, the ideology of realism and neo-realism is mainly guided by the principle of self-preservation, and hence, the BOP provides a milieu for the survival to the weaker states in the system.

The notion of balance of power in international relations is defined in different ways. Some of the well-known definitions of the concept are stated here, One of the renowned political realist, **Hans. J. Morgenthau** has defined the concept as “whenever the term is used without qualification, it refers to an actual state of affairs in which power is distributed among several nations with approximate equality”.

One of the supreme American historians, **Sidney B. Fay** has defined the concept as “balance of power is such a ‘just equilibrium’ in power among the members of the family of nations as will prevent any one of them from becoming sufficiently strong to enforce its will upon others”.

As per **Palmer and Perkins**, “The balance of power assumes that through shifting alliances and countervailing pressures no one power or combination of powers will be allowed to grow so strong as to threaten the security of the rest”.

Therefore, from the descriptions mentioned above, it can be rightly concluded, that the concept of balance of power has been defined in different ways. The balance of power, in fact, confirms to protect state’s interests by maintaining the symmetry of power through various means. In this regard, War, threat, annexation, alliances, and counter-alliances, buffer states, intervention, international pressure, armaments, sophisticated technology and

occasionally persuasion are categorised as various strategies employed while maintaining the Balance of power.

Undoubtedly, the balance of power has given a round of applause for maintaining the peace and security through restricting aggressiveness of the aggressor. Throughout the history, BOP has remained a success in ensuring the global peace and security. The structure of the BOP has often protected the diverse interests of smaller and weaker nations against the dominant states. Though, war is categorised as a significant tool in maintaining the balance of power. However, continually various clashes and conflicts among global states are settling down through the peace negotiations as well. It is a widely accepted that the states often try to gain maximum power through military aggression, seizure of territory and alliance formations. In this way, the states endeavour to safeguard their interests without caring for the interests of smaller or weaker states. There are many opinions, which can be put forward against the balance of power viz. nations find it hard to break alliances, single power dominance can also ensure global peace, difficulty in maintaining mutual consensus amongst two or more strong states, etc. Therefore, it can be rightly said that the Balance of power is creating several challenges. Nevertheless, BOP is still considered as a better tool to maintain peace and security at both regional as well as global levels. In fact, since time immemorial, BOP has had been there in the international system in one form or other to maintain the required status quo as and when required.

METHODS OF MAINTAINING BALANCE OF POWER

The following are the ways or methods of maintaining the balance of power.

1. Alliances and counter alliances:

Alliances are a necessary function of the balance of power operating with a multistage system. The rival groups in the balance of power system have three choices in order to maintain and improve their relative power positions.

i). They can increase their own power, ii) they can add to their power the power of the other nations iii) they can withhold the power of other nations from the opponents. If they make the first choice, they embark upon an armament race. If they make second and third choices, they purpose a policy of alliance.

Alliances generally lead to counter alliances. When an alliance is specifically or indirectly directed against some states, it is quite natural that they will not remain as silent spectators. For example the triple alliance of 1882 between Germany, Austro Hungary and Italy led to a rival alliance, triple entente 1907 between Britain, France and Russia. Alliances may be both offensive and defensive. While an offensive alliance seeks to upset the balance in favour of its members a defensive alliance aims at restoring peace.

2. Armament and disarmament:

Power is a relative term which is determined in the context of a particular nation or a group of nations. In the event of an impending danger from the enemy, every nation tries to maximise its power. The direct way of maintaining the balance is to increase one's own power in relation to power of one's opponents. When there is a great disparity between power position of two nations, it is not possible for the weaker one to increase its own power to the level of its rival. This method of maintaining the balance can be resorted to only when there is a rough parity in the power position of the rivals.

Like armament, disarmament can restore a balance of power one can succeed in keeping its rival disarmed one preserves the balance in one's favour. But in practice disarmament as such has rarely been resorted to except in case of defeated powers on the conclusion of general war. For example the effort on the part of the allied powers after the first world war was to keep Germany permanently weak.

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