

Theories of International Relations: Balance of Power & Balance of Terror

OBJECTIVES

1. Introduction-Definition of the concept Balance of Power
2. Basic assumptions of Balance of Power
3. Characteristics of Balance of Power
4. Evolution of the Concept
5. Types of Balance of Power
6. How countries maintain BoP?
7. Criticism
8. Understanding Balance of Terror
9. Balance of Power- Appraisal

Introduction

Balance of Power- (BoP) realist theory

- One of the most influential and central theories of IR
- Acc. to George Schwarzenberger- BoP as “equilibrium’ or a certain amount of stability in international relations.”
- David Hume sees BoP as ‘a scientific law’ of IR
- Hans J Morgenthau sees BoP as ‘iron law of world politics’

Basic Assumptions

- Acc. to Quincy Wright- five main assumptions
- Two types of balancing:
 - Internal Balancing
 - External Balancing
- Morgenthau and Waltz’s balance-of-power theory:

H. J. Morgenthau- BoP result of a struggle for power, state superiority vital crucial for the stability of international politics,

- K. Waltz- it is the structure of international politics, anarchy, self-help

Characteristics of Balance of Power

- Active intervention
- Negotiation in place of direct military confrontation
- Constant change, hence temporary
- Opposition of preponderance of any single actor
- Status quo
- Big powers dominant
- Not suitable for democracies
- Reliance of weaker national actors on their allies
- Presence of a balancer

Evolution of the Concept

- ❖ The origin: with the growth of the present state system.
- ❖ Machiavelli- Further elaborated
- ❖ The treaty of Westphalia (1648) firmly established the nation state system- international relations-role of BoP
- ❖ Hugo Grotius (17th century)- science of international law, BoP as basic principle of diplomacy
- ❖ BoP and the Balkan area in 1914, the First World War, later WWII

Types of Balance of Power

- The balance of power has the following types:

- 1) Simple balance
- 2) Complex balance
- 3) Local, regional and global
- 4) Flexible and rigid

How countries maintain BoP?

There are following imp ways:

- Power accumulation
- Alliances and counter alliances- traditional way balancing, counter alliances- Triple Alliance (1882) vs. Triple Entente (1907) WWI & WWII
- Compensations- annexation of a territory or division of territory
- Partition
- Intervention and War
- Buffer States

Criticism

- Realism as the basis..emphasis on self-interest, hence more power struggle
- BoP concept does not necessarily guarantees peace, war always a possibility
- Exact measurement of power is not feasible on which BoP concepts is based
- Dominance of one power often seen in history
- Centered around the notion of power
- Undermines other interests i.e. political, economic

Balance of Terror

- ❖ Balance of Terror denotes nuclear arms race btw the US & the USSR during the Cold War
- ❖ It also refers to the fragile peace prevailed due to the fear of nuclear war
- ❖ Therefore, existence of peace due to deterrence

Acc. to-Merriam Webster Dictionary:

- ❖ “A situation in which the threat of mutual annihilation by nations with the capability to wage nuclear war serves as a deterrent against military aggression and the use of nuclear weapons”

▪ **Balance of Power- Appraisal**

Why it is an irrelevant concept :

- Bi-Polarity
- Absence of Balancer
- More deadlier nature of modern nuclear weapons
- Rapidly changing world- economic interdependence led by Globalisation etc.
- Why still relevant:
- However, the existence of nation-state and pursuit of power keep the concept of BoP relevant

- Conclusion:
- The BoP has been an important theory of IR
- It has been a central concept in the theory and practice of IR

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