The Balance of Power

Hans J. Morgenthau

The aspiration for power on the part of several nations, each trying either to maintain or overthrow the status quo, leads of necessity to a configuration that is called the balance of power[1] and to policies that aim at preserving it. We say "of necessity" advisedly. For here again we are confronted with the basic misconception that has impeded the understanding of international politics and has made us the prey of illusions. This misconception asserts that men have a choice between power politics and its necessary outgrowth, the balance of power, on the one hand, and a different, better kind of international relations on the other. It insists that a foreign policy based on the balance of power is one among several possible foreign policies and that only stupid and evil men will choose the former and reject the latter.

It will be shown in the following pages that the international balance of power is only a particular manifestation of a general social principle to which all societies composed of a number of autonomous units owe the autonomy of their component parts; that the balance of power and policies aiming at its preservation are not only inevitable but are an essential stabilizing factor in a society of sovereign nations; and that the instability of the international balance of power is due not to the faultiness of the principle but to the particular conditions under which the principle must operate in a society of sovereign nations.

BALANCE OF POWER AS UNIVERSAL CONCEPT

The concept of "equilibrium" as a synonym for "balance" is commonly employed in many sciences—physics, biology, economics, sociology, and political science. It signifies stability within a system composed of a number of autonomous forces. Whenever the equilibrium is disturbed either by an outside force or by a change in one or the other elements composing the system, the system shows a tendency to re-establish either the original or a new equilibrium. Thus equilibrium exists in the human body. While the human body changes in the process of growth, the equilibrium persists as long as the changes occurring in the different organs of the body do not disturb the body's stability. This is especially so if the quantitative and qualitative changes in the different organs are proportionate to each other. When, however, the body suffers a wound or loss of one of its organs through outside interference, or experiences a malignant growth or a pathological transformation of one of its organs, the equilibrium is disturbed, and the body tries to overcome the disturbance by re-establishing the equilibrium either on the same or a different level from the one that obtained before the disturbance occurred.[2]

The same concept of equilibrium is used in a social science, such as economics, with reference to the relations between the different elements of the economic system, e.g., between savings and investments, exports and imports, supply and demand, costs and prices. Contemporary capitalism itself has been described as a system of "countervailing

[1] The term "balance of power" is used in the text with four different meanings: (1) as a policy aimed at a certain state of affairs, (2) as an actual state of affairs, (3) as an approximately equal distribution of power, (4) as any distribution of power. Whenever the term is used without qualification, it refers to the actual state of affairs in which power is distributed among several nations with approximate equality.

From Hans J. Morgenthau: *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*. Sixth Edition, revised by Kenneth W. Thompson, pp. 187-189; 192-196;198-215;218-233. Originally published in 1948. Italics added.

power."[3] It also applies to society as a whole. Thus we search for a proper balance between different geographical regions, such as the East and the West, the North and the South; between different kinds of activities, such as agriculture and industry, heavy and light industries, big and small businesses, producers and consumers, management and labor; between different functional groups, such as city and country, the old, the middle-aged, and the young, the economic and the political sphere, the middle classes and the upper and lower classes.

Two assumptions are at the foundation of all such equilibriums: first, that the elements to be balanced are necessary for society or are entitled to exist and, second, that without a state of equilibrium among them one element will gain ascendancy over the others, encroach upon their interests and rights, and may ultimately destroy them. Consequently, it is the purpose of all such equilibriums to maintain the stability of the system without destroying the multiplicity of the elements composing it. If the goal were stability alone, it could be achieved by allowing one element to destroy or overwhelm the others and take their place. Since the goal is stability plus the preservation of all the elements of the system, the equilibrium must aim at preventing any element from gaining ascendancy over the others. The means employed to maintain the equilibrium consist in allowing the different elements to pursue their opposing tendencies up to the point where the tendency of one is not so strong as to overcome the tendency of the others, but strong enough to prevent the others from overcoming its own. In the words of Robert Bridges:

> Our stability is but balance: and wisdom lies
> In masterful administration of the unforeseen.

Nowhere have the mechanics of social equilibrium been described more brilliantly and at the same time more simply than in *The Federalist*. Concerning the system of checks and balances of the American government, No. 51 of *The Federalist* says:

> This policy of supplying, by opposite and rival interests, the defect of better motives, might be traced to the whole system of human affairs, private as well as public. We see it particularly dis-

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2. Cf., for instance, the impressive analogy between the equilibrium in the human body and in society in Walter B. Cannon. *The Wisdom of the Body* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1932), pp. 393, 294: "At the outset it is noteworthy that the body politic itself exhibits some indications of crude automatic stabilizing processes. In the previous chapter I expressed the postulate that a certain degree of constancy in a complex system is itself evidence that agencies are acting or are ready to act to maintain that constancy. And moreover, that when a system remains steady it does so because any tendency towards change is met by increased effectiveness of the factor or factors which resist the change. Many familiar facts prove that these statements are to some degree true for society even in its present unstabilized condition. A display of conservatism excites a radical revolt and that in turn is followed by a return to conservatism. Loose government and its consequences bring the reformers into power, but their tight reins soon provoke restiveness and the desire for release. The noble enthusiasms and sacrifices of war are succeeded by moral apathy and orgies of self-indulgence. Hardly any strong tendency in a nation continues to the stage of disaster; before that extreme is reached corrective forces arise which check the tendency and they commonly prevail to such an excessive degree as themselves to cause a reaction. A study of the nature of these social swings and their reversal might lead to valuable understanding and possibly to means of more narrowly limiting the disturbances. At this point, however, we merely note that the disturbances are roughly limited, and that this limitation suggests, perhaps, the early stages of social homeostasis." (Reprinted by permission of the publisher. Copyright 1932, 1939, by Walter B. Cannon.)

3. John K. Galbraith, *American Capitalism, the Concept of Countervailing Power*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1952).

> played in all the subordinate distributions of power, where the constant aim is to divide and arrange the several offices in such a manner as that each may be a check on the other—that the private interests of every individual may be a sentinel over the public rights. These inventions of prudence cannot be less requisite in the distribution of the supreme powers of the state.

In the words of John Randolph, "You may cover whole skins of parchment with limitations, but power alone can limit power . . ."[4]

TWO MAIN PATTERNS OF THE BALANCE OF POWER

Two factors are at the basis of international society: one is the multiplicity, the other is the antagonism of its elements, the individual nations. The aspirations for power of the individual nations can come into conflict with each other—and some, if not most of them, do at any particular moment in history—in two different ways. In other words, the struggle for power on the international scene can be carried on in two typical patterns.

The Pattern of Direct Opposition

Nation A may embark upon an imperialistic policy with regard to Nation B, and Nation B may counter that policy with a policy of the status quo or with an imperialistic policy of its own. France and its allies opposing Russia in 1812, Japan opposing China from 1931 to 1941, the United Nations vs. the Axis from 1941 on, correspond to that pattern. The pattern is one of direct opposition between the nation that wants to establish its power over another nation and the latter, which refuses to yield.

Nation A may also pursue an imperialistic policy toward Nation C, which may either resist or acquiesce in that policy, while Nation B follows with regard to Nation C either a policy of imperialism or one of the status quo. In this case, the domination of C is a goal of A's policy. B, on the other hand, is opposed to A's policy because it either wants to preserve the status quo with respect to C or wants the domination of C for itself. The pattern of the struggle for power between A and B is here not one of direct opposition, but of competition, the object of which is the domination of C, and it is only through the intermediary of that competition that the contest for power between A and B takes place. This pattern is visible, for instance, in the competition between Great Britain and Russia for the domination of Iran, in which the struggle for power between the two countries has repeatedly manifested itself during the last hundred years. It is also clear in the competition for dominant influence in Germany which in the aftermath of the Second World War has marked the relations between France, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and the United States. The competition between the United States and China or between the Soviet Union and China for control of the countries of Southeast Asia offers another example of the same pattern.

It is in situations such as these that the balance of power operates and fulfills its typical functions. In the pattern of direct opposition, the balance of power results directly from the desire of either nation to see its policies prevail over the policies of the other. A tries to increase its power in relation to B to such an extent that it can control the decisions of B and thus lead its imperialistic policy to success. B, on the other hand, will try to increase its power to such an extent that it can resist A's pressure and thus frustrate A's policy, or else embark upon an imperialistic policy of its own with a chance for success. In the latter case, A must, in turn, increase its power in order to be able to resist B's imperialistic pol-

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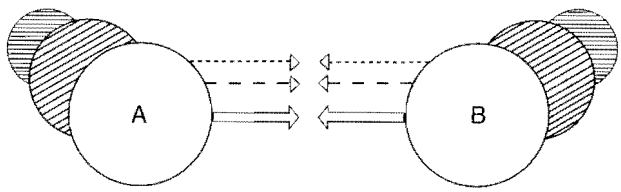
[4] Quoted after William Cabel Bruce, *John Randolph of Roanoke* (New York and London: G.P. Putnam, (1922), Vol. II, p. 211.

icy and to pursue its own with a chance for success. This balancing of opposing forces will go on, the increase in the power of one nation calling forth an at least proportionate increase in the power of the other, until the nations concerned change the objectives of their imperialistic policies—if they do not give them up altogether—or until one nation gains or believes it has gained a decisive advantage over the other. Then either the weaker yields to the stronger or war decides the issue.

So long as the balance of power operates successfully in such a situation, it fulfills two functions. It creates a precarious stability in the relations between the respective nations, a stability that is always in danger of being disturbed and, therefore, is always in need of being restored. This is, however, the only stability obtainable under the assumed conditions of the power pattern. For we are here in the presence of an inevitable inner contradiction of the balance of power. One of the two functions the balance of power is supposed to fulfill is stability in the power relations among nations; yet these relations are, as we have seen, by their very nature subject to continuous change. They are essentially unstable. Since the weights that determine the relative position of the scales have a tendency to change continuously by growing either heavier or lighter, whatever stability the balance of power may achieve must be precarious and subject to perpetual adjustments in conformity with intervening changes. The other function that a successful balance of power fulfills under these conditions is to insure the freedom of one nation from domination by the other.

Owing to the essentially unstable and dynamic character of the balance, which is not unstable and dynamic by accident or only part of the time, but by nature and always, the independence of the nations concerned is also essentially precarious and in danger. Here again, however, it must be said that, given the conditions of the power pattern, the independence of the respective nations can rest on no other foundation than the power of each individual nation to prevent the power of the other nations from encroaching upon its freedom. The following diagram illustrates this situation:

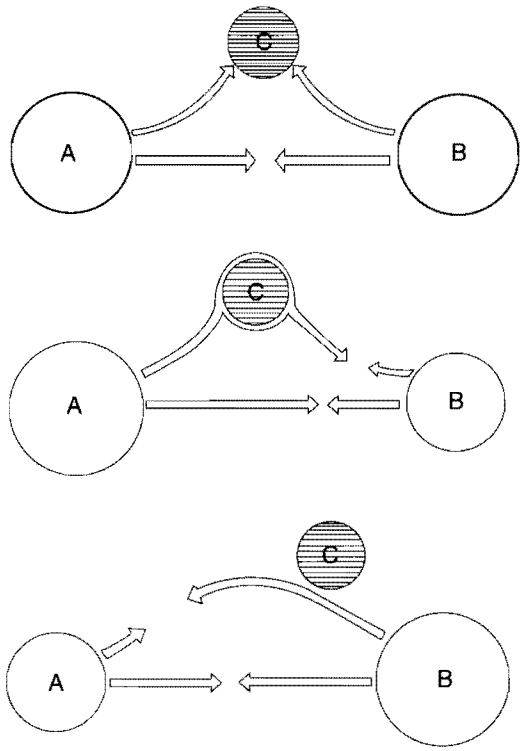


The Pattern of Competition

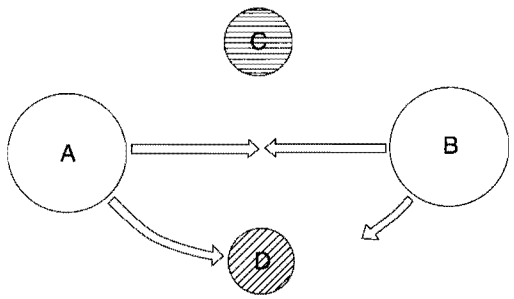
In the other pattern, the pattern of competition, the mechanics of the balance of power are identical with those discussed. The power of A necessary to dominate C in the face of B's opposition is balanced, if not outweighed, by B's power, while, in turn, B's power to gain dominion over C is balanced, if not outweighed, by the power of A. The additional function, however, that the balance fulfills here, aside from creating a precarious stability and security in the relations between A and B, consists in safeguarding the independence of C against encroachments by A or B. The independence of C is a mere function of the power relations existing between A and B.

If these relations take a decisive turn in favor of the imperialistic nation—that is, A—the independence of C will at once be in jeopardy:

If the status quo nation—that is, B—should gain a decisive and permanent advantage, C's freedom will be more secure in the measure of that advantage:



If finally, the imperialistic nation—A—should give up its imperialistic policies altogether or shift them permanently from C to another objective—that is, D—the freedom of C would be permanently secured:



No one has recognized this function of the balance of power to preserve the independence of weak nations more clearly than Edmund Burke. He said in 1791 in his "Thoughts on French Affairs":

> As long as those two princes [the King of Prussia and the German Emperor], are at variance, so long the liberties of Germany are safe. But if ever they should so far understand one another as to be persuaded that they have a more direct and more certainly defined interest in

> a proportioned mutual aggrandizement than in a reciprocal reduction, that is, if they come to think that they are more likely to be enriched by a division of spoil than to be rendered secure by keeping to the old policy of preventing others from being spoiled by either of them, from that moment the liberties of Germany are no more.[5]

Small nations have always owed their independence either to the balance of power (Belgium and the Balkan countries until the Second World War), or to the preponderance of one protecting power (the small nations of Central and South America, and Portugal), or to their lack of attractiveness for imperialistic aspirations (Switzerland and Spain). The ability of such small nations to maintain their neutrality has always been due to one or the other or all of these factors, e.g., the Netherlands, Denmark, and Norway in the First, in contrast to the Second, World War, and Switzerland and Sweden in both world wars.

The same factors are responsible for the existence of so-called buffer states—weak states located close to powerful ones and serving their military security. The outstanding example of a buffer state owing its existence to the balance of power is Belgium from the beginning of its history as an independent state in 1831 to the Second World War. The nations belonging to the so-called Russian security belt, which stretches along the western and southwestern frontiers of the Soviet Union from Finland to Bulgaria, exist by leave of their preponderant neighbor, whose military and economic interests they serve. . . .

DIFFERENT METHODS OF THE BALANCE OF POWER

The balancing process can be carried on either by diminishing the weight of the heavier scale or by increasing the weight of the lighter one.

Divide and Rule

The former method has found its classic manifestation, aside from the imposition of onerous conditions in peace treaties and the incitement to treason and revolution, in the maxim "divide and rule." It has been resorted to by nations who tried to make or keep their competitors weak by dividing them or keeping them divided. The most consistent and important policies of this kind in modern times are the policy of France with respect to Germany and the policy of the Soviet Union with respect to the rest of Europe. From the seventeenth century to the end of the Second World War, it has been an unvarying principle of French foreign policy either to favor the division of the German Empire into a number of small independent states or to prevent the coalescence of such states into one unified nation. The support of the Protestant princes of Germany by Richelieu, of the Rhinebund by Napoleon I, of the princes of Southern Germany by Napoleon III, of the abortive separatist movements after the First World War, and the opposition to the unification of Germany after the Second World War—all have their common denominator in considerations of the balance of power in Europe, which France found threatened by a strong German state. Similarly, the Soviet Union from the twenties to the present has consistently opposed all plans for the unification of Europe, on the assumption that the pooling of the divided strength of the European nations into a "Western bloc" would give the enemies of the Soviet Union such power as to threaten the latter's security.

The other method of balancing the power of several nations consists in adding to the strength of the weaker nation. This method can be carried out by two different means: Either B can increase its power sufficiently to offset, if not surpass, the power of A, and

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5. *Works*, Vol. IV (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1889), p. 331.

vice versa; or B can pool its power with the power of all the other nations that pursue identical policies with regard to A, in which case A will pool its power with all the nations pursuing identical policies with respect to B. The former alternative is exemplified by the policy of compensations and the armament race as well as by disarmament; the latter, by the policy of alliances.

Compensations

Compensations of a territorial nature were a common device in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries for maintaining a balance of power which had been, or was to be, disturbed by the territorial acquisitions of one nation. The Treaty of Utrecht of 1713, which terminated the War of the Spanish Succession, recognized for the first time expressly the principle of the balance of power by way of territorial compensations. It provided for the division of most of the Spanish possessions, European and colonial, between the Hapsburgs and the Bourbons "*ad conservandum in Europa equilibrium*" as the treaty put it.

The three partitions of Poland in 1772, 1793, and 1795, which in a sense mark the end of the classic period of the balance of power, . . . reaffirm its essence by proceeding under the guidance of the principle of compensations. Since territorial acquisitions at the expense of Poland by any one of the interested nations—Austria, Prussia, and Russia—to the exclusion of the others would have upset the balance of power, the three nations agreed to divide Polish territory in such a way that the distribution of power among themselves would be approximately the same after the partitions as it had been before. In the treaty of 1772 between Austria and Russia, it was even stipulated that "the acquisitions. . . shall be completely equal, the portion of one cannot exceed the portion of the other."

Fertility of the soil and number and quality of the populations concerned were used as objective standards by which to determine the increase in power which the individual nations received through the acquisition of territory. While in the eighteenth century this standard was rather crudely applied, the Congress of Vienna refined the policy of compensations by appointing in 1815 a statistical commission charged with evaluating territories by the standard of number, quality, and type of population.

In the latter part of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, the principle of compensations was again deliberately applied to the distribution of colonial territories and the delimitation of colonial or semicolonial spheres of influence. Africa, in particular, was during that period the object of numerous treaties delimiting spheres of influence for the major colonial powers. Thus the competition between France, Great Britain, and Italy for the domination of Ethiopia was provisionally resolved, after the model of the partitions of Poland, by the treaty of 1906, which divided the country into three spheres of influence for the purpose of establishing in that region a balance of power among the nations concerned. Similarly, the rivalry between Great Britain and Russia with respect to Iran led to the Anglo-Russian treaty of 1907, which established spheres of influence for the contracting parties and a neutral sphere under the exclusive domination of Iran. The compensation consists here not in the outright cession of territorial sovereignty, but rather in the reservation, to the exclusive benefit of a particular nation, of certain territories for commercial exploitation, political and military penetration, and eventual establishment of sovereignty. In other words, the particular nation has the right, without having full title to the territory concerned, to operate within its sphere of influence without competition or opposition from another nation. The other nation, in turn, has the right to claim for its own sphere of influence the same abstinence on the part of the former.

Even where the principle of compensations is not deliberately applied, however, as it was in the aforementioned treaties, it is nowhere absent from political arrangements, territorial or other, made within a balance-of-power system. For, given such a system, no nation will agree to concede political advantages to another nation without the expectation, which may or may not be well founded, of receiving proportionate advantages in return. The bargaining of diplomatic negotiations, issuing in political compromise, is but the principle of compensations in its most general form, and as such it is organically connected with the balance of power.

Armaments

The principal means, however, by which a nation endeavors with the power at its disposal to maintain or re-establish the balance of power are armaments. The armaments race in which Nation A tries to keep up with, and then to outdo, the armaments of Nation B, and vice versa, is the typical instrumentality of an unstable, dynamic balance of power. The necessary corollary of the armaments race is a constantly increasing burden of military preparations devouring an ever greater portion of the national budget and making for ever deepening fears, suspicions, and insecurity. The situation preceding the First World War, with the naval competition between Germany and Great Britain and the rivalry of the French and German armies, illustrates this point.

It is in recognition of situations such as these that, since the end of the Napoleonic Wars, repeated attempts have been made to create a stable balance of power, if not to establish permanent peace, by means of the proportionate disarmament of competing nations. The technique of stabilizing the balance of power by means of a proportionate reduction of armaments is somewhat similar to the technique of territorial compensations. For both techniques require a quantitative evaluation of the influence that the arrangement is likely to exert on the respective power of the individual nations. The difficulties in making such a quantitative evaluation—in correlating, for instance, the military strength of the French army of 1932 with the military power represented by the industrial potential of Germany—have greatly contributed to the failure of most attempts at creating a stable balance of power by means of disarmament. The only outstanding success of this kind was the Washington Naval Treaty of 1922, in which Great Britain, the United States, Japan, France, and Italy agreed to a proportionate reduction and limitation of naval armaments. Yet it must be noted that this treaty was part of an over-all political and territorial settlement in the Pacific which sought to stabilize the power relations in that region on the foundation of Anglo-American predominance.

Alliances

The historically most important manifestation of the balance of power, however, is to be found not in the equilibrium of two isolated nations but in the relations between one nation or alliance of nations and another alliance.

The General Nature of Alliances: Alliances are a necessary function of the balance of power operating within a multiple-state system. Nations A and B, competing with each other, have three choices in order to maintain and improve their relative power positions. They can increase their own power, they can add to their own power the power of other nations, or they can withhold the power of other nations from the adversary. When they make the first choice, they embark upon an armaments race. When they choose the second and third alternatives, they pursue a policy of alliances.

Whether or not a nation shall pursue a policy of alliances is, then, a matter not of principle but of expediency. A nation will shun alliances if it believes that it is strong enough to hold its own unaided or that the burden of the commitments resulting from the alliance is likely to outweigh the advantages to be expected. It is for one or the other or both of these reasons that, throughout the better part of their history, Great Britain and the United States have refrained from entering into peacetime alliances with other nations.

Yet Great Britain and the United States have also refrained from concluding an alliance with each other even though, from the proclamation of the Monroe Doctrine in 1823 to the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, they have acted, at least in relation to the other European nations, as if they were allied. Their relationship during that period provides another instance of a situation in which nations dispense with an alliance. It occurs when their interests so obviously call for concerted policies and actions that an explicit formulation of these interests, policies, and actions in the form of a treaty of alliance appears to be redundant.

With regard to the continent of Europe, the United States and Great Britain have had one interest in common: the preservation of the European balance of power. In consequence of this identity of interests, they have found themselves by virtual necessity in the camp opposed to a nation which happened to threaten that balance. And when Great Britain went to war in 1914 and 1939 in order to protect the European balance of power, the United States first supported Great Britain with a conspicuous lack of that impartiality befitting a neutral and then joined her on the battlefield. Had in 1914 and 1939 the United States been tied to Great Britain by a formal treaty of alliance, it might have declared war earlier, but its general policies and concrete actions would not have been materially different than they actually were.

Not every community of interests, calling for common policies and actions, also calls for legal codification in an explicit alliance. Yet, on the other hand, an alliance requires of necessity a community of interests for its foundation.[6] Under what conditions, then, does an existing community of interests require the explicit formulation of an alliance? What is it that an alliance adds to the existing community of interests?

An alliance adds precision, especially in the form of limitation, to an existing community of interests and to the general policies and concrete measures serving them. The interests nations have in common are not typically so precise and limited as to geographic region, objective, and appropriate policies as has been the American and British interest in the preservation of the European balance of power. Nor are they so incapable of precision and limitation as concerns the prospective common enemy. For, while a typical alliance is directed against a specific nation or group of nations, the enemy of the Anglo-American community of interests could in the nature of things not be specified beforehand, since whoever threatens the European balance of power is the enemy. As Jefferson shifted his sympathies back and forth between Napoleon and Great Britain according to who seemed to threaten the balance of power at the time, so during the century following the Napoleonic Wars, Great Britain and the United States had to decide in the light of circumstances ever liable to change who posed at the moment the greatest threat to the balance of power. This blanket character of the enemy, determined not individually but by the function he performs, brings to mind a similar characteristic of collective security, which is directed against the abstractly designed aggressor, whoever he may be.

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6. Glancing through the treaties of alliance of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, one is struck by the meticulous precision with which obligations to furnish troops, equipment, logistic support, food, money, and the like, were defined.

The typical interests which unite two nations against a third are both more definite as concerns the determination of the enemy and less precise as concerns the objectives to be sought and the policies to be pursued. In the last decades of the nineteenth century, France was opposed to Germany, and Russia was opposed to Austria, while Austria was allied with Germany against France and Russia. How could the interests of France and Russia be brought upon a common denominator, determining policy and guiding action? How could, in other words, the *casus foederis* be defined so that both friend and foe would know what to expect in certain contingencies affecting their respective interest? It was for the treaty of alliance of 1894 to perform these functions. Had the objectives and policies of the Franco-Russian alliance of 1894 been as clear as were the objectives and policies of Anglo-American cooperation in Europe, no alliance treaty would have been necessary. Had the enemy been as indeterminate, no alliance treaty would have been feasible.

Not every community of interests calling for co-operation between two or more nations, then, requires that the terms of this co-operation be specified through the legal stipulations of a treaty of alliance. It is only when the common interests are inchoate in terms of policy and action that a treaty of alliance is required to make them explicit and operative. These interests, as well as the alliances expressing them and the policies serving them, can be distinguished in five different ways according to: their intrinsic nature and relationship, the distribution of benefits and power, their coverage in relation to the total interests of the nations concerned, their coverage in terms of time, and their effectiveness in terms of common policies and actions. In consequence, we can distinguish alliances serving identical, complementary, and ideological interests and policies. We can further distinguish mutual and one-sided, general and limited, temporary and permanent, operative and inoperative alliances. . . .

Alliances vs. World Domination: While the balance of power as a natural and inevitable outgrowth of the struggle for power is as old as political history itself, systematic theoretic reflections, starting in the sixteenth century and reaching their culmination in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, have conceived the balance of power generally as a protective device of an alliance of nations, anxious for their independence, against another nation's designs for world domination, then called universal monarchy. B, directly threatened by A, joins with C, D, and E, potentially threatened by A, to foil A's designs. Polybius has pointed to the essence of this configuration in his analysis of the relations between the Romans, the Carthaginians, and Hiero of Syracuse:

> The Carthaginians, being shut in on all sides, were obliged to resort to an appeal to the states in alliance with them. Hiero during the whole of the present war had been most prompt in meeting their requests, and was now more complaisant than ever, being convinced that it was in his own interest for securing both its Sicilian dominions and his friendship with the Romans, that Carthage should be preserved, and that the stronger Power should not be able to attain its ultimate object entirely without effort. In this he reasoned very wisely and sensibly, for such matters should never be neglected, and we should never contribute to the attainment by one state of a power so preponderant, that none dare dispute with it even for their acknowledged rights.[7]

. . . The wars against the France of 1789 and against Napoleon show the same configuration of one preponderant nation aiming at world domination and being opposed by a coalition of nations for the sake of preserving their independence. The manifesto with

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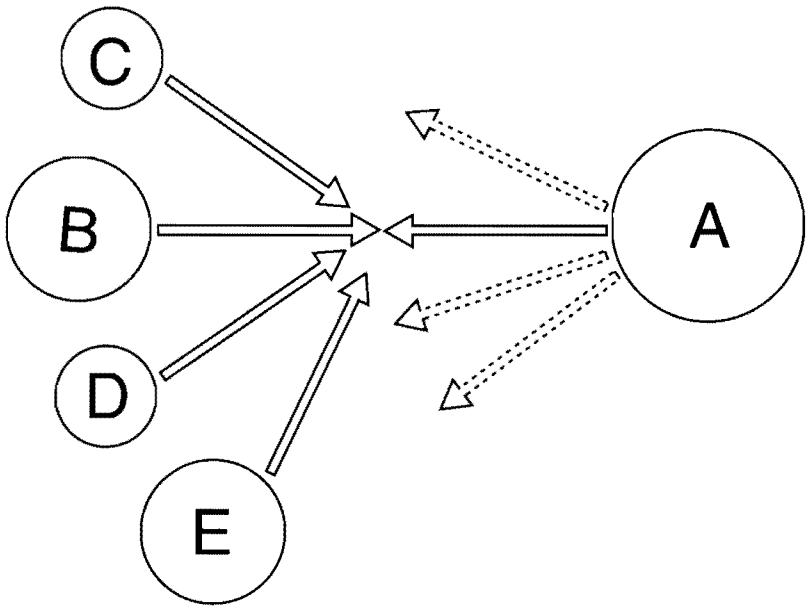
7. Polybius I, 83.



which the first coalition initiated these wars in 1792 declared that "no power interested in the maintenance of the balance of power in Europe could see with indifference the Kingdom of France, which at one time formed so important a weight in this great balance, delivered any longer to domestic agitations and to the horrors of disorder and anarchy which, so to speak, have destroyed her political existence." And when these wars approached their conclusion, it was still the purpose of the Allied powers, in the words of the Convention of Paris of April 23, 1814, "to put an end to the miseries of Europe, and to found her repose upon a just redistribution of forces among the nations of which she is composed"; that is, upon a new balance of power. The coalitions that fought the Second World War against Germany and Japan owed their existence to the same fear, common to all their members, of the latter nations' imperialism, and they pursued the same goal of preserving their independence in a new balance of power. Similarly, the Western bi- and multilateral alliances have since the late forties pursued the objective of putting a halt to the imperialistic expansion of the Soviet Union through the creation of a new world balance of power.

Alliances vs. Counteralliances: The struggle between an alliance of nations defending their independence against one potential conqueror is the most spectacular of the configurations to which the balance of power gives rise. The opposition of two alliances, one or both pursuing imperialistic goals and defending the independence of their members against the imperialistic aspirations of the other coalition, is the most frequent configuration within a balance-of-power system. . . .

From the beginning of the modern state system at the turn of the fifteenth century to the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815, European nations were the active elements in the balance of power. Turkey was the one notable exception. Alliances and counteralliances were

this fear that motivated Austria in July 1914 to try to settle its accounts with Serbia once and for all, and that induced Germany to support Austria unconditionally. It was the same fear that brought Russia to the support of Serbia, and France to the support of Russia. In his telegraphic message of August 2, 1914, to George V of England, the Russian Czar summed the situation up well when he said that the effect of the predominance of Austria over Serbia "would have been to upset balance of power in Balkans, which is of such vital interest to my Empire as well as to those Powers who desire maintenance of balance of power in Europe.... I trust your country will not fail to support France and Russia in fighting to maintain balance of power in Europe."[9]

After the First World War, France maintained permanent alliances with Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and Romania and, in 1935, concluded an alliance—which was, however, not implemented—with the Soviet Union. This policy can be understood as a kind of preventive balance-of-power policy which anticipated Germany's comeback and attempted to maintain the status quo of Versailles in the face of such an eventuality. On the other hand, the formation in 1936 of an alliance between Germany, Italy, and Japan, called the Axis, was intended as a counterweight against the alliance between France and the Eastern European nations, which would at the same time neutralize the Soviet Union.

Thus the period between the two world wars stands in fact under the sign of the balance of power by alliances and counteralliances, although in theory the principle of the balance of power was supposed to have been superseded by the League of Nations principle of collective security. Yet, actually, collective security . . . did not abolish the balance of power. Rather, it reaffirmed it in the form of a universal alliance against any potential aggressor, the presumption being that such an alliance would always outweigh the aggressor. Collective security differs however, from the balance of power in the principle of association by virtue of which the alliance is formed. Balance-of-power alliances are formed by certain individual nations against other individual nations or an alliance of them on the basis of what those individual nations regard as their separate national interests. The organizing principle of collective security is the respect for the moral and legal obligation to consider an attack by any nation upon any member of the alliance as an attack upon all members of the alliance. Consequently, collective security is supposed to operate automatically; that is, aggression calls the counteralliance into operation at once and, therefore, protects peace and security with the greatest possible efficiency. Alliances within a balance-of-power system, on the other hand, are frequently uncertain in actual operation, since they are dependent upon political considerations of the individual nations. The defection of Italy from the Triple Alliance in 1915 and the disintegration of the French system of alliances between 1935 and 1939 illustrate this weakness of the balance of power.

THE "HOLDER" OF THE BALANCE

Whenever the balance of power is to be realized by means of an alliance—and this has been generally so throughout the history of the Western world—two possible variations of this pattern have to be distinguished. To use the metaphor of the balance, the system may consist of two scales, in each of which are to be found the nation or nations identified with the same policy of the status quo or of imperialism. The continental nations of Europe have generally operated the balance of power in this way.

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9. *British Documents on the Origins of the War, 1898-1914* (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1926), Vol. XI, p. 276.

The system may, however, consist of two scales plus a third element, the "holder" of the balance or the "balancer." The balancer is not permanently identified with the policies of either nation or group of nations. Its only objective within the system is the maintenance of the balance, regardless of the concrete policies the balance will serve. In consequence, the holder of the balance will throw its weight at one time in this scale, at another time in the other scale, guided only by one consideration—the relative position of the scales. Thus it will put its weight always in the scale that seems to be higher than the other because it is lighter. The balancer may become in a relatively short span of history consecutively the friend and foe of all major powers provided they all consecutively threaten the balance by approaching predominance over the others and are in turn threatened by others about to gain such predominance. To paraphrase a statement of Palmerston: While holder of the balance has no permanent friends, it has no permanent enemies either; it has only the permanent interest of maintaining the balance of power itself.

The balancer is in a position of "splendid isolation." It is isolated by its own choice; for, while the two scales of the balance must vie with each, to add its weight to theirs in order to gain the overweight necessary for success, it must refuse to enter into permanent ties with either side. The holder of the balance waits in the middle in watchful detachment to see which is likely to sink. Its isolation is "splendid"; for, since its support or lack of support is the decisive factor in the struggle for power, its foreign policy, if cleverly managed, is able to extract the highest price from those whom it supports. But since this support, regardless of the price paid for it, is always uncertain and shifts from one side to the other in accordance with the movements of the balance, its policies are resented and subject to condemnation on moral grounds. Thus it has been said of the outstanding balancer in modern times, Great Britain, that it lets others fight its wars, that it keeps Europe divided in order to dominate the continent, and that the fickleness of its policies is such as to make alliances with Great Britain impossible. "*Perfidious Albion*" has become a byword in the mouths of those who either were unable to gain Great Britain's support, however hard they tried, or else lost it after they had paid what seemed to them too high a price.

The holder of the balance occupies the key position in the balance-of-power system, since its position determines the outcome of the struggle for power. It has, therefore, been called the "arbiter" of the system, deciding who will win and who will lose. By making it impossible for any nation or combination of nations to gain predominance over the others, it preserves its own independence as well as the independence of all the other nations, and is thus a most powerful factor in international politics.

The holder of the balance can use this power in three different ways. It can make its joining one or the other nation or alliance dependent upon certain conditions favorable to the maintenance or restoration of the balance. It can make its support of the peace settlement dependent upon similar conditions. It can, finally, in either situation see to it that the objectives of its own national policy, apart from the maintenance of the balance of power, are realized in the process of balancing the power of others. . . .

The classic example of the balancer has, however, been provided by Great Britain. To Henry VIII is attributed the maxim: *cui adhaero praeest* (he whom I support will prevail). He is reported to have had himself painted holding in his right hand a pair of scales in perfect balance, one of them occupied by France, the other by Austria, and holding in his left hand a weight ready to be dropped in either scale. Of England under Elizabeth I it was said "that France and Spain are as it were the Scales in the Balance of Europe and England the

Tongue or the Holder of the Balance."[10] In 1624, a French pamphlet invited King Jacob to follow the glorious example of Elizabeth and Henry VIII, "who played his role so well between the Emperor Charles V and King Francis by making himself feared and flattered by both and by holding, as it were, the balance between them . . ."

DOMINANT AND DEPENDENT SYSTEMS

We have spoken thus far of the balance of power as if it were one single system comprehending all nations actively engaged in international politics. Closer observation, however, reveals that such a system is frequently composed of a number of subsystems that are interrelated with each other, but that maintain within themselves a balance of power of their own. The interrelationship between the different systems is generally one of subordination, in the sense that one dominates because of the relatively great weight accumulated in its scales, while the others are, as it were, attached to the scales of that dominant system.

Thus, in the sixteenth century, the dominant balance of power operated between France and the Hapsburgs, while at the same time an autonomous system kept the Italian states in equilibrium. In the latter part of the seventeenth century a separate balance of power developed in Northern Europe out of the challenge with which the rise of Swedish power confronted the nations adjacent to the Baltic Sea. The transformation of Prussia into a first rate power in the eighteenth century brought about a particular German balance of power, the other scale of which had Austria as its main weight. This autonomous system, "a little Europe within the great," was dissolved only in 1866 with the expulsion of Austria from the Germanic Confederation as a consequence of the Prusso-Austrian War of the same year. The eighteenth century saw also the development of an Eastern balance of power occasioned by the ascendancy of Russia. The partitions of Poland, by virtue of the principle of compensations, between Russia, Prussia, and Austria are the first spectacular manifestations of that new system.

Throughout the nineteenth century until the present day, the balance of power in the Balkans has been of concern to the nations of Europe. As early as 1790 Turkey concluded a treaty with Prussia in which the latter promised to go to war with Austria and Russia "because of the prejudice which the enemies, in crossing the Danube, have brought to the desirable and necessary balance of power." In the latter part of the nineteenth century one began to speak of an African balance of power with reference to a certain equilibrium among the colonial acquisitions of the great powers. Later on, the balance of power in the Western Hemisphere, in the Pacific, in the Far and Near East were added to the diplomatic vocabulary. One even spoke of an "Austrian equilibrium" and of the Austrian monarchy with its antagonistic nationalities it was said that it "is constrained to apply to itself the rules of conduct which the powers of Europe with their perpetual rivalries follow with regard to each other."[11]

It is not by accident that the autonomy of such local balance-of-power systems is the greater and their subordination to a dominant system the less noticeable, the more removed they are physically from the center of the struggle for power—the more they operate at the periphery of the dominant system, out of reach of the dominant nations. Thus an Italian bal-

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[10] William Camden, *Annales of the History of the Most Renowned and Victorious Princess Elizabeth, Late Queen of England* (London, 1635), p. 196.

[11] Albert Sorel, *L'Europe et la révolution français* (Paris: E. Plon, 1885) Vol. I, p.443.

ance of power could develop during the fifteenth century in relative autonomy, while the great nations of Europe were occupied in other regions. For the better part of the history of Western civilization the different balance-of-power systems of Asia, Africa, and America were entirely independent of the configurations of the European nations, to the point of being hardly known to them.

The balance of power in the Western Hemisphere up to the Second World War and in Eastern Europe until the end of the eighteenth century owe their relative autonomous development to their location at the periphery of the power centers of the time. The partitions of Poland which were intended to preserve the balance of power in Eastern Europe were executed by the directly interested nations without interference of any other nation. The alliance concluded in 1851 between Brazil and Uruguay against Argentina for the purpose of maintaining the balance of power in South America had only a very remote connection with the European balance of power. On the other hand, it has now become possible to speak of an autonomous African balance of power. Since the indigenous peoples of Africa have started to compete for power with each other and with non-African nations, Africa is no longer solely an object of the struggle for power centered elsewhere.

The more intimately a local balance of power is connected with the dominant one, the less opportunity it has to operate autonomously and the more it tends to become merely a localized manifestation of the dominant balance of power. The balance of power within the German Confederation from Frederick the Great to the War of 1866 presents an intermediate situation between full autonomy and complete integration. It combines a certain degree of autonomy with integration into the dominant system. While the equilibrium between Prussia and Austria was, as we have seen, a precondition for the preservation of the liberties of the members of the Germanic Confederation, this equilibrium was also indispensable for the maintenance of the European balance of power as a whole.

The German balance thus fulfilled a dual function: one within its own framework, another for the general system of which it was a part. Conversely, the fusion of Prussia and Austria or the domination of one by the other would not only have been destructive of the independence of the individual German states but would as well have threatened the freedom of the other European nations. "If Europe," as Edmund Burke put it, "does not conceive the independence and the equilibrium of the empire to be in the very essence of the system of balance of power in Europe . . . all the politics of Europe for more than two centuries have been miserably erroneous."[12] The perpetuation of the balance between Prussia and Austria was, therefore, in the interest not only of the other members of the Germanic Confederation but of all European nations.

When, as a consequence of the War of 1866, Prussia and later Germany gained a permanent advantage over Austria which destroyed the balance between the two nations and made Germany predominant in Europe, it became one of the functions of the European balance of power to preserve at least the independence of Austria against infringement by its stronger neighbor. It was in consequence of that permanent European interest that after the First World War the victorious Allies sought by legal, economic, and political measures to prevent the fusion of Austria with Germany. Moreover, it was within the logic of

12. *Works*, Vol. IV (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1889), p. 330.

this situation that Hitler regarded the annexation of Austria as a necessary stepping stone on the road toward the overthrow of the European balance of power.

The balance of power in the Balkans has fulfilled a similar function since the last decades of the nineteenth century. Here, too, the maintenance of a balance of power among the Balkan nations has been regarded as a prerequisite for the maintenance of the European balance. Whenever the local balance was threatened, the great nations of Europe intervened in order to restore it. The statement of the Russian Czar at the beginning of the First World War, quoted above, clearly illustrates that connection.

STRUCTURAL CHANGES IN THE BALANCE OF POWER

In recent times the relations between the dominant balance of power and the local systems have shown an ever increasing tendency to change to the detriment of the autonomy of the local systems. The reasons for this development lie in the structural changes that the dominant balance of power has under gone since the First World War and that became manifest in the Second. We have already indicated the gradual expansion of the dominant balance-of-power system from Western and Central Europe to the rest of the continent, and from there to other continents, until finally the First World War saw all the nations of the earth actively participating in a world-wide balance of power.

Hand in hand with the consummation of this expansion went a shift of the main weights of the balance from Europe to other continents. At the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, the main weights in the balance were predominantly European: Great Britain, France, and Russia in one scale, Germany and Austria in the other. At the end of the Second World War, the principal weights in each scale were either entirely non-European, as in the case of the United States, or predominantly non-European, as in the case of the Soviet Union. In consequence, the whole structure of the world balance of power has changed. At the end of the First World War and even at the beginning of the Second, the two scales of the balance, so to speak, were still in Europe: only the weights of the scales came from all over the earth. The main protagonists of the power contest and the principal stakes for which it was fought were still predominantly European. To paraphrase the words of George Canning, already quoted, non-European powers were called in only for the purpose of redressing the balance of power of Europe. In Churchill's words of 1940, "The New World, with all its power and might, steps forth to the rescue and the liberation of the Old."

Today the balance of power of Europe is no longer the center of world politics around which local balances would group themselves, either in intimate connection or in lesser or greater autonomy. Today the European balance of power has become a mere function of the world-wide balance of which the United States and the Soviet Union are the main weights, placed on opposite scales. The distribution of power in Europe is only one of the concrete issues over which the power contests between the United States and the Soviet Union is being waged.

What is true of the formerly dominant system is true of all the traditional local systems as well. The balance of power in the Balkans, no less than the balances in the Near and Far East, have shared the fate of the general European system. They have become mere functions of the new world-wide balance, mere "theaters" where the power contest between the two great protagonists is fought out. One might say that of all the local balance-of-power systems only the South American system has retained a certain measure of autonomy, protected as it is by the predominance of the United States.

EVALUATION OF THE BALANCE OF POWER

Considering especially its changed structure, how are we to evaluate the balance of power and to assess its future usefulness for the preservation of peace and security in the modern world?

In explaining its nature and operation, we have stressed its inevitable connection with, and protective function for, a multiple-state system. Throughout its history of more than four hundred years the policy of the balance of power succeeded in preventing any one state from gaining universal dominion. It also succeeded in preserving the existence of all members of the modern state system from the conclusion of the Thirty Years' War in 1648 to the partitions of Poland at the end of the eighteenth century. Yet universal dominion by any one state was prevented only at the price of warfare, which from 1648 to 1815 was virtually continuous and in the twentieth century has twice engulfed practically the whole world. And the two periods of stability, one starting in 1648, the other in 1815, were preceded by the wholesale elimination of small states and were interspersed, starting with the destruction of Poland, by a great number of isolated acts of a similar nature.

What is important for our discussion is the fact that these acts were accomplished in the name of the very principle of the balance of power whose chief claim to serve as the fundamental principle of the modern state system had been that it was indispensable for the preservation of the independence of the individual states. Not only did the balance of power fail to protect the independence of Poland, but the very principle of territorial compensation each member for the territorial aggrandizement of any other member brought about the destruction of the Polish state. The destruction of Poland in the name of the balance of power was but the first and most spectacular instance of a series of partitions, annexations, and destructions of independent states which, from 1815 to the present, have all been accomplished in application of that same principle. Failure to fulfill its function for individual states and failure to fulfill it for the state system as a whole by any means other than actual or potential warfare points up the three main weaknesses of the balance of power as the guiding principle of international politics: its uncertainty, its unreality, and its inadequacy.

The Uncertainty of the Balance of Power

The idea of a balance among a number of nations for the purpose of preventing any one of them from becoming strong enough to threaten the independence of the others is a metaphor taken from the field of mechanics. It was appropriate to the way of thinking of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, which liked to picture society and the whole universe as a gigantic mechanism, a machine or a clockwork, created and kept in motion by the divine watchmaker. Within that mechanism, and within the smaller mechanisms composing it, the mutual relations of the individual parts could be, it was believed, exactly determined by means of mechanical calculations, and their actions and reactions accurately foreseen. The metaphor of two scales kept in balance by an equal distribution of weights on either side, providing the mechanism for the maintenance of stability and order on the international scene, has its origin in this mechanistic philosophy. It was applied to the practical affairs of international politics in the spirit of that philosophy.

The balance of power, mechanically conceived, is in need of an easily recognizable quantitative criterion by which the relative power of a number of nations can be measured and compared. For it is only by means of such a criterion, comparable to the pounds and ounces of a real pair of scales, that one can say with any degree of assurance that a certain nation tends to become more powerful than another or that they tend to maintain a balance

of power between them. Furthermore, it is only by means of such a criterion that variations in power can be converted into quantitative units to be transferred from one scale to the other in order to restore the balance. The theory and practice of the balance of power found such a criterion, as we have seen, in territory, population, and armaments. The policies of compensations and of competitive armaments have served throughout the history of the modern state system as the practical application of that criterion.

But does the power of a nation actually repose in the extension of its territory? Is a nation the more powerful the more territory it possesses? Our examination of the factors that make for the power of a nation has shown that the answer can be in the affirmative only with qualifications so far-reaching as almost to nullify the affirmative character of the answer. . .

National character and, above all, national morale and the quality of government, especially in the conduct of foreign affairs, are the most important, but also the most elusive, components of national power. It is impossible for the observer of the contemporary scene or the explorer of future trends to assess even with approximate accuracy the relative contributions these elements may make to the power of different nations. Furthermore, the quality of these contributions is subject to incessant change, unnoticeable at the moment the change actually takes place and revealed only in the actual test of crisis and war. Rational calculation of the relative strength of several nations, which is the very lifeblood of the balance of power, becomes a series of guesses the correctness of which can be ascertained only in retrospect. . . .

An eighteenth-century opponent of the balance of power tried to demonstrate the absurdity of the calculations common at the time by asking which of two princes was more powerful: one who possessed three pounds of military strength, four pounds of statesmanship, five pounds of zeal, and two pounds of ambition, or one who had twelve pounds of military strength, but only one pound of all the other qualities? The author gives the advantage to the former prince, but whether his answer will be correct under all circumstances is certainly open to question, even under the assumption—patently hypothetical—that the quantitative determination of the relative weight of these different qualities were possible.

This uncertainty of power calculations is inherent in the nature of national power itself. It will therefore come into play even in the most simple pattern of the balance of power; that is, when one nation opposes another. This uncertainty is, however, immeasurably magnified when the weights in one or the other or in both scales are composed not of single units but of alliances. Then it becomes necessary to compute not only one's own and the opponent's national power and to correlate one with the other, but to perform the same operation on the national power of one's allies and those of the opponent. The risk of guessing is greatly aggravated when one must assess the power of nations belonging to a different civilization from one's own. It is difficult enough to evaluate the power of Great Britain or of France. It is much more difficult to make a correct assessment of the power of China, Japan, or even the Soviet Union. The crowning uncertainty, however, lies in the fact that one cannot always be sure who are one's own allies and who are the opponent's. Alignments by virtue of alliance treaties are not always identical with the alliances that oppose each other in the actual contest of war. . . .

The Unreality of the Balance of Power

This uncertainty of all power calculations not only makes the balance of power incapable of practical application but leads also to its very negation in practice. Since no nation can be sure that its calculation of the distribution of power at any particular moment in history is correct, it must at least make sure that its errors, whatever they may be, will not put the nation at a disadvantage in the contest for power. In other words, the nation must try to have at least a margin of safety

which will allow it to make erroneous calculations and still maintain the balance of power. To that effect, all nations actively engaged in the struggle for power must actually aim not at a balance—that is, equality—of power, but at superiority of power in their own behalf. And since no nation can foresee how large its miscalculations will turn out to be, all nations must ultimately seek the maximum of power obtainable under the circumstances. Only thus can they hope to attain the maximum margin of safety commensurate with the maximum of errors they might commit. The limitless aspiration for power, potentially always present, as we have seen, in the power drives of nations, finds in the balance of power a mighty incentive to transform itself into an actuality.

Since the desire to attain a maximum of power is universal, all nations must always be afraid that their own miscalculations and the power increases of other nations might add up to an inferiority for themselves which they must at all costs try to avoid. Hence all nations who have gained an apparent edge over their competitors tend to consolidate that advantage and use it for changing the distribution of power permanently in their favor. This can be done through diplomatic pressure by bringing the full weight of that advantage to bear upon the other nations, compelling them to make the concessions that will consolidate the temporary advantage into a permanent superiority. It can also be done by war. Since in a balance-of-power system all nations live in constant fear lest their rivals deprive them, at the first opportune moment, of their power position, all nations have a vital interest in anticipating such a development and doing unto the others what they do not want the others to do unto them. . . .

It will forever be impossible to prove or disprove the claim that by its stabilizing influence the balance of power has aided in avoiding many wars. One cannot retrace the course of history, taking a hypothetical situation as one's point of departure. But, while nobody can tell how many wars there would have been without the balance of power, it is not hard to see that most of the wars that have been fought since the beginning of the modern state system have their origin in the balance of power. Three types of wars are intimately connected with the mechanics of the balance of power: preventive war, already referred to, where normally both sides pursue imperialistic aims, anti-imperialistic war, and imperialistic war itself. . . .

The dynamics of international politics as they play between status quo and imperialistic nations, lead of necessity to such a disturbance of the balance of power that war appears as the only policy that offers the status quo nations at least a chance to redress the balance of power in their favor.

Yet the very act of redressing the balance carries within itself the elements of a new disturbance. The dynamics of power politics as outlined previously make this development inevitable. Yesterday's defender of the status quo is transformed by victory into the imperialist of today, against whom yesterday's vanquished will seek revenge tomorrow. The ambition of the victor who took up arms in order to restore the balance, as well as the resentment of the loser who could not overthrow it, tend to make the new balance a virtually invisible point of transition from one disturbance to the next. Thus the balancing process has frequently led to the substitution of one predominant power, disturbing the balance, for another one. . . .

The Balance of Power as Ideology

Our discussion has thus far proceeded on the assumption that the balance of power is a device for the self-defense of nations whose independence and existence are threatened by a disproportionate increase in the power of other nations. What we have said of the balance of power is true only under the assumption that the balance of power is used genuinely for its avowed purposes of self-protection. Yet we have already seen how the

power drives of nations take hold of ideal principles and transform them into ideologies in order to disguise, rationalize, and justify themselves. They have done this with the balance of power. What we have said above about the popularity of anti-imperialistic ideologies in general applies to the balance of power.

A nation seeking empire has often claimed that all it wanted was equilibrium A nation seeking only to maintain the status quo has often tried to give a change in the status quo the appearance of an attack upon the balance of power. . . .

The difficulties in assessing correctly the relative power positions of nations have made the invocation of the balance of power one of the favored ideologies of international politics. Thus it has come about that the term is being used in a very loose and unprecise manner. When a nation would like to justify one of its steps on the international scene, it is likely to refer to it as serving the maintenance or restoration of the balance of power. When a nation would like to discredit certain policies pursued by another nation, it is likely to condemn them as a threat to, or a disturbance of, the balance of power. Since it is the inherent tendency of the balance of power in the proper meaning of the term to preserve the status quo, the term has, in the vocabulary of status quo nations, become a synonym for the status quo and for any distribution of power existing at any particular moment. Any change in the existing distribution of power is therefore opposed as disturbing the balance of power. In this way a nation interested in the preservation of a certain distribution of power tries to make its interest appear to be the outgrowth of the fundamental, universally accepted principle of the modern state system and, hence, to be identical with an interest common to all nations. The nation itself, far from defending a selfish, particular concern, poses as the guardian of that general principle: that is, as the agent of the international community.

In this sense one speaks, for instance, of the balance of power in the Western Hemisphere which might be disturbed by the policies of non-American nations, or of the balance of power in the Mediterranean which must be defended against Russian intrusion. Yet what one means to defend in either case is not the balance of power but a particular distribution of power regarded as favorable to a particular nation or group of nations. The New York Times wrote in one of its reports on the Foreign Ministers' Conference in Moscow in 1947: "The new unity of France, Britain and the United States . . . may be only temporary but it does alter the balance of power perceptibly."[13] What was actually meant was not that the balance of power in the proper meaning of the term had been altered, but that the distribution of power which existed after the conference was more favorable to the Western powers than the one that existed before.

The use of the balance of power as an ideology accentuates difficulties inherent in the mechanics of the balance of power. Yet it must be noted that the ready use as an ideology to which the balance of power lends itself is not an accident. It is a potentiality inherent in its very essence. The contrast between pretended precision and the actual lack of it, between the pretended aspiration for balance and the actual aim of predominance—this contrast, which, as we have seen, is of the very essence of the balance of power, makes the latter in a certain measure an ideology to begin with. The balance of power thus assumes a reality and a function that it actually does not have, and therefore tends to disguise, rationalize, and justify international politics as it actually is . . .

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13. April 27, 1947, p. E3.