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M.S.

1 The meaning of the balance of power

Students of international politics do not need to be told of the unsatisfactory state of balance of power theory. The problems are well known: the ambiguous nature of the concept and the numerous ways it has been defined, the various distinct and partly contradictory meanings given to it in practice and the divergent purposes it serves (description, analysis, prescription and propaganda); and the apparent failure of attempts clearly to define balance of power as a system and specify its operating rules.

Schroeder, 1989: 135

INTRODUCTION

If the idea of the balance of power is so laden with contradictions, why then should we study it at all? The answer to that question is that, for all its faults, the balance of power has been one of the most important ideas in history. It is a concept which for centuries students of international relations believed held the key to understanding the recurrent patterns of behaviour of states living in a condition of 'international anarchy'. At the same time, it was a guide for many statesmen, who saw in it a method for securing the continuing independence of their states. This is the critical importance of the balance of power concept, that whatever its limitations as a tool for analysis or a guide to policy, it has historically been a reality; a reality that deserves to be analysed and understood.

However, when it comes to seeking the essence of the idea of the balance of power, the difficulty is not that its meaning cannot be discovered, but rather, as Inis Claude (1962: 13) has pointed out, that it has too many meanings. At its heart the balance of power seems a simple concept, readily understandable by statesmen and ordinary citizens. Confusion exists, however, because throughout

history its advocates and critics alike have used the term too freely, so that an analysis of the countless references to it in the literature throws up a host of examples which confuse rather than enlighten. Ernst Haas uncovered eight different meanings of the phrase 'balance of power' (1953: 447-57) while Wight (1966: 151) went one better with nine. George Liska (1977: 5) has argued that it is counter-productive to attempt to pin down the balance of power concept too exactly and that there is 'a misplaced desire for precision in a concept that is at once the dominant myth and the fundamental law of interstate relations, and as such with some reason, highly elastic'. Nevertheless, this elasticity has contributed to the confusion surrounding the concept.

DEFINITIONS

Before plunging into the trackless swamp of the alternative interpretations, it is worth noting at the outset that at the heart of the balance of power idea is a straightforward concept as, following the approach used by Zinnes (1967: 270-85), a select number of definitions will suffice to make clear.

- 1 'An equal distribution of Power among the Princes of Europe as makes it impractical for the one to disturb the repose of the other'.
Anonymous, *Europe's Catechism*, 1741
- 2 'action by a state to keep its neighbours from becoming too strong ... because the aggrandisement of one nation beyond a certain limit changes the general system of all the other neighbours ... attention to the maintenance of a kind of equality and equilibrium between neighbouring states'.
Fenelon, 1835
- 3 'The balance of power, however it be defined, that is, whatever the powers were between which it was necessary to maintain such equilibrium, that the weaker should not be crushed by the union of the stronger, is the principle which gives unity to the political plot of modern European history'.
Stubbs, 1886
- 4 'History shows that the danger threatening the independence of this or that nation has generally arisen, at least in part, out of the momentary predominance of a neighbouring state at

once militarily powerful, economically efficient, and ambitious to extend its frontiers or spread its influence, the danger being directly proportional to the degree of its power and efficiency, and to the spontaneity and "inevitableness" of its ambitions. The only check on the abuse of political predominance derived from such a position has always consisted in the opposition of an equally formidable rival, or of a combination of several countries forming leagues of defence. The equilibrium established by such a grouping of forces is technically known as the balance of power'.

Crowe, 1928

- 5 'an arrangement of affairs so that no state shall be in a position to have absolute mastery and dominate the others'.
Vattel, 1916
- 6 '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'.
Palmer and Perkins, 1954
- 7 The balance of power 'operates in a general way to keep the average calibre of states low in terms of every criterion for the measurement of political power ... a state which threatens to increase its calibre above the prevailing average becomes subject, almost automatically to pressure from all the other states that are members of the same political constellation'.
Toynbee, 1934
- 8 The balance of power 'refers to an actual state of affairs in which power is distributed among several nations with approximate equality'.
Morgenthau, 1978
- 9 'when any state or bloc becomes, or threatens to become, inordinately powerful, other states should recognise this as a threat to their security and respond by taking equivalent measures, individually and jointly, to enhance their power'.
Claude, 1962
- 10 'The balance's underlying principle ... was that all the nth disengaged powers would tend to intervene on the side that seemed in danger of losing any ongoing war, to ensure that

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such a loser was not eliminated from the system and absorbed into an emerging colossus'.

Quester, 1977

As Dina Zinnes notes, a listing of definitions in this way shows almost complete agreement on the key feature of a balance of power system. A balance of power involves 'a particular distribution of power among the states of that system such that no single state and no existing alliance has an "overwhelming" or "preponderant" amount of power' (Zinnes, 1967: 272).

When the essence of the concept is distilled in this way, it is easy to agree with Hume that the balance of power is founded upon 'common sense and obvious reasoning'. Although it must be said that Hume's argument is based upon a crucial assumption, which is that the independence of states is a more important goal to pursue than a process of political unification under a hegemonic power. This may indeed be a desirable goal, but it is a goal identifiable with a particular post-Renaissance European manner of looking at international relations.

There are a variety of methods by which this basic objective might be sought, generating alternative policies and different balance of power systems. For example, in the unusual case of a two-power system, only an equality of power can prevent preponderance, in the manner called for by the balance of power approach. As the number of states in the system increases beyond this, however, a wide variety of distributions of power becomes acceptable. 'In effect, any distribution is permissible as long as the power of each unit - state or alliance of states - in the system is less than the combined power of all the remaining units' (Zinnes, 1967: 272).

BALANCE OF POWER AND 'REALISM'

Balance of power thinking is usually conceived of as belonging within a particular tradition of thinking about international relations, that of 'power politics' or 'realism'. Dougherty and Pfaltzgraff (1990: 81) have listed what they see as being the four basic tenets of this perspective.

- 1 Nation-states are the key actors in an international system composed of independent sovereign states.
- 2 Domestic and foreign policy are clearly separated areas of national policy.

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- 3 International politics is a struggle for power in an anarchic international environment.
- 4 States have different capabilities to achieve goals and defend interests.

These four assumptions draw upon a particular interpretation of older traditions. It could be argued that Thucydides, Machiavelli, Hobbes and Rousseau fall within the power politics world-view. A classic statement of this perspective was Hans Morgenthau's *Politics Among Nations* (1978). Morgenthau asserted that the world is the result of forces inherent in human nature and that:

moral principles can never be fully realised, but must at best be approximated through the ever temporary balancing of interests and the ever precarious settlement of conflicts. This school, then, sees in a system of checks and balances a universal principle for all pluralist societies. It appeals to historic precedent rather than to abstract principles, and aims at the realisation of the lesser evil rather than that of the absolute good.

(Morgenthau, 1978: 1-2)

Morgenthau laid out six principles which he felt distinguished the concept of political realism.

- 1 Politics, like human nature, is seen as being governed by objective laws that have their roots in human nature. Once identified, these 'laws' will be of enduring value - 'the fact that a theory of politics was developed hundreds or even thousands of years ago - as was the theory of the balance of power - does not create a presumption that it must be outmoded and obsolete' (1978: 4). Statesmen will make decisions on the basis of rational choices between alternative options.
- 2 The key concept which enables the realist to make sense of the complexities of international politics is the concept of *interest* defined in terms of power (1978: 5). Morgenthau admits that realism emphasises a rational foreign policy which is never quite attainable in practice, but he argues that this does not detract from its utility.

Far from being invalidated by the fact that, for instance, a perfect balance of power policy will scarcely be found in reality, it assumes that reality, being deficient in this respect, must be understood and evaluated as an approximation to an ideal system of balance of power.

(Morgenthau, 1978: 8)

- 3 The kind of interest determining political action in a particular period of history depends upon the political and cultural context within which foreign policy is formed. The same applies to the concept of power. Therefore, Morgenthau accepts that power and the use of power can change during periods of time, but argues that this will be more likely to result from a general shift in the balance of power within the international system. Power here is defined as 'anything that establishes and maintains the control of man over man' (1978: 9). The contemporary connection between interest and the nation-state is seen as the product of a particular period of history. Alternatives to the nation-state could evolve in the future and, by implication, could have been key actors in the past.
- 4 Realism does not accept the validity of universal moral principles in an abstract sense, but argues that they must be 'filtered through the concrete circumstances of time and place' (1978: 173). Above all, Morgenthau argues that the state has no right to allow moral principles to get in the way of, or detract from, its duty to pursue the objective national interest.
- 5 However, Morgenthau qualifies this by arguing that, in fact, states' policies are influenced by their moral judgements in a way that tends to encourage moderation, and that this encourages a live-and-let-live approach where states recognise that just as they are pursuing their own national power aspirations, so too are other states. Individual states should therefore respect each other.
- 6 Morgenthau goes on to argue that realists and politicians should subordinate non-political criteria such as morality to the requirements of political reality.

The realist image of international relations is one of inevitable clashes between nation-states as they seek to maintain their autonomy and increase their wealth and power. 'The fundamental nature of international relations is seen as being unchanged over the millennia. International relations continues to be a recurring struggle for wealth and power among independent actors in a state of anarchy' (Gilpin, 1981: 7). This latter point is a feature of most balance of power thinking. There is a tendency to argue that balance of power politics is an inevitable feature of any international system, because it reflects the nature of mankind and human nature is seen as being essentially unchanging. This view was expressed in the eighteenth century by David Hume when he argued that the ancient Greeks,

who understood human nature so well, must therefore have been familiar exponents of balance of power politics.

There is a major problem involved here. Classical realist thought looks at the world in a particular way. Realists have identified this approach as being a natural or inevitable way for human beings to look at the world of interstate relations. Perhaps inevitably, they have projected this particular image of international relations back into history, finding evidence from past eras which support their world-view and citing earlier thinkers such as Thucydides, Machiavelli and Rousseau, as well as statesmen in many eras, as supporting their perspective.

However, as later sections of this study will demonstrate, the balance of power approach, which is central to realist theorising, is far from being an instinctive human approach to international politics. On the contrary, it appears to be the product of a peculiar combination of factors in seventeenth-century Europe, and the particular model of the balance of power which realists promote is significantly different from the concept as it originally emerged and as it periodically reasserted itself. Moreover, for the majority of recorded human history, the balance of power approach has been conspicuously absent from the record of interstate relations.

THE CENTRALITY OF POWER

The concept and measurement of power, together with the ability of states to translate this power into defined national goals, is one of the most fundamental characteristics of realist perspectives. Most realists assume that it is in the interests of the state to acquire as much power as possible and, having acquired it, to exercise and maintain that power.

One intellectual problem immediately thrown up by this assumption is that power is a concept, or term, interpreted differently by different people. For some it means the use of force, usually military force, but also political or economic force. For others, power is not a specific thing or activity, but is an ability to influence the behaviour of other states. Gilpin (1981) defines power as an actor's ability to impose his or her will despite resistance, and defines prestige or authority as being different from power. Prestige and authority constitute only the 'probability' that a command will be obeyed. However, Gilpin still acknowledges that any prestige or authority eventually relies upon traditional measures of power, whether military or economic.

Closely related to the notion of power is the concept of national interests, and the objectives of using power. Realist assumptions regarding concepts such as sovereignty and anarchy lead the realists to argue that because international politics is anarchic, that is, there is no superior governing authority, then the independent sovereign states basically have to struggle to secure their own interests. Nicholas Spykman argued that the basic objective of a state's foreign policy must be to preserve territorial integrity and political independence.

Thus, the processes and activities of states in the realist image of international relations become naturally limited to achieving the short-term or immediate goals of security and survival, since no single state can reasonably plan for its long-term future and security.

This condition of realist international politics has been described by some writers as the security politics paradigm or more generally as the security dilemma. It sees states perpetually competing, conflicting and fighting over issues of national security. The implication of this is that states must do whatever is necessary to survive in this highly dangerous environment. If most states are ruthlessly behaving in this way, then those that do not will become victims in the struggle for security. The nature of the system in which all the states exist then becomes a determining factor in their behaviour, forcing them to play the balance of power game if they are to survive. This characterisation is central to the explanation of the balance of power advanced by 'structural' or 'neo'-realists such as Kenneth Waltz (1979: 118).

The balance of power theory sees international society as unequal; power versus weakness. But this basic inequality among states can be balanced, that is, all states can be kept in check regarding each other's position, and this can therefore prevent hegemony, allowing states to preserve their identity, integrity and independence, and perhaps deterring aggression or war.

Balance of power theory is thus closely in line with the traditional, realist image of international relations. The task of statesmen is to identify and prioritise the national interests according to any changes that occur. Because the international anarchy militates against any long-term security or stability, nation-states may well encourage balance of power systems, so that in absolute terms their security, stability, power and influence can be more readily enhanced. Morgenthau (1978) therefore argued that the balance of power and foreign policies which were designed to achieve or maintain it

were not only inevitable, but were crucial mechanisms for stabilising international society.

Realism and balance of power thinking are linked because their assumptions are so similar. However, Morgenthau himself believed that balance of power theory offered only a partial solution to the problem of anarchy and change in the international system. This, in his view, was because states involved in the international anarchy must in practice seek, not 'a balance or equality of power, but a superiority of power on their own behalf' (Morgenthau, 1978: 227). This argument seems to run counter to the whole essence of balance thinking. Superiority is clearly not the same thing as equality. It is one of the problems of examining the balance of power idea that even its proponents can use the term in ways which are clearly contradictory. The many alternative uses of the term are looked at later in this chapter, but it is worth noting here that the pursuit of superiority rather than balance need not necessarily indicate imperialistic intentions. Balancing power is difficult because power defies exact measurement and states will tend to insure themselves against underestimating their opponents' power or overestimating their own by acquiring a margin of safety, a capacity to match a greater-than-anticipated threat. In a flexible multipolar system such an effort is unlikely to threaten predominance. In a simple bipolar system, however, this would not be the case and any successfully acquired 'margin of safety' would in practice represent superiority.

Trevor Taylor (1978) argues that what is significant about the power-politics approach is not so much the obvious point that a state's influence in the international arena depends upon the power it has, but rather the suggestion that 'if a state is to succeed, it has little choice but to make the acquisition of power its central, immediate aim' (Taylor, 1978: 122). In other words, the structural realist assumption. Although critical of the assumptions of the realist approach, Taylor notes that it is virtually impossible to prove or disprove, because the arguments about whether it is correct or not are based upon a subjective judgement, so that the approach is likely to remain in vogue indefinitely. If this is the case, then so will the balance of power idea, which shares most of the same assumptions.

The raw material for the power-politics approach is history. Schwarzenberger (1964: 14) describes power politics as being 'an abstraction reached inductively by the study of International Relations of the past and present'. Taylor (1978: 125) gives an

example from Morgenthau, and the same approach can be seen in Butterfield, Wight, Aron, Spykman and other members of the realist school. Much of this writing can be criticised as being selective in its choice of historical examples. Thus, Rosecrance (1973: 25) declared that 'history is a laboratory in which our generalisations about international politics can be tested'. Yet earlier power-politics writers, rather than using history in this way, tended to selectively pick out particular historical cases to illustrate their points and thereby support them. Indeed, one historian, Schroeder (1991), has called into question the whole edifice of twentieth-century balance of power theorising by challenging the historical interpretations on which it is based.

Writers of the power-politics school also drew inspiration from political philosophy and, because they shared an essentially pessimistic view of human nature, chose to highlight the insights of thinkers such as Hobbes and Machiavelli, 'whose works emphasised the dark side of human behaviour' (Taylor, 1978: 126). However, as Little (1989: 92) has pointed out, in doing so, such writers established the dominance of a *particular* image or interpretation of the balance of power, and indeed, of power itself. At the same time, they effectively eclipsed an alternative, associative image of the balance of power, without which it is difficult to explain certain periods of the operation of balance of power policies in history. In particular, this specific interpretation of the concept is a poor basis for understanding the important balance of power system of the early nineteenth century in Europe and, most crucially, it is an inadequate basis from which to comprehend the seventeenth-century origins of balance of power thinking itself.

A key departure point of realism is the idea of state personality – that like an individual, a state has a sense of purpose and is capable of rational action. E. H. Carr describes this assumption as 'a necessary fiction or hypothesis' (1946: 148–9) without which it would be impossible to conceptualise international relations – a point made also by Purnell (1978: 27–8) with regard to the ancient Greek state system. This assumption is by no means universally accepted by international relations theorists, but it is central to realist thought. Once it is accepted that a state has personality, it can be assumed that there is indeed a 'national interest' conceived of in terms of the well-being of the entire people rather than just a particular group within the state. This national interest is generally identified with security on the grounds that 'unless a state is secure it cannot

be sure that it will survive and, if it does not survive, it will not be able to fulfil any other goals favouring its citizens' welfare' (Taylor, 1978: 127).

As noted earlier, the power-politics perspective is underpinned by a particular view of human nature. This emphasises its worst aspects and therefore argues that in order to be successful people and states must protect themselves against the evil of others. Political leaders are seen as being obsessed with the desire to increase and employ power for its own sake. Humans are viewed as dangerous and untrustworthy. Conflicting, rather than complementary interests are emphasised. For the realist, conflict is inevitable and natural. To a large extent, functioning balance of power systems are a reflection of these attitudes. By its very nature, the balance of power mentality breeds an obsession with the relative power of states within the system and a pervasive spirit of rivalry. The competitive elements of the system are not even really mitigated by the use of alliances, since the balancing process is present both within and between alliances. Even current allies must be constrained and at all times there is the awareness that the ally of today may become the enemy of tomorrow.

THE PURSUIT OF POWER

For a balance of power to come into being there must exist an international system, that is, a community of states in regular contact with each other. These states will have certain policy objectives, some of which will conflict with the policies of other states. Each state's most important objective will be the continuing existence and independence of the state itself. In order to maintain their independence, states will rely on diplomacy supported by military power – primarily their own, but supplemented by that of allies if necessary. As each state moves to match the efforts of its rivals a balance of power will emerge which sustains a basically stable system. Power must be countered by matching power.

This is very much the conventional wisdom. However, it should be noted that system is not the same thing as society. An important school of thought within international relations theorists has consistently argued that international relations is not simply a state of warlike anarchy whose social elements are minimal. They have argued instead that there is such a thing as 'international society', that states and governments are bound by rules and therefore form a community with one another, a society. This way of conceptualising

international relations can be traced at least as far as the seventeenth-century Dutch jurist Hugo Grotius. In the thinking of Hedley Bull in the late twentieth century it was important to this study, because Bull explicitly linked the idea of the balance of power with the notion of international society. He did so by asserting that theories of the state system, in so far as they present the balance of power as a product of deliberate state policy and argue that states are obliged to seek to produce such a balance, 'must be taken also to embody the idea of international society and of rules binding upon its members' (Bull, 1966: 39).

Quincy Wright distinguished between a 'static' balance of power and a 'dynamic' one. This can be identified with the distinction between balance as a system and balance of power as a policy. Wright described a static balance as 'the condition which accounts for the continued coexistence of independent governments in contact with one another', while a dynamic balance 'characterises the policies adopted by governments to maintain that condition' (Wright, 1942: 445).

An obvious feature of all traditional balance of power reasoning is the obsession with power. Hans Morgenthau, a leading proponent of balance of power politics declared that 'the aspiration for power on the part of several nations, each trying to maintain or overthrow the status-quo, leads of necessity to a configuration that is called the balance of power' (Morgenthau, 1978: 173). States are seen as being engaged in a struggle for power, indeed, the accumulation of 'power' is their sole foreign policy objective; all other objectives being viewed as simply means to that end.

This simple approach is clearly flawed. States do not by any means devote their entire resources permanently to the accumulation of power. Governments have a variety of demands upon their available resources, and varying domestic political and cultural traditions mean that by no means all states pursue a policy of power accumulation.

Robert Gilpin modified this simple image to some extent by describing international relations as being 'a recurring struggle for wealth and power among independent actors in a state of anarchy' (Gilpin, 1981: 7). Power is seen as a means to an end – protecting and advancing the well-being of the state's citizens, but is *also* an end in itself.

For Morgenthau, the balance of power created a 'precarious stability' in interstate relations, one that needs constantly to be re-established. The phrase 'balance of power' implies a certain

permanence – a 'balance' is a finished product. The reality of international relations, however, is that movement and change, not stasis, are its characteristic features. Even a balance of power, therefore, cannot hope to produce permanent stability. Power is never permanently balanced, rather the states must be permanently engaged in the act of balancing power, of adjusting and refining it in response to the perpetual ebb and flow of power within the system. In this sense the balancing process is designed not to be an obstacle to peaceful change, but rather to influence its form so as to avert destabilising developments.

Power can be seen as the capacity of an individual or an organisation to achieve its objectives. But power does not exist in the abstract. It is a function of the relationship between the power-holder and the state which it is trying to influence. Until such a relationship exists, power remains implicit and a state's power varies according to the context in which it is trying to use it. In their search for security, states are seen as seeking to acquire, retain and increase their national power, since this is the principal means by which they can achieve security. International relations is seen as a jungle, a Hobbesian State of Nature, where the search for power has to be unending if survival is to be assured. Classical realist scholars such as Morgenthau, Schwarzenberger and Schuman all argue essentially that hostility between states is a natural and inevitable feature of international relations which leads almost instinctively to the emergence of balance of power politics and a balance of power system.

In addition, though the nature of power itself is hardly if ever defined by balance of power theorists, it is implicit in their writings that by power they mean *military* power. According to Hedley Bull, 'the idea of the balance of power rests on the abstraction of the military factor'. E. H. Carr (1946: 109) argues that the military instrument is crucial because 'the *ultima ratio* of power in International Relations is war. Every act of the state in its power aspect, is directed to war, not as a desirable weapon, but as a weapon which it may require in the last resort to use'.

C. Wright Mills (1959: 27) argued that the leaders of the nuclear superpowers during the cold war assumed that 'military violence and the whole supporting ethos of an overdeveloped society geared for war are hard-headed, practical, inevitable and realistic conceptions'. This demonstrates the importance of ideas (such as the balance of power concept) in international relations, for in this sense ideas are facts, which shape both perceptions and actions and are therefore

crucial in creating the 'reality' with which statesmen believe themselves to be dealing.

Clearly, military power is an important element in the foreign policy of many states, and it is therefore logical that the nature of such power and its comparative distribution among states will be an important element affecting outcomes in international politics. Its importance is summed up by a comment by Liska that 'the key structural guarantee of minimum order in a pure multistate system is the distribution of antagonistic power in a reciprocally countervailing pattern' (Taylor, 1978: 132).

A balance of power is never a static phenomenon and can never be taken for granted. It is always tending to move towards an imbalance. It therefore has to be constantly adjusted, either towards the restoration of an earlier equilibrium, or – more usually – the creation of a new one. Lasswell (1965) spoke of the balancing of power, rather than of a balance, since the attempt toward equilibrium can never be a wholly successful one.

Lord Bolingbroke, an eighteenth-century British Foreign Minister recognised this, but cautioned that the implication for states was that they needed to maintain a constant vigilance.

The scales of the balance of power will never be exactly poised, nor is the precise point of equality either discernible or necessary to be discerned. It is sufficient in this, as in other human affairs, that the deviation be not too great. Some there will always be. A constant attention to these deviations is therefore necessary.

(Maurseth, 1964: 125)

Although states might in theory desire a preponderance rather than a balance, rational leaders are aware that beyond a certain point in the drive for preponderance the law of diminishing marginal returns comes into operation. A balance emerges because the states comprising the system reach at least an adequate, if not an absolute, degree of security and realise that efforts to enhance their security still further would either strain the demands upon their national resources to the point where cut-backs and set-backs would be seen in other areas of national power or they would trigger a more than offsetting loss in relative military power because of political realignments against them (Liska, 1957: 35). Moreover, a continuous aggressive drive for hegemony pursued simultaneously by all the states within a system would undermine the fabric of the international *society* of which states form a part. International society is crucially composed of cooperative as well as conflictual elements

and, at a minimum, must provide the 'rules of the game' within which competition takes place.

To the extent therefore that statesmen are conversant with balance of power thinking and used to viewing foreign policy in terms of interaction within a state system, they will be alive both to the need to recognise and act against threats to the equilibrium posed by other states, and to the fact that their own ambitions will be similarly monitored by the other states in the system.

ALTERNATIVE MEANINGS OF THE BALANCE OF POWER

The British historian A.F. Pollard once turned to the Oxford English Dictionary to find 'balance' defined in twenty different ways, 'of' given sixty-three meanings and 'power' eighteen. The various permutations of meaning could therefore turn into the thousands, so that it was hardly surprising that the phrase had been used in so many different ways throughout history. According to Pollard

The balance of power may mean almost anything; and it is used not only in different senses by different people, or in different senses by the same people at different times, but in different senses by the same person at the same time.

(Pollard, 1923: 58)

A number of analysts have investigated the various alternative ways in which the phrase has been used throughout its long history. Hans Morgenthau believed that the term was used in four distinct senses –

as a policy aimed at bringing about a certain power distribution; as a description of an actual state of affairs in international politics; as an approximately equal distribution of power internationally; and as a term describing any distribution of political power in international relations.

(Morgenthau, 1978: 173)

Martin Wight (Butterfield and Wight, 1966: 151) identified nine distinct meanings, or at least nine different ways in which the concept has been used. Not all can be held to have equal validity, though all have been commonly used. An incorrect usage remains that even if it is used frequently. Some of the meanings given to the phrase in the list which follows, clearly diverge sharply from the core meaning identified at the outset of this chapter.

- 1 An even distribution of power.
- 2 The principle that power ought to be evenly distributed.
- 3 The existing distribution of power. Hence, any possible distribution of power.
- 4 The principle of equal aggrandisement of the great powers at the expense of the weak.
- 5 The principle that our side ought to have a margin of strength in order to avert the danger of power becoming unevenly distributed.
- 6 (When governed by the verb 'to hold':) A special role in maintaining an even distribution of power.
- 7 (Ditto:) A special advantage in the existing distribution of power.
- 8 Predominance.
- 9 An inherent tendency of international politics to produce an even distribution of power.

The first meaning noted by Wight is the core meaning identified earlier in this chapter; an even distribution of power in the international system which precludes any one state or alliance from achieving a preponderance. This includes the simple or 'bipolar' balance and the multiple balance forms. This is the closest thing there is to a generally accepted definition of the balance of power. But, as Wight's eight other meanings make clear, it is very far from being the only sense in which the phrase is commonly used.

The second use of the phrase sees it changing from a purely descriptive to a normative use; the idea that equilibrium is beneficial and that power *ought* to be evenly distributed. This usage found clear expression in the Treaty of Utrecht of 1713, which brought the War of the Spanish Succession to an end. The treaty preamble justified its terms on the grounds that it would produce 'a just Balance of Power (which is the best and most solid foundation of mutual friendship and a lasting general concord)'. When used in this sense the phrase 'balance of power' is being given a positive moral connotation. Advocates in extolling the balance of power promote the features that are deemed to accompany it, such as moderation in foreign policy means and ends, the preservation of sovereign independence, and for some, the deterrence of war. This type of usage is worth noting because balance of power politics are often contrasted with idealist foreign policy, whereas in certain historical periods the balance of power idea itself has been invested with overtones of idealism. However, criticisms of balance of power policies have also been

made on ethical grounds, notably by the American President Woodrow Wilson.

However, as already noted, power defies exact measurement and states will constantly be seeking to insure themselves with a margin of error. Even if a stable equilibrium does come into existence, it is likely to favour some states more than others and will be seen as imperfect by revisionist states who feel it discriminates against them. Thus, Hitler told Italy in 1936 that 'Any future modifications of the Mediterranean balance of power must be in Italy's favour' (Wight, 1966: 151). Here the phrase is being used in its third sense, to simply refer to the existing distribution of power, as a synonym for the prevailing political situation. It is in this sense that statesmen will refer to the balance of power moving or leaning, for example an Israeli leader might have suggested that the balance of power was swinging towards the Arab states, or favoured Israel's enemies. Martin Wight argues that this use of the phrase can be extended to mean *any* possible distribution of power and quotes Winston Churchill in 1942, 'no man can see how the balance of power will lie or where the winning armies will stand at the end of the war' (1966: 15). Here all sense of a genuine balance or equilibrium has been lost and the phrase has become simply a synonym for the distribution of power at a particular time. Historically, this can be seen in the way that the balance of power was identified with a particular political settlement at the end of a major war. This was true of the arrangements created in Europe by the Utrecht treaty of 1713 and the Vienna treaty of 1815. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries such a particular order was often called a 'system', as for example 'the system of Westphalia'. What this meant in reality was the *status quo* produced by the war.

The fourth use of the phrase, the principle of equal aggrandisement of the Great Powers at the expense of the weak, is based upon the record of certain states historically pursuing foreign policies justified in the name of the balance of power, particularly the partition of Poland in the eighteenth century and the division of Africa and China in the nineteenth.

The policy of partition has always been a controversial one for both advocates and opponents of balance of power policies. Wight himself declares vigorously that 'nothing in European history has done more to discredit the idea of the balance of power than the belief that it led naturally to such a crime as the Partition of Poland' (1966: 157) and quotes the outraged terms of Friedrich von Gentz

who bitterly declared that those who divided Poland in the name of the balance of power, 'whilst they inflicted the most fatal wounds upon the spirit and very existence of this system, borrowed its external forms, and even its technical language' (von Gentz, 1806: 77). Whether partition was indeed a perversion of the balance of power concept depends upon one's interpretation of the overall purpose of a balance of power system, that is, whether it is designed to preserve the sovereignty of *all* the states in the system, or merely that of the great powers, the 'essential national actors' identified by Morton Kaplan (see Chapter 4). As a technique it simply represents one possible way of interpreting the balance of power principle.

More controversial still is the fifth possible meaning, the principle that 'my side ought to have a margin of strength in order to avert the danger of power becoming unevenly distributed'. Here the distinction is between an objective and a subjective balance of power. Thus, for example, Reinhold Neibuhr, a 'realist' advocate of balance of power policies was able to argue during the cold war that 'the idealists must learn that nothing but a preponderance of power in the non-Communist world can preserve the peace' (Davis and Good, 1960: 302). Indeed, Walter Lippmann, in the same era argued that a balance of power, far from providing security, had the opposite effect during the Allies-Axis confrontation and that 'when the alliance is inadequate because there is an opposing alliance of approximately equal strength, the stage is set for a world war. For then the balance of power is so nearly even that no state is secure' (Lippmann, 1943: 106). Although proponents of this view have justified it in terms of the balance of power, it is essentially a perversion of the balance of power ideal. True balance of power policies are pursued without regard to ideological divisions and the aim is a true equilibrium, not a preponderance for one side. A preponderance remains exactly that, whichever side possesses it. It was in this sense that Pollard (1923: 59) argued that supporters of the balance of power thought of 'balance' in the sense of a bank balance, that is, a surplus rather than equality.

The sixth meaning is that of 'possessing a special role in maintaining an even distribution of power', and is seen most clearly in the form of the 'balancer' state described in Chapter 3. Here, a state derives political advantage, but has special responsibilities, because its diplomacy is responsible for maintaining the system in balance by committing its strength periodically in support of the weaker element(s) of the simple balance. This was a policy attributed to

Britain in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and one attempted on occasion by Sweden, Savoy and Venice with varying degrees of success.

The fact that a balancer's power is normally uncommitted, giving it a manoeuvrability denied to the powers of the central balance produces yet another usage of the phrase 'balance of power', one implying 'the possession of a special advantage in the existing distribution of power'. British statesmen of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries frequently used the expression in this way.

So flexible has been the term 'balance of power' that it has even been used to convey the exact opposite of its traditional meaning and employed to describe the possession of *predominance*. It was this that Chester Bowles meant when he wrote in 1956 that 'the two-thirds of the world who live in the undeveloped continents ... will ultimately constitute the world balance of power' (Wight: 1966: 165). Ernst Haas cites an example of this tendency from the historical literature. The Count of Hauterive argued that the balance of power demanded that France break the Treaty of Campo Formio in order to raise a confederation of continental states to oppose the dominant position of Britain 'and, incidentally, establish the hegemony of France' (Haas, 1953a: 449).

Here, according to Haas, the balance of power is 'a special case, either in its equilibrium or its hegemony connotation - in the general pattern of power politics'. As Inis Claude has remarked, 'while such tolerance of diversity is admirable, it is a strange theory that cannot choose between polar opposites' (Claude, 1989: 80).

Finally, Wight identifies a ninth meaning of the phrase, which is 'an inherent tendency of international politics to produce an even distribution of power', the idea of systemic equilibrium maintained by the processes of the system. This is the sense in which non-realist theorists use the term. The system is seen as operating irrespective of whether or not any particular state or states wish it to operate. Thus, according to A. J. P. Taylor, between 1848 and 1914 the balance of power appeared to be self-operating in the manner of the laws of economics. 'If every man followed his own interest, all would be prosperous; and if every state followed its own interest, all would be peaceful and secure' (Wight, 1966: 166). Even this final usage is itself plastic, tending to become a synonym for the 'endless shifting and regrouping of power, the scales perpetually oscillating without coming to rest' (*ibid.*).

Ernst Haas enumerated different meanings of the balance of power in much the same way as did Martin Wight. But though

some of the meanings he identified were the same as those of Wight, a number of his categories were significantly different, and are worth noting.

- 1 Balance meaning 'stability' and 'peace'. Haas argued that many analysts effectively argue, not so much that the balance of power is an effective mechanism for producing peace and stability, but rather that 'peace and stability are identical with the balance of power' (1953a: 450), giving as an example F. G. Leckie's 1817 book, *An Historical Research into the Nature of the Balance of Power*. However, Fénelon was rather more explicit in claiming that the balance of power was a producer of peace, declaring that 'this care to maintain a kind of equality and balance among neighbouring nations is that which secures the common repose' (Wright, 1975: 41).
- 2 In sharp contrast, Haas also identifies a group for whom the balance of power means 'instability' and 'war'. This is clearly seen in the writings of such bitter opponents of the balance of power concept as Richard Cobden (1867) and commentators such as the Abbé de Pradt, who argued that 'the balance of power meant war, while peace is identical with the settling of all issues on their moral, economic and ethnographic merits' (Haas, 1953a: 451). Both the latter two ideas seem based upon an exaggerated image. A key mechanism for maintaining the balance of power was war, which was used to defend and redress the balance. In this sense, Cobden was right, although as the period 1815–1914 showed the balance might work to produce periods in which major wars were very infrequent. By the same token, however, Leckie clearly overstressed the pacifying effects of the balance of power system.
- 3 Haas also sees as a specific meaning of the phrase the 'notion of balance' as implying a universal law of history. This is an outlook clearly associated with Hans Morgenthau, for years the *doyen* of the 'realist' school of international relations theory. Haas himself quotes as an example John B. Moore, who declared that

what is called the balance of power is merely a manifestation of the primitive instinct of 'self-defence', which tends to produce combinations in all human affairs, national as well as international, and which so often manifests itself in aggression.

(Haas, 1953a: 452)

As always, the assumption here is of the natural and inevitable struggle of states for superiority and the equally inevitable resistance to such attempts.

Donnadieu described it in determinist terms, 'Destiny takes along him who consents and draws along him who refuses', said Rabelais. 'The balance of power is one of these necessary forces; in other words, it is the expression of a law in the life of nations' (Haas, 1953a: 453). Burke said of the balance of power that it 'had been ever assumed as the known common law of Europe, at all times, and by all powers'.

- 4 Ernst Haas also draws attention to the way in which 'the balance of power' has been employed as a vehicle for propaganda. The concept has, at certain periods in European history, been an extremely popular one. The reasons for this are explored in Chapter 2. Its emergence in an intellectual context generally favourable to the notion of balance or equilibrium in all fields made it an appropriate metaphor for political use. This very availability, and the advantage which politicians took of it, was one of the reasons its meaning subsequently became subject to dispute. The mechanism which politicians used to derive political advantage from association with the positive connotations of the balance of power was simply to identify it with whatever particular state of affairs the politician in question wished to commend. Thus, in calling together a coalition to take arms against the infant French democracy in 1792, Prussia appealed for intervention in terms of the balance of power.

The perfection of the balance of power was offered as a justification for German expansionism in the First World War and French expansionist policies during the eighteenth century, policies which were not in fact about balance at all, which indeed ran quite counter to it. As Haas notes what makes the use of balance terminology in this context significant is 'the fact that the users of the term felt so convinced of its popularity as to make its conversion into a symbol of proper policy propagandistically profitable' (Haas, 1953a: 463).

Haas, in an insightful analysis of this aspect of the use made of the balance of power, describes it as serving an 'ideological' function in its heyday. Ideology is here used to mean the belief in a set of symbols. These symbols may not be objectively true, but they serve an important purpose as the myths which produce the spiritual cohesion of the ruling class. The balance of power concept

may have been used in this sense to explain policies 'in terms of natural laws, in terms of moral rightness, or in terms of historical necessity if the symbol chosen to "put it over" was a sufficiently widely accepted one' (Haas, 1953a: 463). Indeed, Justi, in his *Di Chimare des Gleichgewichts von Europa*, published in 1758, argued just this, calling it a 'camouflage'. 'States, like private persons, are guided by nothing but their private interests, real or imaginary, and they are far from being guided by a chimerical balance of power' (Haas, 1953a: 464). For Haas, however, balance of power thinking is genuinely ideological if statesmen believe that the need for balancing power is actually in the general interest. In this sense, Peter Gellman has argued that the phrase 'balance of power' is also 'an invitation to consider the moral dimensions of international politics' (1989: 157) in the sense that proponents have deemed it a force for good and a producer of peace and independence, while critics have denounced it as a source of instability and war and a mechanism for denying national self-determination. As will be seen in Chapter 2, the European background in which the balance of power idea emerged during the second half of the seventeenth century very clearly demonstrates the way in which the balance of power concept came to serve a crucial ideological function in the sense used by Haas.

With the concept given so many meanings, Schroeder (1989: 140-1) has argued that the phrase 'balance of power' should never be used without an accompanying phrase identifying the way in which it is being used. Noting that other concepts such as socialism and democracy acquired highly charged and divergent meanings which required clarification in this way, as with 'liberal democracy', 'authoritarian democracy', 'peoples' democracy', and so on, Schroeder calls for a similar qualification for the phrase 'balance of power'. Certainly, this would make it easier to realise which particular meaning of the phrase was being used at any particular time.

Schroeder also makes the interesting suggestion that because the phrase appears to have meant different things at different periods in history, then the concept itself is a dependent variable. 'Instead of the balance of power explaining what happened in European politics, what happened in European politics largely explains what happened to the idea of the balance of power' (1989: 141). This is an extremely insightful observation, for the concept has indeed experienced an evolutionary history of this kind.

The wide variety of ways in which the term 'balance of power' has been used has contributed to its popularity and longevity, but

at the expense of clear comprehension. The most obvious problem, as Inis Claude noted, is that proponents frequently fail to distinguish between balance of power as a situation of equilibrium and as a system of states engaged in competitive manipulation of power relationships among themselves (1989: 77). Chapters 3 and 4 therefore examine these two distinctive ways of thinking about the balance of power as a phenomenon. Before doing so however, Chapter 2 looks at the historical origins of the theory and practice of the balance of power.

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3 Balance of power policies

INTRODUCTION

In discussions of the balance of power one can distinguish between a prescriptive and a descriptive element: the balance of power as a policy and the balance of power as a system. As policy it endorses the creation and preservation of equilibrium, the confrontation of power with countervailing power to prevent a single power laying down the law to all others. As system it implies interdependence: 'a collection of states, autonomous units of power and policy, involved in such intimacy of interrelationship as to make reciprocal impact feasible' (Claude, 1962: 42). The first meaning may be seen as the logic of a balance of power response to a 'Hobbesian' international relations, while the latter reflects the 'Grotian' version of the concept. This chapter looks at the balance in the first sense, as policy, while Chapter 4 will examine the question of the balance of power as a system.

Students of the balance of power have long noted its attractiveness as a guide for foreign policy-makers. Ernst Haas felt that historically it had been seen as an extremely useful principle which explained the nature of the state system and the rules that states should follow to ensure their survival.

Its merits lay in its objectivity, its detachment from ideology, its universality, and its independence from short-term considerations. It stressed the essentials, timeless and inescapable, in international affairs: power and power relationships.

(Haas, 1953a: 370)

States are not normally intrinsic supporters of balance *per se*; that is to say that a state's government does not pursue policies with the object of seeing its own room for manoeuvre constrained. On the

contrary, for statesmen the balance is like good advice, something valuable for others, but not for oneself! The best balance is one which leaves one's own state free while constraining all the others. This, however, is extremely difficult to achieve, and is closest approached in the role of the 'balancer' state. The complexity of balance of power policies from the point of view of individual governments is that states are pursuing incompatible goals – seeking to engage actively to prevent imbalance emerging, yet at the same time attempting to minimise the scale of their own commitment and burdens; seeking to support a system that constrains all, while hoping to maximise their own freedom of action. Not surprisingly, policies composed of such elements will not function smoothly or predictably.

Organski identified six methods by which states might attempt to maintain the balance of power, these being to arm, to seize territory, establish buffer zones, form alliances, intervene in the internal affairs of other nations, or divide and conquer (1968: 267). None of these techniques is peculiar to balance of power politics, they are simply foreign policy techniques and can just as easily be used by a major state to attempt to create an empire, or by a small state simply to increase its own power. However, they are all techniques that have been used historically in an attempt to maintain a perceived balance of power.

The various techniques can be divided into two basic categories: those that attempt to build up one's own power and those that attempt to weaken or diminish the adversary. The more commonly used techniques are looked at below.

ALLIANCES

As Gulick (1955: 58–60) noted, the most logical way to promote a balance of power among states would be to ensure that all of them had the same power. A preference for such an arrangement has underlain a number of proposed balance of power schemes, such as those of Sully in the early seventeenth century and Bellers in the early eighteenth. For Martin Wight, such a preference reflected a Grotian approach and has normative connotations (1991: 165). In reality, such a scheme faces overwhelming obstacles. Even to ensure that the *major* states in the system are approximately equal in power is extremely difficult and the most thoroughgoing attempt at doing this, the Vienna Congress of 1814–15 fell far short of the ideal, leaving Russia and Austria far larger than Prussia, even when the

latter had gained enormous territories in an attempt to create a check on both Russia and France.

Since equality of states cannot be attained, the next best option is to use fluid alliances to create an effective equality of power between the states making up the system. The territorial and military inequality of states can be corrected through a system of alliances.

Alliances provide states acting within a balance of power system with a capacity for flexibility and rapid reaction to threats which they cannot find simply by looking to their own resources. States can increase their power by internal reform, but it is difficult to produce major increases of power at very short notice by this method. The fastest way to achieve this end is by adding to one's own strengths the strength of allies or relatively, by decreasing the strengths of an adversary by luring away its allies (Organski and Kugler 1980: 16).

It has been argued in this regard that what distinguishes the late twentieth-century from the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century international systems is not the pursuit of deterrence through balanced power, but rather the means chosen for achieving this end. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the preferred method was not matching a rival's power by increasing one's own military capability, but rather by matching power through forming a coalition of all the states that saw themselves as being threatened by an aggressor's growing power. The historical systems were not characterised by an increase in the power of a single state or even the system as a whole. Instead, power was rearranged to counter aggression (Ziegler, 1977: 172). In the bipolar 'balance of terror', by contrast, strategic nuclear power was directly balanced with reference to a single nuclear adversary.

States join alliances to protect themselves from states or coalitions whose superior resources could pose a threat. To ally *with* the dominant power means placing one's trust in its continued benevolence. The safer strategy is to join with those who cannot readily dominate their allies in order to avoid being dominated by those who can. Thus, Henry Kissinger advocated *rapprochement* with China rather than the Soviet Union because he believed that, in a triangular relationship, it was better to align with the weaker side (Kissinger, 1979: 178).

States do not simply ally against power *per se*. There has to be an accompanying perception of threat. For the states of Western Europe, American power was not seen as threatening after 1945, whereas Soviet power was. In addition, states will understandably react more rapidly and energetically to threats from nearby states.

As Walt (1985: 10) points out, 'because the ability to project power declines with distance, states that are nearby pose a greater threat than those that are far away'. In short, the more aggressive or expansionist a state appears, the more likely it is to trigger an opposing coalition.

In a balance of power system alliances should be flexible and temporary. States should be prepared to desert old allies and seek new ones whenever such a realignment would serve to benefit the balance of power. Midlarsky (1983: 762-84) has described this behaviour as 'the absence of alliance memory', making all other states potential allies or enemies, regardless of past friendships or hostility, and allowing for random changes in alliance partners. Because of this need to avoid permanent commitments, *ad hoc* alliances best suit a balance of power system. The more states there are in the system, the easier it will be to make the adjustments necessary to maintain the balance, because the number of potential allies will be greater. Thus, Organski (1968) argues that the large number of major powers that formed the eighteenth-century state system allowed a very high number of possible alliance combinations and this was one of the key reasons why the balance of power system worked so effectively during that period.

Not all potential allies would have much to offer in terms of diplomatic, economic or military strength. Nations seek allies who can counterbalance the power of rival states and their allies, and they therefore try to find allies that can supplement their own capabilities. The principle involved is simply the balancing of power with power; a state seeks allies to cope with a danger that it cannot overcome unaided.

Thus, in a balance of power system alliances will tend to form as states seek to augment their own power with the power of allied states, in reaction to a perceived threat. A number of writers have argued that the size of the alliances thus produced is predictable. William Riker, for example, has argued that states will create alliances 'just as large as they believe will ensure winning and no larger' (1962: 32). This assertion clearly contradicts the historical record, but Riker explains this by pointing to what he calls 'the information effect' (*ibid.*: 77). The uncertainty of the real world and the absence of perfect information about the capabilities and intentions of one's likely opponents mean that alliance building tends to aim at 'a subjectively estimated minimum coalition rather than at an actual minimum' (*ibid.*). This latter formulation accords more closely with the opinion of other writers on the subject who have argued

that larger than minimum winning alliances will occur, for example, Russett (1968: 291).

Thus, in a balance of power system one would expect alliances to occur, and these alliances to be fairly large. Friedman in fact argues that *status-quo* alliances (and an alliance devoted to the maintenance of the existing balance of power must be deemed a *status-quo* alliance) will be larger than the minimum winning alliance. This is because the 'gain', that is, the maintenance of the *status quo*, satisfies all the members of the alliance (Friedman, Bladen and Rosen, 1970: 261). In this respect it is worth noting Strausz-Hupé's comment that alliances which are meant to deter will only be successful if they can assemble overwhelming force (Strausz-Hupé and Possony, 1950: 231-2). However, a number of balance theorists, such as Jervis (1976: 110), have argued that the larger an alliance becomes, the more difficult it becomes for it to perform its function effectively, because the states involved have to devote more time to managing the controversies within the alliance and therefore have correspondingly less time and energy to devote to addressing the external threats for which the alliance was created in the first place.

In periods marked by ideological rigidity but strategic stability, states may follow their ideological preference when it comes to joining alliances. When faced by great danger, however, ideological compatibility is far less important; one takes whatever allies one can get, as the alliance between the Western democracies and the Soviet Union during the Second World War demonstrates. Balance of power alliances are by their very nature temporary arrangements. Once their objective has been achieved the cement that held them together – fear of the imperialistic power – dissolves and the alliance fragments. Thus, the alliance or coalition does not itself go on to become a threat to the other states in the system. This pattern of behaviour can be seen following the end of the great coalition wars in 1715, 1815, 1918 and 1945.

Balance of power doctrine puts a tremendous emphasis on diplomatic manoeuvrability. Niou *et al.* (1989: 96) make the important point that it is not always formally existing alliances that help to maintain the balance of power. Sometimes the threat of potential alliance has the same effect. For example, the real balancing dynamic in Europe from the early 1870s onward was between the potential threat of a Russo-French alliance (which did not actually materialise until 1892-4) and the potential counterthreat of an Austro-Italo-German alliance (which was not actually consummated until 1892).

Even the 'balancer' concept involves a direct consideration of alliances. The most commonly cited example of the balancer is Britain, yet during the eighteenth century Britain did not see herself as acting alone in this role, but rather as the core of a group of states sufficiently powerful to tip the balance. British policy was therefore not to intervene alone as the 'balancer state' but rather to act as the core of a balancer alliance of medium powers, adding this alliance to the weaker of the two central powers to form what they invariably called a 'Grand Alliance' for the maintenance of the balance of power.

Britain seems always to have tried to assemble the largest alliance her diplomatic skill and financial resources could produce. There was no attempt to limit the alliance to 'minimum winning' size, even allowing for overestimation of what that might require. It has been said that multilateral alliances somehow seem less aggressive than bilateral alliances, and there may have been an element of this kind of thinking in the British approach. The frantic alliance-building to which Britain was prone was denounced by William Pitt in 1755 as 'a wild comprehensive system'.

This preference for large alliances may have been partly inspired by the British view of the European system as being fundamentally bipolar. As well as being seen as the dominant 'poles' of the European system, France and Austria were seen as being approximately equal in power. However, despite this condition of near equilibrium, Britain felt that her own power was insufficient to tip the balance one way or the other. Hoadly declared in 1727 that the alliance between Britain and the Dutch Republic constituted 'the Turn of the Balance of Europe, whenever they join themselves to any other great Power of Europe; and Both of them together, but barely sufficient for this Purpose' (1727: 78). Without the aid of the Dutch, it was believed, Britain should never take the risk of entering a continental war. In a bipolar system, it has been suggested, alliance leaders will try to gain as many allies as possible, even if many of them can contribute little to the military strength of the alliance. In practice, Britain was attempting to create a coalition rather than a simple alliance.

The difference between an alliance and a coalition is essentially one of size. Gulick, for example, defines an alliance as 'a bilateral or trilateral agreement for offensive or defensive purposes', and a coalition as 'a similar agreement signed by four or more powers or a conjunction of several alliances directed toward the same thing' (1955: 78).

The other major difference between alliances and coalitions, which arises from the consideration of size, is a qualitative difference in membership. Alliances are based around states with a certain number of common interests. Coalitions tend to be based on a single common interest, but one of sufficient importance to override their differences on other issues. An alliance is a grouping of two or three powers, whereas a coalition involves four or more. Coalitions may in practice be formed by the coming together of several alliances whose traditional suspicion of one another is overcome by the overriding threat to the system. For this reason coalitions have appeared 'only in the great war crises of the balance of power, at times when the very existence of the state system seemed shaken and in danger' (Gulick, 1955: 77). The formation of a coalition therefore involved the breaking of traditional alignments and could only be expected in exceptional circumstances. Gulick restricts his definition of coalition to the alignments against Charles V, Louis XIV, Napoleon I, the Central Powers in 1914-18, and the Axis Powers in 1939-45.

Liska (1977: 5) argues that the regulatory function of alliances within a balance of power system is crucial, because balance of power is an approach which is full of anomalies, many of which can be overcome through the workings of the alliance system. In particular, alliances act as the critical link, in both the theory and the practice of the balance, between the actions and policies of individual states and the overall results for the system.

Alliances are deemed to foster parity in so far as they help to adjust the gains made by states within the system and help modulate constraints, which limits the rise or decline of the power of participating states.

THE RESORT TO WAR

With regard to the relationship between the balance of power and war there is a division in the literature, but in this case there exists a clear majority in one school of thought. According to Blainey,

its clearest theorists and practitioners, the Metternichs and Castlereaghs - 'all thought of war as an instrument to preserve or restore a balance of power'. In essence a balance of power was simply a formula designed to prevent the rise of a nation to world dominance. It merely masqueraded as a formula for peace.

(Blainey, 1973: 111-12)

In a general sense, Blainey's criticism is unfair, since proponents of the balance of power have not as a rule made the preservation of peace its primary objective. There are those who have argued that balance of power systems can produce peace, such as Organski and Kugler (1980: 14), who suggest that 'when power is more or less equally distributed among great powers or members of major alliances peace will ensue', though even they assert that power distributions do not generally determine the likelihood of war (*ibid.*: 49). However, from earliest times, observers of international relations have argued that there is in fact a very strong link between power distribution and the outbreak of war. Thucydides, writing in the fifth century BC argued that 'what made war inevitable was the growth of Athenian power and the fear which this caused in Sparta' (1954: 49).

The detailed study of the late nineteenth-century balance of power system by Rosecrance *et al.* (1974) was inconclusive in this regard. They pointed out that it ought to be possible to determine whether a balance of power made war more or less likely. However, their investigation revealed no clear relationship in this regard.

The 'power alignment' column indicates the relative power of each element within the balance of power system (state or group of states). The *c/c* column indicates the degree of conflict (less than 50) or cooperation (more than 50) present in the system in any one year. However, no clear pattern emerges. In the five years in which there was a marked four-against-one imbalance, the degree of cooperation varies tremendously.

The consecutive years 1873 and 1874 highlight the lack of pattern. 1873 was marked by a significant power imbalance, yet conflict levels were low while cooperation levels were high. The following year was also characterised by a dramatic power imbalance, yet in 1874 levels of cooperation were very low.

The lack of identifiable pattern in this case study is important because structural realist theory argues that there is a direct link between systemic stability (defined as the absence of system-wide wars) and the number of states in the system. Yet there does not appear to be a direct correlation between balance and conflict, though Waltz has argued that a bipolar balance is the most stable of all.

The threat of force and its actual use are the two major instruments of balance of power diplomacy. In the periods leading up to the great coalition wars of 1914-18 and 1939-45, balancing policies were pursued through threats of force rather than with force itself.

Table 1 Balance of power patterns and level of cooperation/conflict in the major power sub-system

Year	International alignment	Power alignment	<i>c/c</i> major power sub-system
1870	Germany/France Austria Britain/ Russia	3/10/2	48,406
1871	AFGRB	15	56,805
1872	AFGRB	15	57,118
1873	F/GARB	4/11	57,858
1874	FARB/G	12/3	48,795
1875	FARB/G	12/3	55,186
1876	AFGRB	15	51,654
1877	FARB/G	8/4/3	54,334
1878	AGBF/R	13/2	53,814
1979	AGBF/R	13/2	52,464
1880	AFGRB	15	57,381
1881	B/AGR/F	4/8/3	55,394

Source: Rosecrance *et al.* (1974: 22)

War was an instrument to be used sparingly, but statesmen could not escape the fact that the balance of power would not simply look after itself. They knew that in the final analysis they had to be willing to take their countries into war against the state expanding in pursuit of a hegemony.

War was a necessary corollary of balance of power policy. In the classical period of the balance of power, war was of a limited rather than a total nature and moderation in the objectives in pursuing a war was crucial. For the balance of power system to work effectively it needed to be composed of a number of comparable powers, so that diplomatic flexibility in alliance formation was possible. It was essential, therefore, that defeated states should not be eliminated, but should be permitted to take part in the revived balance as quickly as possible, as was France after 1815, for example. The final third of the eighteenth century, which saw plans to defeat and dismember Prussia, and the actual partition of Poland, was an aberration in this respect.

Proponents of the balance of power have not generally included prevention of war as being an objective of balance of power policy. The object was rather to prevent the domination of the system by one state or alliance, using war to achieve that end if necessary. War was not glorified, it was simply the bitter price that often had to be

paid for maintenance of the independence of the states within the system.

But for those for whom war represented a pathological condition, a disaster to be avoided whenever possible, the balance of power system produced far too many occasions when the bitter price was necessary. Critics of balance policy, such as the conservative Edmund Burke in the eighteenth century, argued that the system not only allowed wars, but generated 'innumerable and fruitless wars. That political torture by which powers are to be enlarged or abridged, according to a standard ... ever has been ... a cause of infinite contention and bloodshed' (Luard, 1992: 16).

Liska argues, controversially, that the maintenance of the balance of power justifies preventative war (1957: 34). Such warfare is seen as being legitimate if it is associated with the limited objective of 'containing' an expansionist adversary. According to Liska, intervention is justified if the adversary is attempting to increase its power through external expansion, but is not legitimate if its power is growing as a result of internal reforms. But this comes very close to recognising a general right of the community to intervene in the internal affairs of other states. Moreover, it begs the question of why peaceful internal reforms should not also trigger such intervention, if they create a latent capability to bid for hegemony.

Some authors, such as Spanier (1972: 10), have argued that the balance of power has had as one of its purposes the deterrence of war. Similarly, Van Dyke (1966: 221) and Organski (1968: 280) argued that one of the benefits to be derived from a balance of power system was the preservation of peace. However, the majority of authors of whom Gulick (1955: 89), Liska (1957: 38) and Wight (1979: 184) are representative, have argued that its function was not to preserve peace, but to preserve the system and, within it, the autonomy of the major states. Thus, for example, Wight argues that

It is easy to point to occasions on which the final move in rectification of the balance has been war. It is not remembered how often the balance of power has averted war. For the balance of power is not the 'cause' of war; the cause of war, however one chooses to identify it, lies in the political conditions which the balance of power in some degree reduces to order.

(Wight, 1979: 184)

Not all observers would share Wight's sanguine view. In the aftermath of the Holocaust of the First World War, many blamed the

rigidity of the alliance systems and the European balance of power for the outbreak of war in 1914. This interpretation has received some support from more recent writers on the balance of power. For example Midlarsky (1989: 6-7) argues that when a bipolar balance between two large coalitions dominates the balance for an extended period of time, as was the case with the confrontation between the Triple Alliance and Triple *Entente* before 1914, then the balance of power is equivalent to exact polarisation. All the major powers are actively linked to one or other alliance. Thus, while international relations scholars would be unlikely to subscribe to the view that the balance of power 'of itself' is a progenitor of systemic war, a 'tight' bipolar condition runs a high risk of breaking into all-out conflict and, as in the decade before 1914, the two conditions may on occasion be effectively identical.

THE SEPARATE PEACE AS A TACTIC

One of the features of Britain's 'balancer' foreign policy in the eighteenth century was her habit of renegeing on treaty obligations. The most interesting aspect of this behaviour, however, was her habit of concluding a separate peace at the end of a war. The British participation in the War of the Spanish Succession, the War of the Austrian Succession, and the Seven Years War, all ended with Britain abandoning her major ally. This raises the question: to what extent can this habit be considered a natural balance of power tactic?

Antipathy to permanent alliances is a clear balance of power tenet. *Ad hoc* alliances should be preferred, and strong powers opposed in turn. Nicholas Spykman wrote of Britain that once a war has been successfully fought and the enemy defeated, 'Britain is apt to shift her diplomatic and economic support. The former ally is deserted because he is now on the strong side; the former enemy supported because he is now weak' (Spykman, 1942a: 25). During the eighteenth century, however, Britain generally moved to abandon her allies even before the war had ended.

This tendency can be explained in other ways than as a balancing tactic. George Liska, for example, has suggested with regard to the eighteenth century that different though complementary conflicts may result in the formation of rival alliances and account for their composition, without clearly identifying either alliance as offensive or defensive in nature. Liska gives as his example the conflicts between 1740 and 1763 over the German and overseas balances. Liska's argument is basically that such a situation means that any

one ally is unlikely 'to support any other ally to the point of achieving total victory in the contest that concerns him in particular' (1977: 7). This is because to do so would probably terminate the alliance, since one ally would have achieved its aims.

Thus, just as Riker argued that a minimum winning alliance is probable, so Liska declares that a 'minimal victory' alliance will be produced. A minimal victory alliance is described as a winning alliance 'just sufficient to satisfy the irreducible objectives of members' (Liska, 1977: 7) and to deny even those to some allies if the final settlement has been precipitated by a separate peace.

As has already been noted, the British alliance-building technique does not fit the 'minimum winning' model. However, the British practice of concluding a separate peace does fit the 'minimal victory' model. Although Britain did tend to make peace early, without achieving all her allies' aims, she did so only when the threat to the balance of power seemed to have been averted. The preservation of the balance of power thereby satisfied the *minimum* aims of all the allies. Since in 1711 and 1748 Britain made peace when the threat had been eliminated, and indeed in 1711 partly because Austria herself was beginning to pose a threat to the balance, the British were pulling out of the war with the main war aim of the allies satisfied. This had the incidental effect of satisfying the third rule in Morton Kaplan's framework, that is, 'to stop fighting rather than eliminate an essential national actor' (1957: 23).

In the War of the Austrian Succession, Britain deserted her Austrian ally early in 1748. The preliminaries of peace were signed by Britain, the Dutch Republic and France in April of that year. Abandoned by her allies, Austria was eventually forced to agree to the Anglo-French peace terms, even though they included none of her major objectives. In 1762 Britain withdrew from the Seven Years War by signing a separate peace with France, leaving Prussia to struggle on alone.

The clear strains within the wartime alliance of 1941-5 between Britain, the United States and the Soviet Union were in large part caused by Stalin's fears that his Western allies might be tempted to conclude a separate peace with Germany. It was these fears that prompted his constant appeals for the Anglo-Americans to open the 'second front' in the West, and the insistence upon 'unconditional surrender' by Germany, leaving no scope for a bargained war termination with the Western allies. Intra-alliance strains towards the end of a successful war are by no means rare in history. Even before a war is over, the shape of the post-war world comes to dominate

diplomatic manoeuvring, rather than simply the successful conclusion of the war.

The tendency of allies to withdraw from coalitions or wars once the minimal anti-hegemonic aim has been achieved certainly has the effect, whether consciously sought or not, of reducing the danger that one or more of the victorious wartime allies will themselves rapidly emerge as a threat to the balance.

THE BALANCER

The question of the importance of the 'balancer' in balance of power systems has generated strong opinions from both critics and proponents. According to Organski (1968: 288), 'There is no such thing as a "balancer" and there never has been'. Padelford and Lincoln (1967: 300), by contrast, argue that, 'in theory and practice any balance of power system, whether limited or global, requires "balancers"'.

The balancer policy is one to which any state can aspire, though few can fulfil its requirements. It is curious that the balancer role has not received more attention, for it exercises a strong attraction for statesmen, indeed, in many ways it is the most desirable role for a great power to play. The reasons why this is so will be looked at in more detail below, but at this point it is worth noting that the balancer acts outside of the central balance, and because its power is not effectively balanced anywhere else in the system, it possesses a margin of disposable power.

The basic function of the balancer is to prevent the occurrence of a permanent disequilibrium in the international system, that is, the existence of a situation in which one state or alliance is able to exercise a hegemony over the others, or even to establish an *imperium*. All variations of the balance of power system have this basic function, that is, the preservation of a system based upon numerous sovereign states. In many ways the balancer role is the clearest example of a state pursuing a conscious balance of power policy. Whereas methods such as alliance formation involve groups of states acting together and overlap to some extent with the idea of balance of power as a *system*, with all the states involved in some way in the balancing process, the balancer role is simply one state perceiving that its own individual policy is crucial to the maintenance of a balance.

The operation of a balancer assumes the existence of an international system structured in such a way that the alignment of the balancer with one state or alliance in the system will be sufficient

to redress any developing imbalance of power. The balancer maintains the balance through its diplomatic flexibility, shifting its support from one side to another, supporting the weaker against the stronger, if necessary even up to the use of military force. It is implicit in this function that the balancer acts within a system often characterised in terms of 'a pair of scales', that is, one dominated by two approximately equal states or alliances. In a genuinely multipolar system there is no need for a specific balancer, since the kaleidoscopic readjustments of the many actors in a system of equal and genuinely unaligned states would obviate the need for a balancer. For a balancer to play a determining role, either the system must be bipolar or it should be multipolar, but with a tendency towards bipolarity in times of crisis. Thus, for example, in the 1730s the European system was multipolar, but as the crises of 1739-40 and 1756 unfolded, the states took sides in such a way that two blocs emerged which dominated events. The Duke of Newcastle in 1733 declared that 'there are two great contending powers in Europe', to which the Earl of Stafford added that he hoped that there would always be such a rivalry, for it could only end 'by one of them being swallowed up by the other', which would be an 'unlucky' thing for Britain and Europe (Cobbett, Vol. 8: 1240). A similar bipolarisation is evident in the decade before the First World War. If the two major blocs are fairly evenly matched, then the previously uncommitted power of the balancer is likely to prove decisive in determining the outcome of any conflict.

If the function of the balancer is straightforward enough, the question of its importance to balance of power systems is not. There is a clear division in the literature between a number of writers who believe that a balance of power system cannot operate efficiently without the existence of a balancer, and a number who argue that a balancer is not only unnecessary, but also that its very existence would subvert a genuine balance of power system.

For the first group of writers, the balancer is the key to the successful operation of the system, indeed, they argue that without the balancer the whole idea of a balance of power is rendered unrealistic. This is because it is only the existence of the balancer, a state devoted to the maintenance of the general equilibrium, that can ensure an actual or potential preponderance to the side prepared to maintain the *status quo*. In Lerche's words, a balance can be sustained 'only when a major state or bloc of states makes the preservation of the balance the major component of its policy' (1956: 129).

Critics of the balancer role are equally emphatic. Henry Craik declared that a balance of power 'ceases to be true as soon as its adjustment is entrusted to anyone. It must either be maintained by its own equilibrium, or it becomes a pretence, sustained only by the application of arbitrary force' (Pollard, 1923: 59). This view is supported by Kenneth Waltz, who argues that the balancer concept derives from a distortion of balance of power theory, the distortion being the idea that 'if a balance is to be formed somebody must want it and must work for it' (Waltz, 1959b: 38). Both Craik and Waltz advocate a conception of the balance of power in which the system operates mechanistically, somewhat in the way an economy is supposed to be operated by market forces under *laissez-faire* economics. The distinguishing element in this 'automatic' conception of the balance of power is, according to Inis Claude, the assumption that 'equilibrium may be produced or preserved without actually being willed by any state' (1962: 46). Kenneth Waltz goes further and criticises those writers who advocate policies designed to preserve the balance, on the grounds that it has proved to be 'an unfortunately short step from the belief that a high regard for preserving a balance is at the heart of wise statesmanship to the assumption that states must pursue balancing policies if a balance of power is to be maintained' (Waltz, 1959b: 38).

Clearly the 'automatic' balance conception leaves no place for a balancer. However, Claude (1962) offers two other conceptions. A 'manually operated' balance is one willed by the leading statesmen, who conduct their states' foreign policies with this end in view. In this version the balance is not produced by the automatic processes of the system or by the efforts of the balancer alone, but by skilled multilateral diplomacy. The other alternative is the 'semi-automatic' system, in which the balance of power is assumed to be largely self-sustaining, but should a major danger threaten the balance, the additional power of the balancer is available to retrieve the situation.

The balancer is a state whose power is not normally committed to any of the alliances of approximately equal strength which constitute the central balance. However, in a situation where two alliances are balanced and one state is non-aligned, one is looking not at a balanced system but at an unbalanced one, since nowhere within the system is the power of the balancer balanced itself. Thus, if power balanced is power neutralised, then the non-aligned state is in an exceedingly powerful position. The advantage of the balancer is that its power is applicable in a way that the power of the states enmeshed

in the central balance is not. Because its intervention produces a preponderance, albeit one 'devoted to the protection of legitimate rights', then in Organski's words, the 'intervention by the balancer brings about the very thing that it is said to be designed to prevent' (Organski, 1968: 287).

Organski is supported by Sterling, who argues that to become the balancer is to come 'as close to achieving actual domination as a diverse, multipolar system permits'. The balancer role is particularly expedient since, in comparison to an outright bid for empire, 'it involves a minimum expenditure of resources, a minimum of opposition and hence a minimum of danger' (Sterling, 1972: 57). Yet, as Daniel Defoe noted, 'every power which overbalances the rest makes itself a nuisance to its neighbours'. Why should the balancer be different? For Organski this is a fatal flaw in balance of power theory. He does not accept that a preponderance in the balancer's hands represents a stabilising factor where in any other state's hands it would be a threat.

In terms of strict logic, Organski is clearly right. A preponderance is not a balance. Yet, equally clearly, at certain periods particular states have successfully played the balancer role, thereby imbuing the concept with a certain credibility. This needs to be explained.

In the case of the British claim to the role, there were a number of domestic factors which traditionally constrained Britain's influence on the European continent. Distrust of large standing armies, suspicion of continental involvement and a preference for naval power, unsuited to continental conquest, all acted to restrain Britain. To have a credible claim to the balancer role a state ought to possess an array of cultural and political values which have the effect of restraining her desire to gain political or territorial preponderances *in the area for which she aspires to perform the balancer role*. They need not be the same factors which restrained Britain, but they must have the same practical effect.

A second restraining factor is the nature of the balancer's power. The fundamental object of the balance of power, as von Gentz noted, was to ensure that no single European state 'must ever become so powerful as to be able to coerce all the rest put together' (von Gentz, 1806: 55). The important element here is the emphasis on singularity. The balancer does not of itself constitute a preponderance because its influence derives from its marginal disposable power *vis-à-vis* the states of the central balance, that is, its ability to add a winning margin to one side. Only if allied to another state or alliance within the system can it exert a decisive influence. Since it does

constitute the winning margin it has tremendous bargaining power in obtaining concessions from the side which it supports. On the other hand, there are also obvious limits. It is always clear *which* side the balancer will defend, that is, the *status-quo* side or, if the situation is not a threat to the entire system, the weaker side. It is never going to be in the balancer's interest to support the strongest or revisionist side, since that would lead to the overthrow of the system and the loss of the balancer position. Moreover, in a situation where the balancer provides a margin to a larger alliance, the other allies are unlikely to accede to any balancer proposals which give a genuine political preponderance to the balancer, since to do so would be to simply exchange one danger for another. The balancer's power, therefore, while inflated by its diplomatic position, is still well short of hegemonial, and the balancer cannot add its weight to the revisionist forces without overthrowing the system.

It is generally accepted that the balancer must be a major power. Morton Kaplan is exceptional in this regard, arguing that 'any national actor' is qualified to fill the role (1969: 42). This is doubtful. It seems clear that a balancer must be a major power if its intervention is going to be decisive. Thus, commenting upon Italy's attempts to act as European balancer in the decade before the First World War, Hans Morgenthau noted that 'it had not enough weight to throw around to give it the key position in the balance of power' (Morgenthau, 1978: 202). Similar failures for the same reason attended the efforts of Venice to act as balancer in Italy after the battle of Pavia in 1525, and of Sweden in the Baltic region during the minority of King Charles XI between 1660 and 1672.

A further attribute required of the balancer is a certain degree of strategic security to go with its power, for, as Reynolds has noted, 'a policy involving shifting friendships is likely to earn one enemies' (1971: 200). Strategic security also enables the balancer to stay outside the central balance and to remain uncommitted until the moment when its intervention can be decisive. What is required are geographical security advantages, such as might arise from mountainous frontiers, a desert hinterland or sheer extent of territory. Morgenthau (1978) gives a further requirement – aloofness. In order to operate impartially the balancer should have its major interests outside the region covered by the central balance. Thus, France under Louis XIV could not be the European balancer because her primary foreign policy objective was acquiring territory in Europe. Britain was a better claimant since her primary interests were overseas and extra-European, in commerce and the colonies.

This argument is not universally accepted, however. Hartmann argues that the central balance itself is made more complex and flexible if the states involved have interests outside the central balance area which lead them to cooperate on occasion against the balancer (1952: 118). Newman, however, argues that if a balancer has interests of its own to protect outside the area of the central balance, those interests will exert a centrifugal force on the balancer, pulling it away from involvement with the central balance. According to Newman, these outside interests 'will either divert the holder from his concern with that balance, or will bring about conflicts that cut across the alignments within the balance, thus weakening it' (1968: 188).

The key variable is the attitude of the balancer towards the central balance. Although both Morgenthau and Newman used Britain as an example, Morgenthau was looking at Britain's record in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Newman at Britain's actions in the 1919-39 inter-war period. The difference between Morgenthau and Newman was prompted by the fact that the key attitudes of the balancer were quite different during these two periods. This suggests a general rule about the impact of the balancer's foreign policy priorities. If the balancer has interests outside the balance, but none the less sees the maintenance of the central balance as a key objective, then the effects of the outside interests will be beneficial. Outside interests will make the balancer less susceptible to the temptation of aggrandisement in the area covered by the central balance. However, if the balancer becomes so obsessed by these outside interests that it begins to neglect the central balance then this is clearly disadvantageous. Overall, therefore, the balancer should be aloof, but not unduly so.

To an extent, the balancer's role will be made easier if the major balance actors themselves are seeking expansion elsewhere. Extra-European imperialism seems to have acted as a 'safety valve' for the European balance in the period from 1871 to 1914. This feature can only operate if the balance system is not already truly global, as it was after 1945.

Unlike general balance of power theory, which, it can be argued, 'is not a theory of state policy, but rather a theory about environmental constraints' (Waltz, 1959b: 41), writers on the balancer have always asserted that there are certain ways in which such a state *has* to behave if it is to perform its function. These may be summarised briefly.

The statesmen of the balancer should view the competition for advantage between the other states impartially, noting the shifts in

the distribution of power among the states, but keeping the balancer itself unaligned. However, once the emergence of a state or alliance capable of posing a serious threat to the overall balance becomes clear, the balancer intervenes, allying itself with the weaker or non-revisionist elements in the system. The addition of the power of the balancer allows this latter grouping to overawe or, if necessary, to physically overcome, the states which threaten the system. Once this has been achieved, and the states comprising the system are brought into overall balance again, the balancer withdraws to take up its position of neutral but watchful guardian once more.

The balancer's intervention should be guided only by a desire to maintain or restore the international equilibrium. This objective should override all other considerations. The balancer can have neither permanent friends nor permanent enemies, only the permanence of its balancing strategy. There ought, therefore, to be no such considerations as 'old alliances', 'ancient enmities' or 'special relationships', nor, logically, ideological solidarity. The balancer cannot afford to become identified with the policies or aims of any of the states or alliances which constitute the central balance. Any state or alliance which aspires to hegemony must be opposed. Thus could Winston Churchill declare that, 'it is a law of public policy which we are following, and not a mere expedient dictated by accidental circumstances, or likes and dislikes, or any other sentiment' (Churchill, 1960: 193).

The balancer is immune to appeals based on concepts such as trust and loyalty. It should ignore past friendships and react only to present danger. Some writers have argued also that the commitment to preserve the balance overrides basic tenets of international law, such as the injunction not to interfere in the domestic affairs of other states. Taken to its extreme, this argument could be used to justify efforts by the balancer to deliberately accentuate the animosities and divisions among the states comprising the central balance. In the long run, however, acquiring a reputation for behaviour of this sort would make it extremely difficult for the balancer to gain the allies necessary for the effective performance of its role.

PARTITION AND COMPENSATION

It might at first appear paradoxical that partition should be included as one of the means by which states might seek to maintain the balance of power. It was, after all, noted at the outset of this book

that the fundamental purpose of the balance of power system is to prevent the emergence of a dominant power and thereby to preserve the sovereignty and autonomy of the states which make up the international system. States are supposed to operate with an understanding that, if they wish to preserve their own independence then they must be prepared to support the independence of the other states in the system. Such a perception is implicit in the 'Grotian' image of the balance of power as the mechanism underpinning the international society of European states which emerged at the beginning of the eighteenth century.

However, there is a division in the balance of power literature on the question of whether, in acting to prevent the emergence of a preponderant state or alliance, states are expected to preserve the independence of *all* the constituent units in the system or merely of some of them.

According to Brougham (1872), the use of partitions and annexations to maintain the balance of power was a case of mistaking the means for the end, because 'the whole object of the system is to maintain unimpaired the independence of nations', an objective which applies as much to small and weak states as to the large and strong. Von Gentz (1806: 58) similarly believed that the balance of power was a guarantor of the independence of all states.

In practice, however, it is arguable if this was so. During the course of the eighteenth century, the idea of the balance of power was still evolving, and was increasingly coming to be seen as a device for stabilising the system through the interaction of the great powers, rather than of every single member of the state system. The balance was frequently maintained at the expense of the smaller states. Many of the major peace settlements saw small states disappear in large numbers. The Treaty of Vienna in 1815 cost many small states their independence, while large states such as Saxony were dismembered.

The attitude of the larger powers in these instances was that of seeing partition as an unpleasant necessity. The preference of France and Austria regarding the possible partition of the Ottoman Empire was that if at all possible partition should be prevented and the Empire preserved intact, but that if it could not be prevented then France and Austria must join in the partition. In Count Tolstoy's words 'if the cake could not be saved, it must be fairly divided' (Gulick, 1955: 72).

In Morton Kaplan's 'rules' for operating a balance system (discussed in the next chapter), two important ones are 'stop fighting rather than eliminate an essential national actor' and 'permit

defeated or constrained essential national actors to re-enter the system'. It is the use of the word 'essential' that is the key to the paradox. In a balance of power system all states are equal, but in George Orwell's telling phrase, 'some are more equal than others'. Small states or large weak states have historically been victimised by the balance of power, used as make-weights to appease the political or territorial designs of the more powerful actors in the system. In January 1805, for example, the British Prime Minister William Pitt argued that many of the small states of Europe could not have any solid existence in themselves and should therefore be disposed of to the benefit of the larger states because 'there is evidently no other mode of accomplishing the great and beneficent object of re-establishing ... the safety and repose of Europe on a solid and permanent basis' (Gulick 1955: 145).

The great powers were protected by the operations of the system because their existence and continuing effectiveness were essential to the successful working of the system. The weak states, by contrast, were not, and therefore were not protected to the same extent. Poland historically has suffered particularly from this feature, being partitioned between rapacious neighbours three times during the eighteenth century and once in the twentieth. Germany suffered the same fate in 1945. The division of regions into 'spheres of influence' for great powers is less dramatic, but also represents a significant restraint on the sovereignty of those states in the region. Examples of this latter behaviour include the Anglo-French *entente* of 1904, which divided North Africa into spheres of influence and the division of the Baltic states between Germany and the USSR's influence in 1939 (Handel, 1981: 177).

The balance of power system has traditionally been operated by the great powers, both because they have the greater capacity to influence outcomes and because they have the biggest stake in the established order. As great powers they have clearly benefited from the existing system and it is therefore most clearly in their interest to defend it.

The reality of the way in which the balance worked historically was that while each state had an interest in preserving a multi-state system, it did not follow that the membership of the state system had to remain constant, and thus the exact identity of the states making up the system might change over time. From a systemic perspective this was good, since it increased the system's flexibility and enabled it to accommodate the necessity for change. From the point of view of smaller or weaker states, it undermined the

protection offered by the system, since they were the most likely to be partitioned to accommodate the need for flexibility and change.

While it can be argued that sacrificing weak states to maintain the balance of power serves the good of the system, it will clearly weaken the commitment of weak states to the balance of power as a system, since it does not serve their interests in the same way that it does those of the great powers. This has often led weak states to pursue what Annette Baker Fox (1957) has called 'anti-balance of power' behaviour, deserting the weaker side in the balance in order not to become the victim of the stronger in the event of war. Thus, Belgium moved away from cooperation with France to a position of neutrality as German strength and assertiveness increased during the 1930s. An essentially self-help system such as the balance of power has less to offer the weaker states, who would gain more from a more ordered international society than the anarchy reflected and protected by the balance of power.

MODERATION

The policy of reciprocal compensation runs counter to one of the other policies identified as an important component of a successful balance of power system, which is that of moderation, or the preservation of the states which are the system's components. Gulick argues that 'preserving the state components is a crucial corollary of the balance of power' (1955: 73). The eventual elimination of Poland at the end of the eighteenth century stands as a stark exception to this, but one can argue that in other cases of partition there is a clear difference between losing *some* territory and losing *all* territory and ceasing to exist.

Moderation, in this context, has a restricted meaning. The victorious states after a balance of power war should seek neither to humiliate or to destroy their recent enemy or enemies. The reason for such 'restraint' is that the recently vanquished will be important counterweights in the post-war balance of power system and their presence may be essential to restrain one or more of the recent victors who subsequently aspire to a dominant role themselves.

Such moderation is generally extended to large, rather than small powers, that is, to the major players within the system. Gulick argues that a spirit of moderation can be seen as a key element in a statesman's balance of power policy because 'only such an attitude can carry with it a willingness to think of the state system as a whole,

and not exclusively of one state' (1955: 77). In the end, moderation is an effective factor because it is in each state's own interest to show such moderation. Each state has an interest in preserving any other important state because it would rather that state survived than that it be swallowed up by potential future enemies.

The historical record is patchy in this regard, however. While it is possible to identify such moderate foreign policies within balance of power systems – Bismarck's generous treatment of defeated Austria in 1866, for example – it is also possible to find states or alliances which appear to have completely ignored this precept. In 1740 an alliance went to war with Austria which, had it been successful would have entirely dismembered the Austrian Empire. Similarly, in 1756 the war aims of the allies united against Prussia effectively called for the elimination by partition of the Prussian state. Only defeat or stalemate in war prevented these aims from being realised.

CONCLUSION

The balance of power concept is an idea that has resonance at many levels. Historically it has been used to explain the actions of states in an essentially insecure environment. It has been used by statesmen to explain and justify their chosen foreign policies, and finally it has been recommended as a guide to wise statesmanship.

One of the curious aspects of the history of the balance of power concept is that for most its history none of its advocates went so far as to systematically work out the corollaries of the balance of power (Gulick, 1955: 52). No helpful handbook on 'how to implement a balance of power policy' ever appeared. Statesmen were left to work that out for themselves within the general moral and political framework of their day. Given the inherent ambiguities and inconsistencies of the balance of power idea, it is hardly surprising, therefore, that statesmen were inconsistent in the manner in which they attempted to apply balance of power policies.

This inconsistency of application is crucial if one assumes that a balance of power can only be produced through the self-conscious foreign policies of states directing their efforts towards that end. A complexity of the theory, however, is that proponents argue that states ought to pursue balance of power policies, but also that even if they fail to do so consistently, a balance of power *system* may, indeed probably will, still emerge.

4 Balance of power systems

INTRODUCTION

One of the many senses in which the phrase 'balance of power' has traditionally been employed is to describe or explain an historical state system. It is one of the ways in which the balance conception can be said to have played a critical part in the historical development of international relations. Historians have applied the 'balance of power' description to the European international systems of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In the eighteenth century itself, statesmen referred to the balance of power system created by the treaties which ended the War of the Spanish Succession as 'the system of Utrecht'.

Balance of power thinking in fact represents one of the earliest example of holism, that is, thinking in terms of the natural tendency of groups of units to form themselves into wholes. It is the defining characteristic of a systems approach and its adoption predated by several hundred years the application of systems theory to other aspects of international relations. Kant, for example, said that the system of states reflected a 'predetermined design to make harmony spring from human discord' (Gulick, 1955: 21-2).

The systems approach assumes that, 'despite the complexity and confusion displayed by the amalgam of interactions, there are a set of structures which describe the international system, and explain the behaviour of the individual states' (Little, 1978: 189).

The key feature about the systemic approach to the balance of power is that it posits a direct relationship between the structure of the state system and the behaviour of states within the system.

Modern general systems theory originated outside the social sciences as a tool of engineering science. It was not until the 1950s that elements of systems thinking began percolating into the social

sciences, and the study of international relations was one of the last to be so influenced. This is surprising, given that there have always been elements of systemic thinking present in international relations. The balance of power is the classic example of this. Many thinkers in the so-called 'Golden Age' of the balance of power, such as Rousseau and Kant, believed that Europe formed a political 'system' and that the balance of power operated in an essentially automatic manner.

Instead of leading the way in introducing the application of systems theory to social science, international relations as an academic discipline was one of the last to embrace it. While other social sciences were investigating its possibilities soon after the end of the Second World War, international relations was engaged in an academic debate over the rehabilitation of the balance of power concept.

After the end of the First World War there occurred a reaction against balance of power policies by both politicians and academics, who saw in the workings of the balance of power system one of the major causes of the outbreak of the war. Led by President Woodrow Wilson, who called the balance of power 'an unstable equilibrium of competitive interests determined by the sword', opponents rejected the balance of power as a way of organising international relations, and sought to promote collective security instead. However, following the Second World War there was a strong reaction to this approach, and writers like E.H. Carr and Morgenthau successfully undermined the idealist school of thought and replaced it with the realist state-centric view of the world. In particular, Morgenthau reasserted the importance of the balance of power idea which he elevated to a 'universal concept' determining the behaviour of any society of sovereign states. He also identified the balance of power as a 'self-regulating mechanism', in the manner of Rousseau.

Morgenthau placed enormous emphasis on the balance of power mechanism because he believed that it held the key to understanding the nature of interstate relations at the systemic level. As a 'realist', Morgenthau believed that all states were engaged in a continuous struggle to expand their own power. Yet, despite this, no state was able to emerge as a dominant political hegemon, and therefore the international system remained an 'anarchy', a system comprised of sovereign, independent states. According to Morgenthau (1978), this paradox could only be understood in terms of the effects of the balance of power system. Morgenthau therefore used the balance of power to explain why the fundamental structure of the interstate

system has remained so stable over the past three and a half centuries.

As was noted in Chapter 1, Morgenthau, and the other members of the 'realist' school of international relations thought, saw the pursuit of power by states as the defining characteristic of the international system. The allegedly 'anarchic' nature of the system forced this behaviour upon states. Thus, the desire to maximise power should not be explained in terms of the individual preferences of states, but rather as a function of the nature of the system. Given the nature of the system, Morgenthau argues, what prevents continuous conflict and disorder is the self-regulating balance of power mechanism.

Kenneth Waltz, another member of the realist school, places so much emphasis on this particular aspect of state behaviour that his theory is described as 'structural realism'. Waltz argues that in an international anarchy, where a state can only rely upon itself for the maintenance of its security, the states are compelled to be functionally alike, to behave in the same way. If states fail to emulate the policies of their successful neighbours they will fall by the wayside. As others emulate them, power balancing takes place and the international order becomes governed by balance of power politics. According to Waltz, for a balance of power system to form only two requirements are necessary: 'that the order be anarchic and that it be populated by units wishing to survive' (Waltz, 1979: 121).

According to Morgenthau, the balance of power system reduced the incidence of warfare and ensured the continuing survival of the states who made up the system. In doing so it prevented any one state from reaching a position where it could establish hegemony over the system. Thus, in the reasoning of both Morgenthau and Waltz, the balance of power system is maintained through the foreign policies of states pursuing their own interests – indeed, Waltz argues that it is not necessary for any of them to actually desire the creation or maintenance of such a system.

However, as Claude (1962: 26–37) has pointed out, Morgenthau does not clearly define the elements which must be present for a balance of power system to be said to exist. It was left to later writers such as Kaplan to attempt to repair this deficiency.

A balance of power system has been defined in terms of a 'stable equilibrium' by Reynolds. Thus, in the anarchy of international relations, states and alliances will interact in such a way that the system as a whole maintains itself in equilibrium. The equilibrium in this instance is not between states or groups of states in the system, but

rather of the system itself (1971: 202). Therefore, a disturbance in the system will be countered by compensating changes in the nature of the interactions among the units. If the challenge to the existing balance of power is defeated and the original situation restored, the equilibrium is deemed stable; if the struggle to prevent hegemony produces a new balance of power with the system in a different condition, then this reflects an unstable equilibrium. Reynolds argues that the phrase 'balance of power' carries with it the implication of a stable equilibrium. In practice, however, this is rarely achieved. The historical experience indicates that although statesmen's objectives reflect the desire to maintain a stable equilibrium, the practical difficulties involved in maintaining an international equilibrium are such that following major challenges, such as those of Napoleon or Kaiser Wilhelm II, a new balance evolves, significantly different from its predecessors, so that the pattern is more characteristic of an *unstable* equilibrium.

Such an unstable equilibrium is what ought to be expected given the nature of international relations. The stability of balance of power systems needs to be seen in this sense. There is a difference between stability and stasis. As shown by the definitions at the start of Chapter 1, the 'equilibrium' aimed at by balance of power systems is not one composed of a number of states all equally powerful, rather it is a *system* in balance, with that condition defined in terms of the inability of any one state or alliance to overthrow the system and establish a hegemony or empire. Thus, there are always elements of disequilibrium present, and adjustments taking place. Stability exists not at the level of particular interstate relations, but at the level of the system as a whole, where the changes occurring are within tolerable limits, that is, not threatening the overall equilibrium. There may still be aggressive attempts by states to enhance their power, there may even be wars, but as long as such wars do not undermine the ability of states within the system to resist and defeat a hegemonic aspirant, the system as a whole is an equilibrium.

It is in this sense that it can be argued that a theory such as Kenneth Waltz's structural realism predicts *balancing* of power rather than particular *balances* of power. The question of system structure is an important one because there are many forms which a balance of power system can take. In Waltz's 1979 study, system structure is composed of three elements, the first of which is the principle according to which the system is organised or ordered. For example, a balance of power system may be bipolar or multipolar

in form. The differences are of more than passing interest, because there exists a major debate within the literature of international relations as to which particular form of the balance of power produces the greatest stability and the least war within the system. Kenneth Waltz, for example, argues that systemic stability (defined as the absence of system-wide wars), is greatest when the number of great powers is smallest, and that the best system is one dominated by only two great powers, a bipolar system. Morton Kaplan, in contrast, argues that the minimum number of great powers (of approximately equal power) required for a system to be stable is five.

A 1972 study by Singer, Bremer and Stuckey looked at the international system during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The study indicated that during the nineteenth century the amount of war in the system increased as power capabilities became concentrated in fewer states. However, in the twentieth century, the same process led to a decline in great power war. Clearly different factors were also at work; the emergence of the 'superpowers' and the advent of nuclear weapons are two obvious reasons why the centuries appear so different.

The key feature of the systemic balance of power theories is that state behaviour is seen as being governed by the nature of the system. Regardless of individual differences between states in terms of culture or ideology, all states must act in a similar way, selfishly seeking to increase their own power. Martin Wight saw power politics as an inevitable feature of a political system which was an anarchy, without a central authority, and he thus made the two almost synonymous. He declared that 'power politics means the relations between independent powers' (Wight, 1946: 7).

This interpretation of the balance of power is as old as the concept itself. In 1605 the Venetian Giovanni Botero described the balance of power as arising incidentally from the efforts of the constituent states in the system to gain an advantage, 'from the plurality of Princes it follows that the balance (*contrappeso*) is useful and good, not from its own nature but by accident' (Anderson, 1993: 154).

The 'system' argument put forward by realists such as Waltz argues that the nature of the system does not provide the state with protection or help.

The contribution of the realists' beliefs about the lack of harmony of interest in the world and about man's capacity for evil and his thirst for power is, therefore, to reinforce the system argument:

not only do states not have protection, they are also in danger and so need it.

(Taylor, 1978: 130)

The normal process of international politics should produce a rough equilibrium. In Gellman's words, 'beyond the plurality of national wills exists a logic intrinsic to the system' (1989: 161). This is not because any state is necessarily enamoured of the idea of equilibrium. Statesmen would much prefer their state to be more powerful than all its rivals. Unfortunately, the costs of attempting to achieve such a dominating position are prohibitive, beyond the resources of most states in most periods of history.

Not all states would even seek such dominance. As Kenneth Waltz has noted, no set of rules can specify how important the game should be considered (Waltz, 1959a: 206) and cultural factors can impose self-restraint. Most states pursue the lesser objective of avoidance of being dominated, a key part of which is remaining alert to take action against states which seem to be seeking a dominating position. This objective, when pursued by most states most of the time, tends towards the creation of a balance of power in the system.

The emergence of a balance of power can therefore be seen as being simply a result of a process, rather than the attainment of a goal being pursued by the state actors. In this sense, the system normally protects itself. As Butterfield put it, 'if there exists an international order, it tends to be mechanically self-adjusting and self-rectifying. As soon as the equilibrium is disturbed at any point, compensatory action automatically emerges in some other part of the system' (1953: 89-90). States with less than overwhelming power will tend to ally against a state or alliance which threatens to overturn the system. Lord Brougham in 1843 described as an 'obvious principle' the idea that a threatened state ought to call on its allies or form alliances and that other states, neither attacked nor threatened ought to make common cause with the endangered state, since

its overthrow will further increase the power of the aggressor and expose them to the risk of afterwards being assailed and conquered. So far from being a refinement of policy, this is simply yielding to the common instinct of self-defence.

(Gareau, 1962: 70)

This is the essence of the mechanical view of the balance of power, a self-regulating system based on the dictates of common sense. This is the view held by Craik and Waltz, quoted in Chapter 3.

The way in which thinking about the balance of power developed through the use of analogy and metaphor undoubtedly played a part in reinforcing this view of the balance. Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century commentators on the balance of power were fond of comparing its workings to the mechanical precision of clockwork or the orbital movements of planetary bodies in the solar system. Thus, for example, Brougham in 1803 argued that the solar mechanics and balance of power both induced order in their respective systems and that, just as newly discovered planets were found to obey the celestial laws common to all heavenly bodies, 'so the powers, which frequently arise in the European world, immediately fall into their places, and conform to the same principles that fix the positions and direct the movements of the ancient states' (Anderson, 1993: 168).

This was by no means a conception confined to eighteenth-century thinkers. The twentieth-century British historian A. J. P. Taylor clearly had such a perspective in mind when he wrote that in the nineteenth century British statesmen saw the balance of power, 'as something that worked itself without British intervention' (Taylor, 1954: 284).

The distinguishing element in this conception, according to Claude, is the assumption that 'equilibrium may be produced or preserved without actually being willed by any state' (Claude, 1962: 46). Kenneth Waltz goes further and criticises those writers who advocated policies designed to preserve a balance, on the grounds that it has proved to be 'an unfortunately short step from the belief that a high regard for preserving a balance is at the heart of wise statesmanship to the assumption that states must follow the maxim if a balance of power is to be maintained' (Waltz, 1979: 119-20). Hans Morgenthau went so far as to assert a determinist view of the balance of power, arguing that statesmen have no choice but to follow balance of power policies, 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' (1978: 173). For Waltz, this is the key contribution made by the balance of power concept to international relations theory. The balance of power is what gives the international system its coherence. This was, in essence, the view of the nature of the European balance of power system that emerged at the end of the seventeenth century.

During the 'classical' period of the balance of power from 1700 to 1918 states were generally not content to rely upon the workings of an automatic balance of power. British politicians, for example, believed that all states should watch their rivals so that no state or

alliance should become dominant through the inertia of others. However, they realised that not all states would be vigilant enough, that mistakes would occur, actions would be deferred until too late and so on, and they were therefore prepared to adopt a watchdog role, drawing other states' attentions to threats to the balance as they perceived them.

Most statesmen's views conformed more closely to conceptions of the balance of power system which Inis Claude has termed the 'manually-operated' and 'semi-automatic' conceptions (1962: 47-9). The 'manually operated' balance of power system is one in which the equilibrium is consciously sought by the leading statesmen, who conduct their states' foreign policy with this end in view. In this system the balance is not produced by the automatic process of the system or by the efforts of a 'balancer' state, but by skilled multi-lateral diplomacy. The balance of power is something which statesmen 'scheme for and contrive', it is not a gift of the gods or something that occurs accidentally. States cannot wait for it to 'happen' (Palmer and Perkins, 1954: 308).

For a system to be said to exist four conditions must be satisfied (Luard, 1992: 342). In the first place 'there must be a clear *inter-connection* between the parts to make it a coherent and interrelated whole'. Secondly, the constituent parts must be in regular *communication*. Thirdly, there should exist a history of predictable interaction such that there are common expectations among the members of the system. Finally, the pattern of relationships should demonstrate regularity. This would include the existence or pursuit of an overall equilibrium among the states, in the sense defined at the start of Chapter 1, that is, the absence of a hegemonic state or group able to dominate and give the law to the other states in the system. For a balance of power 'system' to be said to exist, the pattern of interaction among the constituent states would have to be characterised by the formation of regular combinations designed to block the emergence of a hegemonic power.

VARIETIES OF BALANCE OF POWER SYSTEMS

It is possible to distinguish a simple balance of power from a complex one, that is to say, a balance made up of two powers from one consisting of three or more. The simple balance of power is exemplified by the clash of France and Habsburg Spain/Austria in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and by the confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union in the cold war.

The complex balance of power is illustrated by the situation of Europe in the mid-eighteenth century, when France and Austria were joined as great powers by Britain, Russia and Prussia. A. F. Pollard noted the crucial difference between a two-state system, which he called a 'simple' balance, and a five-state system, which he called a 'multiple' balance. In a two-state system the power of the states needs to be equal. In a five-state, or more, system the states no longer need to be equal in power for the system to remain a balance of power (Pollard, 1923: 60).

For most writers there is a minimum number of actors who need to be involved if a balance of power system is to work effectively. According to Stanley Hoffman (1972) the number must be more than two, and historically has been five or six, with these actors being of comparable if not equal powers. Morton Kaplan (1969: 35) also argued that the number must not fall below five. P. A. Reynolds (1971: 203) argues that a system involving less than five states is likely to break down. A bipolar balance will be characterised by mutual suspicion, enmity and competition. It is a 'zero-sum' conflict in which one side's gain is automatically the other side's loss and if there is indeed a fine balance between the two sides, than a relatively minor gain for one side may give it the margin of advantage it is seeking. This is a brittle system likely to break down into war.

For Reynolds, where there are three states in the system, if any two combine against the third they are likely to gain a significant advantage. A four-state system is likely to resolve itself into a two-against-two simple balance during crises. Thus, only when five states are reached is a sufficient degree of flexibility present. Even a five-state system can break down, but it is far less likely to do so than the others, because it offers a greater number of possible combinations and therefore a flexibility in terms of possible responses.

The advantages of a multi-state balance system based upon flexible alliances, over a simple bipolar balance can be seen through Richard Rosecrance's concept of the 'regulator'. Rosecrance (1963: 220-1) argued that any international system which has stability as a goal is composed of a number of elements - a source of disturbance, a 'regulator', and an array of environmental factors which translate the interaction of the first two into outcomes. For the regulator to produce stability it must produce outcomes regarded as acceptable to the major participants in the system and it must have a number of options at least equal to the number of potential disruptive forces. 'Only by increasing the variety of the regulator states is it possible to reduce the variety of the outcomes. This is the law

of requisite variety. Only variety can destroy variety' (ibid.). Regulative forces may be institutional, such as an international organisation, or informal, as would be the case with states acting within a multipolar balance of power system.

A simple bipolar balance system severely limits the potential variety of response, whereas a multipolar system, particularly one based upon flexible alliances, tends to maximise the number of potential responses to a threat to stability. One state may be approximately balanced by an alliance of several lesser states, which together produce a rough equivalence of power. Another form of balance system is one in which allied groups, the members of each group being roughly comparable to each other, may be in balance. This is essentially a variant of the bipolar balance, with all its advantages and disadvantages.

A 'chandelier' type of balance may exist. Here states of comparable power confront each other, their weapons turned impartially in all directions. The great power 'balances' of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were very broadly of this type. Alliances which are formed in the maintenance of this kind of balance tend to be comparatively short-lived, and not to be coloured by strong ideological congruences among the allies or ideological cleavages with the states against which alliances are formed.

Dina Zinnes listed six possibilities of power distribution and alliance configuration that could be deemed a balance of power. The examples assumed a five-state system and were neither exhaustive nor mutually exclusive.

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- 1 There are no alliances and all states have equal power.
 - 2 All states belong to one of two alliances and the power of the two alliances is equal.
 - 3 There are two alliances equal in power and one non-aligned state.
 - 4 There are two alliances and a third non-aligned state, such that the power of either alliance plus the non-aligned state is greater than the power of the other alliance.
 - 5 There are no alliances and the power of each state is less than the summed total power of all the remaining states.
 - 6 There is one state or alliance which is more powerful than any other unit in the system, but such that condition 5 is still met.

(Zinnes, 1967: 273)

SYSTEMS AND THE BALANCE OF POWER

A feature of the academic study of the balance of power has been the tendency of theorists to derive 'rules' for the balance of power game. Morton Kaplan took this tendency furthest in a book published in 1957 which identified a number of possible international systems, one of which was the balance of power system. Kaplan defined his system in terms of the behaviour of the states operating within it, so that a system could only be identified as a balance of power if the states operated according to Kaplan's rules.

The problem with this approach is that it makes the balance of power system appear far more mechanistic than has historically been the case. Indeed, the beauty of balance of power politics lies in its very flexibility, in the variety of power distribution that can legitimately be termed a balance of power, and in the freedom of manoeuvre available to states within a balance of power system. Ziegler (1977: 173) uses Kaplan's model to describe the balance of power and declares that 'the system operates according to a set of principles or rules'.

Statesmen involved in a balance of power system are unlikely to follow all the prescribed 'rules'. They may not automatically support the weaker side; inhibited perhaps by recent animosity or religious bitterness, they may not feel that the most powerful state in the system is necessarily the one most to be feared. For this reason, Inis Claude urged caution 'when academic theorists succumb to the urge to codify the operations of the balance of power system ... the theorist misleads when he undertakes to reduce to rigid patterns what is in reality a fluid process' (Claude, 1989: 81). There was nevertheless always the danger of rigidity entering the balance of power system. There has always been a historical tendency to regard the current system as being stable and to prefer to keep things as they are.

Nevertheless, the appeal of the balance of power has always lain partly in the fact that it appears to make international politics systematic. As Lord Brougham put it in 1803,

the grand and distinguishing feature of the balancing theory is the systematic form to which it reduces those plain and obvious principles of national conduct ... the general union which it has effected, of all the European powers in one connected system - obeying certain laws, and actuated in general by a common principle.

(Forsyth, Keens-Soper and Savigear, 1970: 269)

The 'rules' set out by writers such as Kaplan are still useful if they are seen more as the identified recurrent behaviour patterns of members of a successful system rather than as rigid prescription. Seen in this way, they can provide a useful outline of the key features which helped to make the system work.

Morton Kaplan's rules are looked at below. They are based upon 'realist' assumptions about the objectives and methods of the states comprising the system, that is, that states wish to increase their power (their capability to influence outcomes) and this brings them into conflict with other states in a political environment which is essentially anarchic.

Kaplan's balance of power model makes certain key assumptions:

- 1 The only relevant actors are nation-states.
- 2 The major powers seek security as their primary goal.
- 3 The weaponry in the system is not nuclear.
- 4 Because some power factors are unpredictable and hard to measure, each seeks a margin of security higher than its current capabilities.
- 5 There must be at least five major powers in the system.
- 6 Each state, even a great power, is likely to need allies to achieve its goals. This explains the willingness to preserve the existence of possible future allies.

(Kaplan, 1968: 389-90)

The third assumption limits the utility of the model somewhat, since it rules out consideration of the nuclear 'balance of terror', which dominated relations between the superpowers during the cold war. This variant of the balance of power approach is an interesting one and is examined in Chapter 8. Kaplan's requirement that there should be at least five great powers would in addition have ruled out consideration of the early cold war period, because of the bipolarity characteristic of that era.

These assumptions lead to six fundamental 'rules'.

- 1 Act to increase capabilities, but negotiate rather than fight.
- 2 Fight rather than pass up an opportunity to increase capabilities.
- 3 Stop fighting rather than eliminate an essential national actor.
- 4 Act to oppose any coalition or single actor which tends to assume a position of preponderance with respect to the rest of the system.

- 5 Act to constrain actors who subscribe to supranational organising principles.
- 6 Permit defeated or constrained essential national actors to re-enter the system as acceptable role partners or act to bring some previously inessential actor within the essential actor classification. Treat all essential actors as acceptable role partners.

The first two rules flow from the need to allow states to pursue a margin of security when they are operating in a world in which the unpredictable has an important effect on outcomes. Rule 3 is based on the realisation that the balance of power is a system based upon the operation of alliances and therefore potential future alliance partners must be preserved. The fourth and fifth rules represent the requirement to take action against any alliance or state which seeks to overthrow the system. The final rule, like rule 3, reflects the need to allow maximum choice of potential alliance partners (Kaplan, 1968: 31).

Kaplan argues that a balance of power system exists only when all these features are present. They are the 'essential rules' of the system. The logic of his argument is that if the historical record shows a high correlation between the actual behaviour of states and the predictions of the theory in terms of the rules to be observed, then the 'theory' can be held to be correct. However, Kaplan's model is not really a theory, but simply a systematic presentation of the traditional view of the way in which the eighteenth-century balance of power system worked.

Because the system is held to define and determine the behaviour of the states within it, the rules identified by Kaplan are specifically described as being prescriptive rather than descriptive, that is, states must follow these rules if they are to gain the maximum amount of security possible within the limitations of the system.

It is important to note that Kaplan's rules derive from a model. They are not meant to be a description of an actual balance of power system based upon a historical example. Rather, they derive from an attempt to narrow the criteria down to the minimum required to allow generalisation. For the construction of a model of a *particular* balance of power system it would be necessary to build in far more detail about capabilities, history, logistics, military technology and tactics, the amount of information available to governments, the role of individuals, technology, domestic politics, and so on. All the factors that are specific to one particular system would prevent it

from being used to analyse other examples. However, a criticism that can be levelled at Kaplan is that while his model is insufficiently detailed to serve as a description of any particular system, nevertheless it shares so many distinctive features with the eighteenth-century European system that it is clearly largely based upon it, which weakens its claim to universality.

Kaplan's approach is still a valuable one, however, because it can be used to look at other examples of actual or suggested balance of power systems and compare them with Kaplan's norm. This was done by Chi (1968) and Franke (1968). Alternatively, the general approach of attempting to systematically outline the key features of a balance of power system can be adapted to build in more assumptions or a larger number of variables. An example of this latter approach is that of Pelz (1991).

Pelz modifies Kaplan's systems to allow for variations in key features of the balance of power in different periods. He identifies three systems in the period since 1776. System I is a representative example of his approach. It overlaps with the period which inspired Kaplan's model, but goes into greater detail in identifying key features. Unlike Kaplan's model this is clearly an attempted description of a perceived historical reality.

System I 1776-93, 1815-92

A Great power relations with other great powers

- 1 Each power maintains or increases capabilities relative to those of its opponents;
- 2 each power opposes any single actor or coalition that tries to dominate the system.

B Great power relations with smaller powers

- 1 Major powers try to dominate or heavily influence smaller powers, particularly those that occupy strategic positions or possess important resources;
- 2 in times of change in the balance of power, the weaker coalition of great powers bids for the support of the smaller powers.

C Conduct of small powers

- 1 In peacetime small powers try to play great powers against other great powers in order to maintain independence or gain concessions;

- 2 in times of tension or war, small powers try to extort disproportionate concessions for their neutrality or their participation in wars that are threatened or are in progress.

D *Diplomacy*

- 1 Each great power tries to join or construct the preponderant coalition;
- 2 frequent or businesslike diplomatic conferences adjust the balance of power by distributing monetary and territorial compensation, but usually without resort to war.

E *Military action*

- 1 The powers use limited amounts of force to adjust the balance of power or to oppose potential hegemony;
- 2 each power goes to war rather than pass up a chance to increase its capabilities.

F *Constraints on use of force*

- 1 Each power has to rationalize the war as necessary for maintaining or adjusting the balance;
- 2 each power permits defeated actors to re-enter the system as acceptable alliance partners on terms that do not greatly alienate them.

G *Military assets, technologies and doctrines*

- 1 Economic: most belligerents rely on limited national taxes, merchant ship prizes and forage and loot;
- 2 troops: most belligerents use professional standing armies and some conscripts;
- 3 technology: most belligerents use muskets, light field artillery and ships of the line;
- 4 strategy: most belligerents use incremental encirclement, attrition and limited campaigns.

H *Ideology*

- 1 Each power opposes any actor or coalition that engages in supranational activities, such as subversive appeals, religious or revolutionary campaigns, or collective security operations.

I *Risk-taking*

- 1 Major powers risk wars of adjustment fairly frequently;
- 2 major powers attempt hegemonic wars very rarely.

J *Domestic politics*

- 1 Elites are able to make foreign policy decisions with little interference.

The rules above (system I) are those which policy-makers tended to follow in the classical multipolar balance of power system. States tried to increase their security by choosing policies that provided a high probability of survival rather than take risks that might yield either hegemony or annihilation. Each state was free to pursue its national interests amorally, as long as it did not try to overthrow the system. Unlike their counterparts in other systems though, decision-makers tended to take the social norms of system I fairly seriously.

The greater detail involved in Pelz's system I brings out Kaplan's point that the more detail involved, the more historically specific it becomes, and the more difficult it is to use it as the basis for generalisations about the balance of power as a system. Unfortunately, in this sense Kaplan's own model falls between two stools. It is not sufficiently detailed to serve as a model of the eighteenth- or nineteenth-century balance of power systems in Europe, yet the similarity between the model and the eighteenth-century system is such as to leave it with little general predictive capability. Little (1978: 192) points out that there is no obvious theoretical logic behind the selection of Kaplan's particular six variables. The first three reflect the practice of the eighteenth-century system, while the last three are additions designed to add rational guidelines for the maintenance of the system.

SUB-BALANCES AND THE GENERAL BALANCE

According to Kaplan, 'the balance of power international system is an international social system which does not have as a component a political subsystem' (1969: 35). However, this definition flies in the face of the historical record, which provides a number of examples of functioning balance of power systems that have been characterised by the presence of sub-systems within the larger whole. This is what one would expect. Since the state system was diversified by geography and the difference in calibre between its members, there were likely to be local and regional distributions of power, distinct from but needing to be comprehended in, the general distribution of power.

A balance of power system may be composed of a number of sub-systems that interrelate to form the larger balance, but which are themselves composed of a number of states who form a regional balance. Usually, the interrelationship between the different systems is one in which the lesser systems are subordinate to the greater,

because of the greater capabilities of the states and alliances forming the larger balance. However, though each of the sub-balances represents a separate individuality, they are united to the whole. It has been characterised as the 'wheels within wheels' of the complex machine that was the European balance of power. In the eighteenth century in Europe an overall balance of power existed composed of Austria, France, Britain, Russia, Prussia and Spain, but in addition there were distinct regional sub-balances in the Baltic and Mediterranean, while a highly complex equilibrium existed within the Holy Roman Empire.

The German sub-balance is unusual historically because it existed in the area which was the geographical heart of the general European balance of power. The more usual situation, as Hans Morgenthau (1978) noted, is for the autonomy of such sub-systems. The closer a regional balance of power is to the core area of the central balance, the less opportunity it has to operate autonomously and the more it tends to become merely a localised manifestation of the dominant balance.

The relationship between a general balance of power and any sub-balances is not a clear one. M. S. Anderson (1970: 185) has noted with regard to contemporary thinking about the eighteenth-century system that

there was little attempt to show with any exactitude what role these 'particular' or 'inferior' balances played within the European one. A connection between the two was, rightly, assumed; but hardly any effort was made to analyse or even to illustrate it.

(Anderson, 1970: 185)

An exception to this was Alexandre Maurice, who wrote in 1801 that there was a general European balance of power and that

there are besides, in some parts of Europe, partial equilibriums formed from the agreement of the relations of states placed in almost immediate connection with each other; in like manner as the general equilibrium is formed from the agreement of all the particular equilibriums. These last are more easily formed than the general equilibrium and once established, are more susceptible of duration.

(Gareau, 1962: 43)

Writers on the balance of power closer to the present day have done little to make up for this deficiency. Martin Wight (1973: 108)

described the minor balances as being 'distinct from but comprehended in the general distribution', but he does not elaborate. Frederick Hartmann argued that the sub-balances were clearly inferior to the general balance,

swallowed up within the larger general balance they reemerge after a war or when the danger of a war recedes ... the extent to which most of the local balances remain stubbornly un-integrated into a general balance is indicative of the relative lack of expectation of general war, just as their subordination within the general balance is a clear sign of increasing tension.

(Hartmann, 1973: 315)

Hedley Bull (1977: 103) confused the issue still further by distinguishing between (a) the general balance of power as opposed to local balances, and (b) the dominant (or central) balance compared with subordinate balances. According to Bull, the dominant balance is still only a particular balance of power and therefore is a 'local' balance as far as the general balance is concerned. The central balance should not be identified with the general balance or equilibrium of the system as a whole.

This is true, but seems to be an unnecessary over-complication of an already complex distinction. In any event, it is clear that modern writers are not more lucid on this question than their predecessors. In fact the eighteenth-century writers were far more clear in their writings, and British statesman eventually succeeded in developing a policy which successfully established a relationship between the balances, despite the difficulties involved.

It was only in the eighteenth century that the idea of comprehending Europe as a whole with regard to interstate relationships began to take hold. The Thirty Years War (1618-48) had, it is true, involved virtually all the European states at one time or another, but the European state system only really emerged into maturity as a result of that great struggle. It required the intellectual revolution of the second half of the seventeenth century and the satisfactory resolution of the general crisis of authority, to enable a stable system to emerge. By 1800 writers such as the Abbé de Pradt spoke of Europe forming 'a single social body which one might rightly call the European Republic' (Gulick, 1955: 11), but at the start of the eighteenth century the European political system was not the unified framework which it later became. Several 'inferior balances' were recognised, with the Baltic and Italy being regularly seen as such, and the Holy Roman Empire also frequently being described as a

'minor balance', for example by the anonymous authors of *A Defence of the Measures of the Present Administration* (London, 1731: 23) and *The Present State of Europe* (London, 1750: 26-7). The powers of northern Europe in 1700 had little to do with those in the extreme south, and *vice versa*. This separation was reflected in the organisation of the British government, which included two foreign ministers – the Secretaries of State for the Northern and Southern Departments – who dealt with matters relating to northern and southern Europe respectively. This practice was also followed by Prussia.

By 1714, however, Britain was certainly one state which had developed a habit of looking at Europe as a single political system, and this raised problems in dealing with the minor balances. There were two possible ways of looking at the sub-balances, and either approach would have been compatible with a commitment to the general balance.

The first option was to give priority to the general balance. In following this policy, the argument would be that the European equilibrium was produced by the balanced interaction of a number of major powers. However, in order to be 'major' powers and to be strong enough to play their part in maintaining the general balance, these states would have to draw their strength from their regional dominance, for example Austria dominating southeast Europe, Prussia dominating north Germany, Sweden dominating the Baltic, Britain being the major naval power, and so on. In this conception, if a balance at the regional level existed at all, it could only exist by an equality of the combined regional actors with the local dominant power. In other words, the regional 'power' would be too strong to be overthrown by the second-rank states in that region. Following this policy, therefore, intervention would only be triggered if *another* great power intervened in the region, threatening to overthrow one great power's power base, and with it the general equilibrium.

One writer who described such a system was Alexander Maurice, quoted earlier. Maurice believed that the equilibrium in the sub-balances should arise from a tension of forces between a dominant local power and the other states in the sub-balance. He felt that it was the duty of the local hegemonic power to maintain regional stability and that these local balances would then produce an overall general balance (Gareau, 1962: 43).

The second option was to follow a policy of supporting balances *at all levels*. A state could act so as to encourage regional balances of power. This would be both good in itself, since it would keep these regions open to access by other states, and it would also

contribute to a balance of power at the general level supported in a complex fashion by the sub-balances. The effect of this system would be to produce a general equilibrium in which the offensive inclinations of the great powers would be greatly inhibited, more so than in the alternative balance system. The reason for this would be that since balanced power is neutralised power in the first conception, if one state dominated a region it would have a margin of disposable power. However, such power could be used to threaten the general balance as well as to defend it.

In the complex multi-balance system, however, constraints were more marked. The great powers would derive their power and prestige from their diverse areas of interest. Yet in several of those areas their room for manoeuvre would be limited. Thus, for example, Austria would be one of the actors in the Italian sub-system and also one in the German sub-system. Should however she attempt aggression by concentrating her resources in one area, she would weaken her influence in the other. Thus, involvement in the regional balance would involve constraints as well as opportunities.

This concern with sub-balances may have been the result of the fact that in the early period of balance of power politics, Europe did not in fact form a single political system. During the eighteenth century, as the sub-systems were steadily integrated within the larger concept of the European system, they gradually ceased to be of such concern to commentators on the balance. The major exception to this general trend was the German-speaking world, where the positions of Prussia and Austria, at the margins of East and West Europe, together with the conception of Germany forming a particular kind of balance in itself, led German thinkers to continue to study the question of inferior balances. The difference in approach to the balance of power this engendered would become significant during the nineteenth century.

SYSTEMS IN PRACTICE

Morton Kaplan and Richard Rosecrance both saw eighteenth-century Europe as a model for their systems approach to the balance of power. However, Evan Luard, in his 1992 study of that system was sceptical about the extent to which it truly functioned as a balance of power system. In a broad sense the system can be held to have worked. Regular responses did occur to curb the expanding powers within the system. The major challenge, that of France under Napoleon, was successfully overcome.

However, a number of caveats can be entered. The system protected only the *major* powers; lesser states disappeared or were substantially reduced. Moreover, on these occasions states engaged in a territorial feeding frenzy, rushing to join in the land-grab, rather than coming to the aid of the victim. Austria was a victim of such bandwagoning in 1740, as was Prussia in 1756. Even during the 'Great War' against France from 1792 to 1815, there was no consistent pattern of resistance to France. States combined not against aggression or expansion on principle, but against specific threats to their particular interests. For Luard, therefore, 'though there was a frequent *tendency* to combine against threats to the peace, it did not have the regularity and consistency which an effective system would have required ... actions were reactive rather than planned: a response to a domination already secured rather than a deliberate "systematic" attempt to prevent domination being won in the first place' (1992: 348).

It was not so much that a system did not exist in eighteenth-century Europe, but rather that it was far less coherent a system than was suggested at the time or subsequently. The century represented an important period in the political evolution of European international relations and is worthy of study for that reason.

5 The eighteenth century: 1700–1815

INTRODUCTION

The eighteenth century has been called 'the golden age of the balance of power', in theory as well as in practice (Morgenthau 1978: 196). It is certainly true that it was in this century that the greatest volume of literature on the balance of power appeared and that European diplomacy was characterised by a constant attention to the balance of power. According to Palmer and Perkins, 'the balance of power was a kind of thread running through the maze of alliances and counter-alliances, the frequent shifts in alignments, and the devious manoeuvres which marked the foreign policies of the great powers of that century' (1954: 318).

M. S. Anderson is even more forthright, declaring of the balance of power concept in the eighteenth century that,

never before or since has it been the object of so much generally favourable discussion by so many different writers. Never before or since has a single idea been so clearly the organising principle in terms of which international relations in general were seen.

(Anderson, 1993: 163)

Governments in this era assumed that states were driven by an urge to expand unless they were countered and increasingly the balance of power acquired strong positive moral connotations. Proponents of the principle argued that states had a positive moral duty to oppose the expansionist tendencies of aggressive states. The British government, having embraced this doctrine, projected an image of it as an onerous burden. The King's speech opening Parliament in 1732 spoke of 'perfecting and finishing this tedious work, conducted through a series of infinite changes and vicissitudes and encumbered

Such an approach relied upon a commitment to consensus. Between 1890 and 1914 this consensus ceased to prevail. The decisions by Britain and France in 1906 to settle the Moroccan dispute, and of Austria-Hungary in 1908 to annex Bosnia, both taken without consulting the other great powers (and in defiance of treaty obligations to do so), epitomised the breakdown of the Concert which had underpinned the system during its heyday. This breakdown removed one of the crucial restraints to great power war.

7 Competing perspectives

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this book is to examine the concept called 'the balance of power' and so far we have looked at its many meanings, its historical origins and development, its manifestation as a foreign policy guide and as a description of a certain type of international system. We have also looked at its implementation over the past three centuries. All this has been necessary in order to illuminate an idea with such a rich and complex history as that of the balance of power.

However, focusing in this way, while necessary, is also rather misleading. By concentrating on this one concept, it is possible to give a misleading impression about its importance in various periods of history. The balance of power has been a powerful and influential idea in the history of the development of the international system, but it has not been the only one. Nor, in those periods when it has been seen as a critical foreign policy strategy, has it been the only strategy available to states. To gain a fuller picture of the concept, it is necessary to place it in the context of important competing ideas and strategies, both in order to define it more clearly and in order to assess its relative historical importance more accurately. Darkness cannot be defined without speaking of light, and the classical balance of power concept needs to be held up against its alternatives in order to be seen in perspective.

In this chapter we will look at three other ideas, 'correlation of forces', 'collective security' and 'bandwagoning', as well as an alternative conception of the balance of power itself. They throw light upon the balance of power as an idea, an organising principle of international security. The 'correlation of forces' concept is interesting because it appears at first to be so similar to balance of power

thinking, yet its crucial differences bring out some of the hidden assumptions of balance of power. Collective security is examined because it is often seen as the polar opposite of balance of power and emerged in the twentieth century as a reaction to it. Yet it shares many features with balance thinking. In addition, since balance thinking argues both for the 'common sense' represented by balance policies and the almost *inevitable* nature of balance of power alignments, the third section looks at the argument that an alternative foreign policy exists for states which is equally, if not more common in history – the phenomenon of 'bandwagoning'. Finally, the idea of an 'associative' rather than an 'adversarial' balance of power is examined.

THE MARXIST-LENINIST CORRELATION OF FORCES CONCEPT

In the twentieth century the advent of communist states produced a new paradigm of balance of power thinking, the 'correlation of international forces'. The most detailed study of this concept is that by Lider (1986), upon which the following discussion relies heavily. The concept occupied a central place in discussions of international politics between East and West during the cold war era. The approach made three key assumptions:

- 1 International relations was seen as an extension of the domestic class struggle;
- 2 the correlations of internal and international forces produced a mutual impact;
- 3 The role of the working class occupied a special place in both kinds of interaction.

(Lider, 1986: 123)

Scholars in the Marxist-Leninist states insisted that the correlation of forces was a concept much broader and more subtle than the Western balance of power concept. 'It is a broad and complex class sociopolitical category. It should be viewed as a correlation of the class, social, economic, political, ideological, military, ethical and other forces in the two socio-economic systems of our times' (Lider, 1986: 124).

The correlation of international forces was regarded as an *objective* category, reflecting 'objectively existing conditions in the international sphere and objective historical tendencies' (ibid.: 127). Western balance concepts were criticised for either being too

narrowly based by being restricted to military factors or, where they were more broadly defined, of offering no clear ranking of the importance of the various factors included. 'The Marxist-Leninist concept, on the other hand, consists in clearly defining all the basic potentials and presenting the sociopolitical and the structural-functional characteristics of the protagonist as the basis of the forces being compared' (ibid.).

The correlation of forces was defined by Tomashevsky as 'the totality of economic, political, legal, diplomatic and military contacts and interrelationships among peoples, among states and state systems [and] among the main social, economic and political forces and organisations functioning in the world' (Lynch, 1987: 91).

Marxist-Leninist specialists in international relations argued that the correlation of international forces in the cold war period was different from the traditional balance of power concept in a number of crucial ways:

- 1 The balance of power which was seen as representing a rivalry between several imperialist great powers, had been superseded by a bipolar correlation of forces with the latter reflecting the rivalry of world socialism and imperialism, forces defined in terms of class struggle.
- 2 The politics of 'spheres of influence' had been replaced by a process characterised by the struggle of the capitalist world to survive.
- 3 The domination of imperialism had been challenged by the growing impact of socialism on the international system.
- 4 Qualitative factors had come to outweigh quantitative factors. The class character of opposing forces was now more important than simply the traditional indices of state power.
- 5 The relative importance of certain power components had altered. Military factors had become less important, while economic and sociopolitical factors had grown in importance.
- 6 The nature of the protagonists had changed. Instead of simply consisting of states, they now included states, groups of states, international movements, classes, popular masses and parties.

The correlation of forces was described in terms of four alternative but complementary forms by Soviet writers (Lider, 1986: 146). It was seen as a correlation between two competing political systems, capitalism and socialism. Sometimes this was expressed as the balance between 'the forces of peace' and 'the forces of war'. Thirdly, it described the military correlation between the two superpowers.

Finally, this was often broadened to embrace the two alliance systems, NATO and the Warsaw Treaty Organisation.

Marxist-Leninist writings from the communist states sharply distinguished the concept of the correlation of world forces from Western theories of the 'global balance of power'. Raymond Garthoff (1951: 86-8) has pointed out that the Russian language itself lacks any term which conveys the same meaning as the English phrase 'balance of power', or indeed of the word 'power'. Russians do not use the Russian words which mean power in the sense of 'greatpowers', 'potency' or 'military forces', but rather the word for 'strength' or 'elemental force' in the sense of 'water-power' or 'force of gravity'. Balance is translated as 'equilibrium', and 'political balance' is defined as 'a comparative stability of the general relation of forces in the political struggle'. Margot Light (1988: 252) also notes this problem and the danger it created of the misunderstanding and misrepresentation of the views of both sides. There is thus a major gap in comprehension possible. Moreover, cultural differences contributed to the difference in perception. Alfred Vagts (1948: 85) suggested that the idea of the balance of power as something ethical, which states should seek to achieve, is peculiar to countries which experienced the Renaissance, and has therefore never been held in equivalent intellectual esteem in Russia.

Balance of power theory was criticised on a number of grounds. Balance of power theories overemphasise military power as the determinant of the total power of states, and ignore socio-economic and domestic political factors. They also disregarded the laws of social development. The balance of power theory was criticised as being based upon an obsolete view of the nature of the international system. In particular, it ignored the class struggle and placed an undue emphasis upon the foreign policies of the great powers. In looking at the great power competition, Western perspectives placed emphasis on particular models which distorted reality. Soviet theorists gave as an example of this the so-called 'strategic triangle' of China, the USA and USSR. Bipolar models were similarly seen as missing the central importance of class struggle.

Soviet writers also criticised the balance of power concept on the grounds that it accepted war as an effective instrument of policy. This was seen as legitimising war, a foolhardy attitude in the age of nuclear weapons. Marxist writers argued that the very difficulty of using military force in the nuclear age increased the importance of non-military elements such as ideological factors.

A further Marxist criticism of balance of power theories was that they found no place for the Third World. Significant actors such as national liberation movements were ignored since they were not states. Indeed, it was argued that balance thinking was used by Western imperialists to justify the suppression of national liberation movements. The existence of a so-called balance of power among the European great powers in nineteenth-century Europe had not prevented the emergence of empires and regional hegemonies outside Europe.

According to Garthoff (1966: 92-3), Soviet thinking on the balance of power encompassed four different meanings:

- 1 A general relation or distribution of power.
- 2 An equilibrium of two units. Such a balance was always seen as being a temporary phenomenon.
- 3 A situation involving a bipolar equilibrium with a detached 'balancer'. This does not take the classic western form of a balancer, but more an 'active neutrality', such as the Soviet Union argued it followed from 1939 to 1941.
- 4 A favourable imbalance, or preponderance of power.

As the cold war stabilised into the 'long peace', Marxist-Leninist thinkers softened their criticism of Western balance of power theories and accepted elements of it into their own thinking about international relations. Pozdnyakov, for example, drew a parallel between the Soviet belief in the global struggle between two competing value systems, capitalism and socialism, and the Western model of a 'bipolar' balance of power (Lynch, 1987: 95). This bipolar vision was not a new one. As early as 1919 Stalin had described the world as being split into two 'camps', those of imperialism and socialism (Garthoff, 1966: 70). The modified Marxist approach accepted the concept of the balance of power *as a system*. It was seen in terms of 'regularities characteristic of the mechanism of the functioning of the international system' (Lider, 1986: 203). A politico-military balance between states was held to preserve the system as a whole and its principal constituents. It was 'based on the interaction and balance of two contradictory elements: the changeability of particular elements (or states) and the relative stability of the ties between them in other words, of the structure of the entire system'. The international system was seen as a self-regulating mechanism characterised not by perfect balance, but by 'a tendency to establish such a balance which proceeds through an unlimited chain of non-balanced conditions' (ibid.). All these

ideas were familiar ones in the traditional Western balance of power literature.

Marxism-Leninism accepted the idea of a bipolar balance of power, but did so by insisting that it was a transitory feature, characteristic of a particular epoch, but one which was less fundamental than the historical inevitability of progress towards socialism. In addition, while balance of power was accepted as a *system*, characterising certain objective conditions, balance of power *politics* was rejected as the policy of bourgeois states working to advance the cause of imperialism.

Despite this qualified acceptance, important differences continued to exist between the Soviet interpretation and the traditional Western view. There remained a fundamental difference between the concepts of balance of power and correlation of forces. The former described an approximate equality of power and was seen as being an approach limited to a particular historical epoch; the latter reflected 'an inherent qualitative superiority of one force – the socialist one – and at the very least a clear tendency of this side to grow ever stronger' (Lider, 1986: 205).

Western criticisms of the correlation of forces concept, mirrored in many respects Soviet criticisms of traditional balance of power theory. Western theorists, not surprisingly, did not accept the argument that the future would witness the inevitable triumph of socialism. In addition, they argued that the correlation of forces placed an undue emphasis on military strength and underplayed the importance of other key factors such as economic strength. Finally, despite the Marxist claims to the contrary, Western analysts held that the correlation was dependent upon a number of elements which were not capable of being accurately measured.

For example, Light (1988: 251) has pointed out that although Soviet scholars argued that the correlation of forces could be scientifically determined and calculated with precise accuracy, none actually provided detailed evidence to support the claim. Some Soviet scholars while asserting that power was measurable, defined it in such a way as to make this extremely difficult. Bolshakov and Vdovichenko, for example, defined power in terms of 'possibilities'. Power is seen as 'realised possibility' in a situation where 'the wider the margin of choice, the greater the power that is available to the actor' (Lynch, 1987: 90). Garthoff (1966: 84) argues that far from explaining how the correlation of forces might be accurately measured, Soviet ideology did not even *imply* what the criteria might be. It was also felt by Western critics to be deceptive to describe its

character as being irreversible, when in fact the West had clearly been able to reverse certain Soviet gains, for example Afghanistan and Nicaragua, at various points during the cold war.

A further cluster of criticisms related to the instrumentality of the concept. It was held to justify Soviet hegemony in Eastern Europe, to justify the huge build-up of Soviet military power and to justify Soviet acts of aggression in terms of historical laws which obliged the Soviet Union to extend the influence of socialism. Moreover, it was used as a propaganda tool to win the support of Third World countries.

The differences between the two concepts can be seen in terms of four key elements. The first of these was the *protagonists*. In the Western concept these were great powers and blocs. In the Marxist approach they were socio-economic systems and international movements. Secondly, *the character of the correlation*, although in both approaches the military component continued to be the most important element, the Western approach tried to emphasise measurable power components, while the Marxist approach emphasised intangible elements. Thirdly, *the view of the international system*: in the Western concept the balance of power was a feature of international politics and was made up of interacting states and alliances, whereas in the Marxist version the importance of *domestic* forces is stressed. Finally, in terms of *the underlying philosophy of international development*, the Western concept can be held to be a rather static one, with its emphasis on the stabilising effect of the balance of power; the Marxist concept stressed the idea of progressive change in a particular historical direction.

Western balance concepts, dominated since 1945 by the Anglo-Saxon Hobbesian perspective, are based upon realist notions of the drive for power and a view of the international anarchy in which states must rely on self-help to pursue and defend their vital interests. This views international relations in terms of a *system* with a basic shape which gradually adjusts to changing conditions. In the Soviet view, international relations was a *process* in which changes fostered by progressive forces moved historically in a particular direction; though even here there were elements of convergence in Western and Soviet thinking, seen, for example, in Kokoshin's view that the structure of the international system defined its basic processes and phenomena (Lynch, 1987: 100), an essentially 'neo-realist' position in Western terms.

Thus, the correlation of forces idea throws useful light on the balance of power concept. It shares certain features with it, and those

common features increased as the theory developed during the twentieth century. At the same time, the important differences are instructive, particularly the emphasis on class antagonism and non-state actors and the progressive view of history. The defeat of communism in the cold war ensured that this concept did not become the new paradigm for equilibrist thinking, but none the less, a more sophisticated balance of power model might usefully incorporate some of the insights contained in the correlation of forces concept.

COLLECTIVE SECURITY AND THE BALANCE OF POWER

Collective security is traditionally viewed as being the antithesis of balance of power politics. As an approach to the creation of national and international security, it emerged from the ashes of the First World War and was seen by many as the precursor of a new world order to replace the balance of power system which had allegedly failed in 1914. The American President Woodrow Wilson insisted that the Great War was a catastrophe which need not be repeated and argued that collective security was the way to prevent future wars, declaring that what the post-war world required was 'not a balance of power, but a community of power, not organised rivalries, but an organised common peace' (Miller, 1980: 45).

Certainly most 'realist' scholars after 1945 were clear in their belief that collective security and the balance of power were entirely dissimilar approaches to international security. Hans Morgenthau argued that whereas balance of power alliances are the product of rational decisions by statesmen on the basis of calculated national interest,

the organising 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 counter-alliance into operation at once.

(Morgenthau, 1959: 175)

However, there was another school of thought, which numbered many realists among its ranks, which argued that the two concepts in fact had a great deal in common, that the dividing line between the two approaches was a very thin one, if it existed at all. President Wilson assured Congress in February 1918 that 'the great game, now forever discredited, of the balance of power was abolished'. Yet

Martin Wight, a leading British realist after 1945, argued that Wilson had only been in a position to attempt such a reorganisation of international security because of the fact that the United States had itself become part of the balance of power system by entering the First World War in 1917. Indeed, Wight claimed that the supporters of the League of Nations in the interwar period saw collective security not as a way of abolishing the balance of power, but as a mechanism for improving, regulating and institutionalising it. It was simply 'a more scientific development of the doctrine of the balance of power as laid down by Pitt, Castlereagh and Palmerston', in other words, a refinement of the Concert of Powers (Wight, 1966: 173).

That collective security could be seen at one and the same time as both a refinement of the balance of power and as its antithesis is explained by two factors. The first point is that, like 'balance of power' itself, the term 'collective security' has, over time, come to be used to describe phenomena that are far removed from the original concept. In particular, it has often been used to describe partial alliances that would be better termed as examples of 'collective defence'. However, 'collective security' carries with it overtones of the civilised international community acting together in defence of higher ideals, and as such has a clear propaganda value. Not surprisingly, therefore, alliances have been happy to have the term applied to their enterprises in order to benefit from its positive connotations. However, by using the phrase 'collective security' to describe an alliance which is much closer to a traditional balance of power actor, the distinctions between the two approaches become blurred, as for example when describing NATO during the cold war as an example of collective security rather than collective defence.

The second reason why it was possible to argue that balance of power and collective security have much in common, is that the assertion had a great deal of truth. Though there are important differences between the two approaches, which will be looked at later, there are also very important similarities, so that it is not correct to view them as polar opposites. When viewed as points along a continuum from international anarchy to world government the differences are more obvious; when looked at in terms of underlying assumptions and even methods, they have much in common.

In their study of the balance of power, Niou, Ordeshook and Rose argue that the distinction between balance of power and collective security is 'meaningless', and that 'the idea of collective security is

an essential part of the balance of power theory' (1989: 159). However, they achieve this by reformulating a definition of security which divests it of its specifically balance of power content, so that the exercise is rather tautological. The balance of power assumption that 'states act to prevent other states from gaining a preponderance of power', becomes the far less prescriptive, 'states formulate their strategic plans under the presumption that other states will act to avert their own elimination' (ibid.).

Though in reality the distinction between the two is not meaningless, there are important similarities, which were amplified by Claude (1962: 123-33). Both systems share the objective of managing power in international relations, but offer different solutions to the problem. Claude argues that while the balance of power approach focuses attention upon the potential of states, that is, upon their capacity for aggression assessed in terms of measurable indices of power, the collective security approach emphasises the question of political intent or purpose. The distinction is not absolute, since balance of power policies in practice also take into account the question of intent. Similarly, collective security regimes have to be concerned with the question of aggressive capacity, since the system can only work if no one state is more powerful than all the other states in the system. This requirement is shared with balance of power systems.

Claude argues that the two systems also share a belief in the general efficiency of deterrence, in that ordinarily, aspiring hegemons will be deterred by the knowledge that their defeat is inevitable if the system works as it is supposed to. In the case of collective security, deterrence is secured by the creation of a permanent blocking coalition, an overwhelmingly powerful alliance of states prepared to act against *any* aggressor. In the case of the balance of power, the relationship with a strategy of deterrence is more ambiguous. Unlike collective security, equality rather than preponderance should deter aggression. Again, in practice, the clear distinction becomes blurred. States can never reach a point of permanent equality, all seek a margin of disposable power in their own 'safe' hands. They seek preponderance rather than equality, but so long as they do so in competition, none is able to attain it. Thus, both systems seek to confront an aggressor with superior power as the preferred option, collective security simply makes this preference more explicit (Claude, 1962: 126).

Another feature common to both balance of power and collective security is a systemic security perspective. Both systems require

states to take joint action against aggressors, even when their own territory or interests are not directly or immediately threatened.

Self-defence becomes a matter of acting with others to forestall the development of a situation in the system at large which would presumably be disadvantageous to the interests of the state in the longer run, rather than confining response to an attack in the here and now.

(Claude, 1962: 127)

Collective security imposes a stronger obligation in this regard, since it is grounded in a legal requirement, rather than merely a commonly perceived interest, but both seek to encourage states to identify their security with the security of other states in the system.

Claude also makes the important point that 'these two systems were designed to deal with essentially the same world; they rest upon broadly similar assumptions concerning the nature of the setting in which they are to operate' (ibid.: 129). For example, as already noted, both require an international system characterised by a diffusion of power among the constituent states. Neither balance of power nor collective security can operate successfully if one state in the system is more powerful than all the other states combined. Both systems depend upon an absence of ideological preference. It is crucial that the victim of aggression is supported, and the aggressor opposed, irrespective of the ideological make up of each party. Neither system will work if states prefer only to aid their 'natural' allies and oppose their 'natural' enemies. It is the fact of aggression which has to be opposed, the identity of the aggressor must be an irrelevance. Thus, Claude cites numerous historical quotations which could describe either the balance of power *or* collective security, for example Mowrer describing the balance in terms that sound like collective security - 'to the aggressive force of the strong individual or oligarchy, it opposes the united defensive force of an entire international community' (ibid.: 132). As earlier chapters have noted, this way of looking at the balance of power as one of the unifying features of the international community has been one of the central ways of conceptualising the idea throughout its history.

Claude concludes by noting the number of scholars who have argued that collective security should be seen as a revised balance of power system, rather than as a completely different approach to the maintenance of international security. In Chapter 6, we noted Gulick's view that the nineteenth-century 'concert' system represented the evolution of balance of power towards collective security,

with the latter being a variant of the former (Gulick, 1955: 307-8). This was a view shared by the British historian and international relations theorist Martin Wight, who felt that the collective security approach represented the logical end-point of the gradual evolution of the balance of power system which had taken place in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Collective security meant 'giving the system of the balance of power a legal framework, to make it more rational, more reliable, and therefore more effectively preventive' (Wight, 1973: 110). This view echoes Gulick's assertion that 'the collective security of 1919 or 1945 was merely an elaboration and refinement of the coalition equilibrium of 1815, just as the latter was an elaboration and refinement of the alliance balance' (Gulick, 1955: 307-8). Certainly, the 'Grotian' version of the purpose of a balance of power system brings it very close to the ideal represented by collective security.

THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN BALANCE OF POWER AND COLLECTIVE SECURITY

For all the many similarities between the two approaches, there are crucial differences which justify classifying them as alternative approaches. There is, as Claude notes, a fundamental difference in the alliance systems which underpin the two approaches. Collective security involves a 'universal' alliance, whereas balance of power is characterised by competitive alliances. It unites rather than divides. For Claude,

The balance of power system involves alliances which are essentially externally-oriented groupings, designed to organise cooperative action among their members for the purpose of dealing with conflict situations posed by states or groups of states on the outside. By contrast the collective security system looks *inward*, seeking to provide security for all its members against any of their number who might contemplate aggression. Balance of power postulates two or more worlds in jealous confrontation, while collective security postulates one world, organised for the cooperative maintenance of order within its bounds.

(Claude, 1962: 145)

Where collective security differs fundamentally from balance of power is in the mechanism used to harness power. Both recognise the need to contain expansionist and aggressive powers, but where balance of power seeks to do this by manipulating rivalry, collective

security seeks to emphasise the possibility of harmonising interests and developing cooperation. The former sees conflict as the norm, the latter treats it as exceptional. 'The former promises competitive security, while the latter promises cooperative security' (ibid.: 146).

Richard Betts argues that the key distinction between the two approaches is that a collective security system is much more dependent upon normative rules than is a balance of power system. It is based upon the norm that states 'must subordinate their own immediate interests to general or remote ones' (Betts, 1993: 269). In the collective security system, aggression should provoke an automatic response from all the other states in the system. The balance of power system is more voluntaristic. It is not aggression as such, but bids for hegemony which must be opposed. Individual states are left with far more latitude in deciding whether or not a particular state, or group of states, represents a genuine threat to the balance of power. If it does not, its aggression can safely go unchallenged if it does not threaten one's parochial national interests. Such aggression might even be welcomed if one's enemies are its victims. Whereas balance of power judges the fact of aggression purely in terms of its impact upon the distribution of power within the political system, collective security identifies aggression and war as inherently evil, to be opposed wherever it arises. The only exception is war in defence of the collective security system itself. Even the idealist Woodrow Wilson accepted that to maintain peace under a collective security system, the international community had to be willing to use military force against transgressors.

This, in turn, leads on to a final major difference between the two approaches. Collective security is not world government, but it certainly involves a far greater degree of political centralisation than does the balance of power system, which in its early eighteenth-century manifestation was almost a synonym for international anarchy, though this was far less true of the nineteenth-century 'concert' version.

Collective security is based upon the institutionalisation of commitment, of response made predictable by being based upon a legal obligation. A number of writers such as Gulick, Wight and Wright argued that collective security was a logical development from balance of power theory in the sense that the balance attempts to ensure that there will always emerge a preponderant coalition capable of defeating a drive for hegemony. Collective security institutionalises this coalition and makes it a permanent feature of

the political landscape. It is possible, from this perspective, to view the history of the international system since 1700 as representing a halting, but definite process of steadily greater institutionalisation of the balance of power system, culminating in the emergence of collective security after the First World War.

COLLECTIVE SECURITY IN PRACTICE

Palmer and Perkins argue that the three outstanding historical examples of collective security systems have been the Concert of Europe, the League of Nations and the United Nations. Although they credit the Concert with surviving until after 1878, they conclude that 'instead of superseding the balance of power, it had been dependent upon a balance which for a time had made great power cooperation both desirable and possible' (Palmer and Perkins, 1954: 328). In fact, as noted in the previous chapter, it is going too far to describe the Concert of Europe, even in the era of the Congress System, as 'collective security'. While it did represent a significant modification of the classical eighteenth-century balance of power system, it was nevertheless a variant of the balance.

The League of Nations has a far stronger claim as an example of an attempt to institutionalise and implement collective security in practice. The statesmen who drafted the Covenant of the League of Nations clearly saw the organisation as embodying the principle of collective security. In the first flush of post-war enthusiasm for building a new world order in 1919, governments were remarkably idealistic in their hopes for the League. Their outlook was founded upon their views as to what constituted the 'lessons' of the First World War and the crisis of July–August 1914.

However, the institution they created proved unable to turn the ideal of collective security into reality. There were many reasons why this proved to be the case. Some were the result of the nature of the Covenant itself, others were the product of the reality of the foreign policies pursued by the member states during the League's existence.

As an instrument for institutionalising collective security the League was deficient in a number of respects (Claude, 1962; Hinsley, 1963). The key Covenant Articles in this respect were Article 10, where member states agreed to preserve the independence and territorial integrity of other member states against external aggression, and Article 16, which mandated automatic economic sanctions against states which went to war in defiance of Articles 12 to 15

(which established procedures designed to make possible the pacific settlement of disputes, though they allowed for the use of war if their procedures were tried in good faith and failed). Article 10 was interpreted by member states as meaning that it was up to them to decide what action they should take and that they were by no means obliged to go to war in defence of the attacked state. Though its implementation was called for on a number of occasions, Article 10 was never applied.

A similar emasculation occurred with Article 16. This article declared that if a League member went to war in defiance of its obligations under the Covenant 'it shall *ipso facto* be deemed to have committed an act of war against all other members of the league which hereby undertake immediately to subject it to the severance of all trade and financial relations', and further that it would in such an event be the duty of the Council of the League

to recommend to the several Governments concerned what effective military, naval or air force the members of the League shall severally contribute to the armed forces to be used to protect the covenants.

Again, the member states quickly moved to dilute this commitment. As early as 1921 the League Assembly decided that it was up to member states, not the League, to decide whether a breach of Articles 12 to 15 had occurred and that no automatic obligation to go to war followed. Article 16 was only implemented once, against Italy after her invasion of Abyssinia in 1935. The League's member states did not impose full immediate sanctions and their token efforts failed to impress Italy and led to a breakdown in confidence in the League and in collective security.

In practice, the League's member states proved reluctant to accept the obligations imposed upon them by the principle of collective security. The European core members of the League were unwilling (and perhaps even unable given their economic weakness) to oppose Japanese aggression against China in 1931. In the 1935 crisis a notable feature was the prevalence of balance of power thinking over a commitment to collective security. Britain refused to impose full-scale sanctions against Italy, because she felt that this would drive Italy into an alliance with Germany.

The League had in any case been crippled from the outset by the fact that a number of major powers remained outside its membership. The United States, Germany and the Soviet Union were not members. Germany was not allowed to join until 1926, the Soviet

Union did not join until 1934 and the United States never joined. The American absence in particular was crucial. The collective security concept implied a universal membership, yet the absence of some of the world's most powerful states, and in particular the United States, robbed it of the overwhelming power it required. The states who were thereby forced to take on the mantle of leadership, Britain and France, had neither the resources nor the desire to fill the gap left by the United States. As the League's authority collapsed in the 1930s it appeared a victory for the balance of power concept. D'Abernon argued that 'the balance of power is a condition for an effective League of Nations' (Palmer and Perkins, 1954: 329).

For Martin Wight, the failure of the League experiment in the 1930s was of critical historical importance. He argues that by 1919 the development of the international system had reached a point where it would either evolve into a genuine collective security system or it would fall back into a more primitive bipolar balance of power system (Wight, 1993: 110). Certainly, the Second World War marked both the final collapse of the League experiment and the emergence of the United States and the Soviet Union as the two 'superpowers' who played a dominant role in the international system for the next 45 years. However, the League's failure led to the creation of a significantly modified successor, the United Nations Organisation, born from the successful wartime alliance and the hope that great power cooperation would mark the period after 1945, as it had after 1815.

The United Nations was in many ways a strengthened version of the League, and the areas where it differed from the League represented in large part concessions to realism, concessions which tended to reduce its ability to act as an instrument of collective security. Those who supported both the United Nations and the concept of collective security reacted to this by broadening the definition of collective security so that UN activities in the security field could be subsumed under the collective security heading. Ernst Haas, for example, argued that UN collective security activities derived from two concepts current within the organisation in the 1950s. One was 'permissive enforcement', based on the anti-communist policies of the United States and its allies. The second was 'balancing', which reflected the efforts of groups of states within the UN to prevent it becoming the tool of one particular group of states, so that UN policy reflected shifting majorities issue by issue (Haas, 1955: 42). According to Haas, collective security ideas, as manifested in the

UN system, 'are derived from the operations of the United Nations and as such reflect the ends of national policy, the conflicts of policy, and the manner in which clashes are reconciled within the institutional structures of United Nations procedures and forces' (ibid.: 43). Haas justified this reinterpretation simply in terms of the failure of the original concept of collective security. 'Collective security based either on universal moral obligations or on a concert of the powerful, while perhaps clearer in its ideological and normative assumptions than the alternatives here proposed, has not in fact flourished' (ibid.: 60).

In Haas' formulation, collective security itself is to a large extent dependent upon a process of balancing, in this case, of groups within the UN. By this, he means a process by which *ad hoc* majorities emerge on specific issues within the UN so that the great powers, and particularly the United States, do not always get their way, and when they do, it is with the resultant policy modified to reflect to some extent the preferences of other states. Haas himself noted that these 'balancing operations are closer to traditional diplomacy, though within the procedural framework of the United Nations, than to the processes assumed by the Wilsonians' (1955: 61-2).

As the article by Haas demonstrates, in the period after 1945 the phrase 'collective security' began to lose its distinctive meaning and came to be applied to arrangements that would be better described as 'collective defence' or 'collective action'. Describing regional security organisations such as NATO as examples of collective security is highly misleading. NATO was simply a traditional defensive alliance whose members were bound together by a pledge of common defence against a perceived threat, in this case that of the Soviet Union and its European allies. There was no sense in which NATO was designed to deter the use of the military instrument *as such*. It remained indifferent to the use of force by its members both inside and outside the areas covered by the NATO treaty. NATO, in fact, far from being an example of collective security, was a classic example of realist balance of power politics.

Similarly, United Nations peacekeeping operations since 1945 are examples of the international community taking collective action in the security field, but bear no resemblance to collective security as such. There is no sense in which such operations reflect an obligation of all states to oppose aggression by any state at any time. The closest it has come to such an approach has been the Korean operation of 1950-3 and the Iraq-Kuwait War of 1990-1, the latter far more so than the former. Unless collective security means an

automatic response based upon legal obligation, irrespective of each state's direct concern in the area at issue, then the concept has no distinctive meaning.

BALANCING AND BANDWAGONING

The central argument of proponents of the balance of power theory, particularly those concerned with the tendency for balances to materialise at the systemic level, is that balance of power policies are essentially automatic given the nature of the international anarchy. The 'realist' school of international relations in particular has argued, on the basis of what appears to be ample historical evidence, that since 1700 balance of power politics has been a regular and predictable aspect of international relations.

However, this interpretation of diplomatic history is not without its critics. In particular, Schroeder (1991) has taken issue with it on almost every point. According to Schroeder, the pattern of recurrent balance of power policies identified in the historical record is largely an illusion and, in the periods which have been most strongly identified with balance of power politics, other foreign policy strategies were usually preferred to the option of balancing. These views are an extraordinary deviation from the traditional interpretation and deserve to be discussed in some detail.

Schroeder (1991: 5) presents a radically different interpretation of the historical record. For example, Gulick, in his classic study of the balance of power takes the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars as his case study, seeing the successive anti-French coalitions as an attempt by the other major powers in Europe to restore political equilibrium to a Europe thrown out of balance by the emergence of the French Empire under Napoleon Bonaparte. Schroeder, however, argues that that First Coalition (1792-97), far from being created to constrain a dominant France, was in fact formed at a time when France was weak, and states joined the coalition precisely because it seemed stronger than France and likely to prevail. When France's power became more evident as the decade progressed, this did not cause new states to flock to the coalition, but rather, led existing allies to desert (Prussia, Tuscany) and in some cases to join the French side, as Spain did. The Second Coalition (1799-1801) saw a similar pattern. From 1799 to 1813, although France had clearly emerged as the dominant continental power, the majority of states chose to ally with France rather than oppose it, a phenomenon known as 'bandwagoning'.

Every major power in Europe except Great Britain (Prussia, Austria, Russia, Spain) became France's active ally for a considerable period during the Napoleonic Wars; many smaller states joined his system, some willingly, others under duress. Wars continued to break out not because European states continually insisted upon trying to balance against the hegemonic power, but because Napoleon's insatiable ambition and lawless conduct frustrated their efforts to hide or bandwagon.

(Schroeder, 1991: 5)

Europe began to swing against Napoleon only after his disastrous invasion of Russia in 1812 and particularly after his defeat at Leipzig in 1813.

Schroeder identifies a similar pattern in the Second World War (1939-45). Prior to its outbreak states in Central and Eastern Europe chose to bandwagon or lie low, but not to firmly oppose Germany. Belgium, Holland, Denmark and Norway all chose neutrality, and even Britain and France moved to oppose Germany only in 1939 when it became clear that Hitler's demands, like Napoleon's, were insatiable. By concluding the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact in 1939 the Soviet Union 'bandwagoned' while Vichy France, Hungary and Romania similarly backed rather than resisted expansionist Germany during the Second World War. Neutral states such as Spain and Sweden leaned towards Germany. Only when Germany was clearly on the road to defeat did Sweden, for example, move to support Germany's opponents.

In between these two clear examples, Schroeder cites the examples of the Crimean War and the First World War. It should be noted that the Crimean War is not usually thought of as a balance of power conflict even by proponents of the concept. However, Schroeder's point concerning these two conflicts is that it is difficult to say clearly whether balancing or bandwagoning was going on. Although the winning side chose to talk in balance of power terms, the reality was that the winners *always* represented a dominant coalition. Russia was not generally seen as a military threat by most European states in the 1850s, and in the 1914-18 conflict most states joined the Allies - the larger of the two coalitions (Schroeder, 1991: 5-6).

More generally, Schroeder argues that the past 300 years has not been characterised by a series of systems in which individual states instinctively pursue balance of power policies when threatened by an expansionist power. States always have alternative options available when pursuing their foreign policy goals. There are various

strategies a state might pursue during a dangerous period in international politics. A high-profile strategy of using one's own power to oppose an expansionist state is by no means the automatic response of states. Schroeder identifies a number of alternative strategies which historically states adopted instead of balancing techniques.

One such strategy was 'hiding'. This involved efforts to avoid having to become a direct participant in the crisis on one side or the other. In its most extreme form this would involve adopting an ostrich attitude, paying no attention to the threat or denying its existence. Other techniques were

declaring neutrality in a general crisis, possibly approaching other states on one or both sides of a quarrel to get them to guarantee it; trying to withdraw into isolation; assuming a purely defensive position in the hope that the storm would blow over; or, usually as a later or last resort, seeking protection from some other power or powers in exchange for diplomatic services, friendship or non-military support without joining that power or powers as an ally or committing itself to any use of force on its part.

(Schroeder, 1991: 3-4)

A second, rarer, strategy was what Schroeder calls 'transcending', which he defines as

an effort to surmount international anarchy and go beyond the normal limits of conflictual politics by striving for an international consensus or formal agreement on norms, rules and procedures to solve the problem, end the threat and prevent its recurrence.

(Schroeder, 1991: 4)

Schroeder's third strategy is that known as 'bandwagoning', defined as 'joining the stronger side for the sake of protection, even if this meant insecurity *vis-à-vis* the protecting power and a certain sacrifice of independence' (*ibid.*).

To exemplify these strategies in practice, Schroeder cites the European crisis of 1785, the Bavarian succession crisis when the Austrian Emperor attempted to exchange his territories in the Austrian Netherlands (modern Belgium and Luxembourg) for Bavaria. The German states saw this as a real threat to their security, but their responses differed widely. Some chose to hide, that is, to ignore the issue or remain neutral, despite their recognition that the crisis had grave implications for their own future independence. Some, most notably Prussia, moved to balance the threat from Austria. Some initially adopted neutrality and then bandwagoned by supporting

Prussia once it had become clear that Austria was likely to back down. A number of the smaller states attempted to 'transcend' the issue by forming an alliance of small states whose objective was to reform the institutions of the Holy Roman Empire to guarantee the existing territorial arrangements and create mechanisms for the arbitration of subsequent disputes.

It has been argued that in situations of conflict between the great powers, small or weak states will prefer to remain neutral or bandwagon rather than balance (Baker-Fox, 1957: 186-97, Rothstein, 1968: 11, Walt, 1987: 29). This clearly runs counter to the expectations of a balance of power system. Walt argues that weak states do this because they believe that their strength is too limited to influence the outcome and that they would suffer heavily in the conflict. It is therefore imperative for them to be on the winning side at all times, irrespective of whether or not the winning side threatens the balance of power (Walt, 1987: 29-30). However, Walt also argues that weak states can be expected to pursue balance of power strategies when they are threatened by states with similar capabilities to their own. According to Labs (1992: 385), 'most literature on weak state behaviour in international relations theory accepts that weak states tend to bandwagon with a threatening Great Power'.

Labs himself does not subscribe to this view and cites a number of examples of states resisting a great power. Some of these examples are dubious, however. Belgium in 1914 or Finland in 1939, where a small state chose to fight a great power without a guaranteed promise of military support from allies, are hardly examples of 'balancing'. There was no sense in which these actions were conscious attempts to create or restore a balance of power. Labs goes on to accept that in other cases, Czechoslovakia in 1938, for example, small states did effectively bandwagon. The question this provokes therefore, is under what circumstances do small states prefer to bandwagon rather than balance?

As noted in Chapter 4, Walt argues that a state's threat assessment is effected not only by a simple calculation of relative military strength, but includes geographic proximity, offensive capability and aggressive intentions as well. Thus, while states will tend to balance, the choice of who to balance against, may well not be simply the strongest military power or combination. Looked at in these terms it is possible to see for example, the alliance patterns of the First World War as reflecting balancing rather than bandwagoning. The later-joining allies were responding not just to the military balance, but also to the relative sense of aggressive intention, which inclined them

to oppose the Central Powers. However, this still cannot account for all the anomalies. For example, as Schroeder (1991: 4) points out, when Japan and China joined the Allied Powers in the First World War, they were simply bandwagoning – Japan in order to seize German possessions and China in order to gain the protection represented by alliance with Britain and France.

Balancing behaviour can also be affected by a phenomenon which Barry Posen calls 'buckpassing' (Posen, 1984: 63). In a multipolar balance of power system, while the need to oppose expansionist states may be evident, it may not be so evident as to which state or states should accept the responsibility for doing so. Each major power may decide to allow this responsibility to fall elsewhere, and if they all do this then the threat would not be countered. To accept the responsibility would be to assume burdens and costs while providing free benefits for the other great powers in the system. Only those states so geographically close to the threat as to be unable to avoid responding may take action, and these may be insufficiently powerful in themselves to achieve success. Posen argues that 'buckpassing' contributed to the British and French failure to deter Germany in the 1930s.

Like Schroeder, Labs argues that states (in his case weak states) have a number of policy options available to them during great power crises, not all of which involve following the 'rules' of the balance of power (Labs, 1992: 389–90). In his typology the options are: non-alignment, bandwagon, balance and not fight, ally with other weak states, balance and fight, fight alone. Only two of the options fall into the balance of power category. The order in which the options are listed reflects the order of preference of states, at least in the view of most scholars. Significantly, even a limited commitment to balance emerges as only the third choice.

Labs himself does not find this argument convincing and challenges the evidence from the diplomatic history of the 1930s, on which it is based. The critical factor, in his view, is the presence or not of a promise by a great power to come to the support of the weak state, should it follow balancing 'rules' and oppose the aggressor. 'Weak states need the hope that the aggressor will ultimately be defeated to balance against it. That the weak state might suffer considerable destruction in the meantime rarely affects this inclination to balance' (Labs, 1992: 393). Labs modifies the order of preference as: non-alignment, balance with a protecting great power without fighting, balance with a protecting great power and fight, seek an alliance of weak states, fight alone, bandwagon.

In this significant re-ordering, the two balance of power strategies have advanced to second and third preference, while the strategy most antithetical to balance of power politics, bandwagoning, is relegated to least attractive option. Labs supports his argument with a detailed case study of the international politics of German unification between 1860 and 1866.

What is clear from these arguments is that the adoption of balance of power policies is by no means an automatic response by states. International relations theorists have tended to identify broad patterns of behaviour as evidence for the existence of balance of power systems. There is clearly a need for more detailed research in this regard. More exhaustive historical studies of particular eras might well reveal that the balance of power concept served an ideological function in justifying policy, rather than a prescriptive purpose in mandating it. Much might depend on what exactly statesmen conceived of when they spoke of the 'balance of power' or 'international equilibrium'.

THE 'ASSOCIATIVE' BALANCE OF POWER

In Chapter 1 it was suggested that the intellectual tradition in which balance of power thinking has historically been embedded is that of power politics, or 'realism'. This is certainly the prism through which it is usually analysed. However, this traditional interpretation is not without its critics. In particular, Richard Little and Paul Schroeder have proposed that the historical record provides clear evidence that the 'power-politics' interpretation of the balance of power is not the only one.

Schroeder's arguments have already been looked at in the context of the nineteenth-century balance of power system. His critique rests upon a distinction between 'balance of power' and 'political equilibrium' and the argument that the nineteenth-century system 'depended mainly not on balancing power against other power but on balancing other vital factors in international politics, and that pure balance of power politics destroys political equilibrium rather than sustains it' (Schroeder, 1989: 135).

Little's critique identifies two competing traditions within balance of power thought and argues that, since the emergence of international relations as an academic discipline in the twentieth century, there has been a consistent and misleading tendency to identify and discuss only one of the conceptions. Little calls these two conceptions the 'adversarial' and 'associative' balance of power traditions.

The former 'depicts political actors in competitive and self-interested terms', while the latter 'assumes that in a balance of power political actors can be cooperative and pursue policies which embrace the interests of others' (Little, 1989: 88).

The adversarial balance concept is rooted in realist assumptions about the nature of international relations. It embodies a coercive conception of power and an image of international politics which reflects the implications of the 'security dilemma', with states seeking to expand by force and fearing the similar tendencies in their neighbours. The emphasis is on the accumulation and use of military force, an atmosphere of tension and uncertainty and a constant struggle to survive and expand. It is the 'Hobbesian', Anglo-Saxon version of balance of power theory noted in earlier chapters.

Little contrasts this with the 'associative' balance of power. This conception, it is argued, originally emerged in the domestic state context and is founded upon a 'communal' or cooperative conception of power. In this perspective to have power is to be 'empowered by a certain number of people to act in their name' (Arendt, 1970: 44). Little points out that neither classical nor modern thinkers have emphasised this conception of power in respect to international relations. Yet statesmen who have conceived of the balance of power as a system have frequently employed a conception of the international equilibrium which implies an associative rather than an adversarial balance of power. Little cites as historical examples the policies of Metternich and Castlereagh in the first half of the nineteenth century. In this conception, a balance of power does not arise as an incidental by-product of the selfish power-seeking policies of individual states. Rather, it is the result of a deliberately fostered equilibrium, based upon a just settlement which recognises and attempts to harmonise the interest of all states, so that they have an interest in supporting and defending the new *status quo*. Thus, for the Austrian statesman Metternich, 'The establishment of international relations on the basis of reciprocity under the guarantee of respect for acquired rights ... constitutes in our time the essence of politics' (Little, 1989: 95), and it was this that produced an equitable and effective balance of power. This is a conception which is much closer to the European interpretation that emerged at the end of the seventeenth century as one of the responses to the 'general crisis' of that century and which has been referred to as the 'Grotian' conception in this study, because it accords with Grotius' ideas regarding the nature of international society. Thus, to produce a stable balance, it is necessary not only to oppose the hegemonic

drives of expansionist states and pursue settlements that do not create future threats, but to do so in ways that create or maintain an overall acceptance of the *status quo*. These are demanding requirements which will not always be easy to reconcile. However, if successfully pursued, they allow for the international system to be conceived of as an international society, rather than as an international anarchy.

CONCLUSIONS

According to Stubbs (1886: 225), balance of power is 'the principle which gives unity to the political plot of European history'. However, in seeing the balance of power idea in this way it is important to bear in mind three things. Firstly, that the balance of power has not been the only organising principle in international relations and its currency should not delude us into thinking that it has been. Secondly, even in periods when balance of power policies have been generally recommended or approved of, not all states have chosen to allow them to determine their foreign policies. Thirdly, even when the 'balance' has been the publicly proclaimed objective of statesmen, caution is required since the phrase can cover so many different meanings. It is going too far to argue that 'where balance of power is not a meaningless mantra, it is used as a substitute for something else' (Gellman, 1989: 178), but none the less it is important to identify the particular sense in which a balance of power is being sought and to recognise that even with that caveat 'it follows that balance of power doctrine can account for only part of the world's political behaviour' (Sterling, 1972: 70).