

SEVENTH EDITION

**POLITICS AMONG NATIONS**  
*The Struggle for  
Power and Peace*

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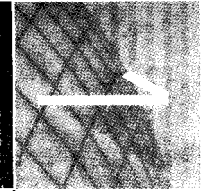
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# A Realist Theory of International Politics

This book purports to present a theory of international politics. The test by which such a theory must be judged is not a priori and abstract but empirical and pragmatic. The theory, in other words, must be judged not by some preconceived abstract principle or concept unrelated to reality, but by its purpose: to bring order and meaning to a mass of phenomena that without it would remain disconnected and unintelligible. It must meet a dual test, an empirical and a logical one: do the facts as they actually are lend themselves to the interpretation the theory has put upon them, and do the conclusions at which the theory arrives follow with logical necessity from its premises? In short, is the theory consistent with the facts and within itself?

The issue this theory raises concerns the nature of all politics. The history of modern political thought is the story of a contest between two schools that differ fundamentally in their conceptions of the nature of man, society, and politics. One believes that a rational and moral political order, derived from universally valid abstract principles, can be achieved here and now. It assumes the essential goodness and infinite malleability of human nature, and blames the failure of the social order to measure up to the rational standards on lack of knowledge and understanding, obsolescent social institutions, or the depravity of certain isolated individuals or groups. It trusts in education, reform, and the sporadic use of force to remedy these defects.

The other school believes that the world, imperfect as it is from the rational point of view, is the result of forces inherent in human nature. To improve the world one must work with those forces, not against them. This being inherently a world of opposing interests and of conflict among them, moral principles can never be fully realized 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 historical precedent rather than to abstract principles and aims at the realization of the lesser evil rather than of the absolute good.

This theoretical concern with human nature as it actually is, and with the historical processes as they actually take place, has earned for the theory presented here the name of *realism*. What are the tenets of political realism? No systematic exposition of the philosophy of political realism can be attempted here; it will suffice to single out six fundamental principles, which have frequently been misunderstood.

## SIX PRINCIPLES OF POLITICAL REALISM

**1.** Political realism believes that politics, like society in general, is governed by objective laws that have their roots in human nature. In order to improve society it is first necessary to understand the laws by which society lives. The operation of these laws being impervious to our preferences, men will challenge them only at the risk of failure.

Realism, believing as it does in the objectivity of the laws of politics, must also believe in the possibility of developing a rational theory that reflects, however imperfectly and one-sidedly, these objective laws. It believes also, then, in the possibility of distinguishing in politics between truth and opinion—between what is true objectively and rationally, supported by evidence and illuminated by reason, and what is only a subjective judgment, divorced from the facts as they are and informed by prejudice and wishful thinking.

Human nature, in which the laws of politics have their roots, has not changed since the classical philosophies of China, India, and Greece endeavored to discover these laws. Hence, novelty is not necessarily a virtue in political theory, nor is old age a defect. The fact that a theory of politics, if there be such a theory, has never been heard of before tends to create a presumption against, rather than in favor of, its soundness. Conversely, 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. A theory of politics must be subjected to the dual test of reason and experience. To dismiss such a theory because it had its flowering in centuries past is to present not a rational argument but a modernistic prejudice that takes for granted the superiority of the present over the past. To dispose of the revival of such a theory as a “fashion” or “fad” is tantamount to assuming that in matters political we can have opinions but no truths.

For realism, theory consists in ascertaining facts and giving them meaning through reason. It assumes that the character of a foreign policy can be ascertained only through the examination of the political acts performed and of the foreseeable consequences of these acts. Thus we can find out what statesmen have actually done, and from the foreseeable consequences of their acts we can surmise what their objectives might have been.

Yet examination of the facts is not enough. To give meaning to the factual raw material of foreign policy, we must approach political reality with a kind of rational outline, a map that suggests to us the possible meanings of foreign policy.

In other words, we put ourselves in the position of a statesman who must meet a certain problem of foreign policy under certain circumstances, and we ask ourselves what the rational alternatives are from which a statesman may choose who must meet this problem under these circumstances (presuming always that he acts in a rational manner), and which of these rational alternatives this particular statesman, acting under these circumstances, is likely to choose. It is the testing of this rational hypothesis against the actual facts and their consequences that gives theoretical meaning to the facts of international politics.

**2.** The main signpost that helps political realism to find its way through the landscape of international politics is the concept of interest defined in terms of power. This concept provides the link between reason trying to understand international politics and the facts to be understood. It sets politics as an autonomous sphere of action and understanding apart from other spheres, such as economics (understood in terms of interest defined as wealth), ethics, aesthetics, or religion. Without such a concept a theory of politics, international or domestic, would be altogether impossible, for without it we could not distinguish between political and nonpolitical facts, nor could we bring at least a measure of systemic order to the political sphere.

We assume that statesmen think and act in terms of interest defined as power, and the evidence of history bears that assumption out. That assumption allows us to retrace and anticipate, as it were, the steps a statesman—past, present, or future—has taken or will take on the political scene. We look over his shoulder when he writes his dispatches; we listen in on his conversations with other statesmen; we read and anticipate his very thoughts. Thinking in terms of interest defined as power, we think as he does, and as disinterested observers we understand his thoughts and actions perhaps better than he, the actor on the political scene, does himself.

The concept of interest defined as power imposes intellectual discipline upon the observer, infuses rational order into the subject matter of politics, and thus makes the theoretical understanding of politics possible. On the side of the actor, it provides for rational discipline in action and creates that astounding continuity in foreign policy which makes American, British, or Russian foreign policy appear as an intelligible, rational continuum, by and large consistent within itself, regardless of the different motives, preferences, and intellectual and moral qualities of successive statesmen. A realist theory of international politics, then, will guard against two popular fallacies: the concern with motives and the concern with ideological preferences.

To search for the clue to foreign policy exclusively in the motives of statesmen is both futile and deceptive. It is futile because motives are the most illusive of psychological data, distorted as they are, frequently beyond recognition, by the interests and emotions of actor and observer alike. Do we really know what our own motives are? And what do we know of the motives of others?

Yet even if we had access to the real motives of statesmen, that knowledge would help us little in understanding foreign policies and might well lead us astray. It is true that the knowledge of the statesman's motives may give us one

among many clues as to what the direction of his foreign policy might be. It cannot give us, however, the one clue by which to predict his foreign policies. History shows no exact and necessary correlation between the quality of motives and the quality of foreign policy. This is true in both moral and political terms.

We cannot conclude from the good intentions of a statesman that his foreign policies will be either morally praiseworthy or politically successful. Judging his motives, we can say that he will not intentionally pursue policies that are morally wrong, but we can say nothing about the probability of their success. If we want to know the moral and political qualities of his actions, we must know them, not his motives. How often have statesmen been motivated by the desire to improve the world and ended by making it worse? And how often have they sought one goal, and ended by achieving something they neither expected nor desired?

Neville Chamberlain's politics of appeasement were, as far as we can judge, inspired by good motives; he was probably less motivated by considerations of personal power than were many other British prime ministers, and he sought to preserve peace and to assure the happiness of all concerned. Yet his policies helped to make the Second World War inevitable and to bring untold miseries to millions of people. Sir Winston Churchill's motives, on the other hand, were much less universal in scope and much more narrowly directed toward personal and national power, yet the foreign policies that sprang from these inferior motives were certainly superior in moral and political quality to those pursued by his predecessor. Judged by his motives, Robespierre was one of the most virtuous men who ever lived. Yet it was the utopian radicalism of that very virtue that made him kill those less virtuous than himself, brought him to the scaffold, and destroyed the revolution of which he was a leader.

Good motives give assurance against deliberately bad policies; they do not guarantee the moral goodness and political success of the policies they inspire. What is important to know, if one wants to understand foreign policy, is not primarily the motives of a statesman but his intellectual ability to comprehend the essentials of foreign policy, as well as his political ability to translate what he has comprehended into successful political action. It follows that, while ethics in the abstract judges the moral qualities of motives, political theory must judge the political qualities of intellect, will, and action.

A realist theory of international politics will also avoid the other popular fallacy of equating the foreign policies of a statesman with his philosophic or political sympathies, and of deducing the former from the latter. Statesmen, especially under contemporary conditions, may well make a habit of presenting their foreign policies in terms of their philosophic and political sympathies in order to gain popular support for them. Yet they will distinguish with Lincoln between their "official duty," which is to think and act in terms of the national interest, and their "personal wish," which is to see their own moral values and political principles realized throughout the world. Political realism does not require, nor does it condone, indifference to political ideals and moral principles, but it requires indeed a sharp distinction between the desirable and the possible—between what is desirable everywhere and at all times and what is possible under the concrete circumstances of time and place.

It stands to reason that not all foreign policies have always followed so rational, objective, and unemotional a course. The contingent elements of personality, prejudice, and subjective preference, and of all the weaknesses of intellect and will that flesh is heir to, are bound to deflect foreign policies from their rational course. Especially where foreign policy is conducted under the conditions of democratic control, the need to marshal popular emotions to the support of foreign policy cannot fail to impair the rationality of foreign policy itself. Yet a theory of foreign policy that aims at rationality must for the time being, as it were, abstract from these irrational elements and seek to paint a picture of foreign policy that presents the rational essence to be found in experience, without the contingent deviations from rationality that are also found in experience.

Deviations from rationality that are not the result of the personal whim or the personal psychopathology of the policymaker may appear contingent only from the vantage point of rationality but may themselves be elements in a coherent system of irrationality. The possibility of constructing, as it were, a counter-theory of irrational politics is worth exploring.

When one reflects upon the development of American thinking on foreign policy, one is struck by the persistence of mistaken attitudes that have survived—under whatever guises—both intellectual argument and political experience. Once that wonder, in true Aristotelian fashion, has been transformed into the quest for rational understanding, the quest yields a conclusion both comforting and disturbing: we are here in the presence of intellectual defects shared by all of us in different ways and degrees. Together they provide the outline of a kind of pathology of international politics. When the human mind approaches reality with the purpose of taking action, of which the political encounter is one of the outstanding instances, it is often led astray by any of four common mental phenomena: residues of formerly adequate modes of thought and action now rendered obsolete by a new social reality; demonological interpretations of reality that substitute a fictitious reality—peopled by evil persons rather than seemingly intractable issues—for the actual one; refusal to come to terms with a threatening state of affairs by denying it through illusory verbalization; or reliance upon the infinite malleability of a seemingly obstreperous reality.

Man responds to social situations with repetitive patterns. The same situation, recognized in its identity with previous situations, evokes the same response. The mind, as it were, holds in readiness a number of patterns appropriate for different situations; it then requires only the identification of a particular case to apply to it the preformed pattern appropriate to it. Thus the human mind follows the principle of economy of effort, obviating an examination *de novo* of each individual situation and the pattern of thought and action appropriate to it. Yet when matters are subject to dynamic change, traditional patterns are no longer appropriate; they must be replaced by new ones reflecting such change. Otherwise a gap will open between traditional patterns and new realities, and thought and action will be misguided.

On the international plane it is no exaggeration to say that the very structure of international relations—as reflected in political institutions, diplomatic procedures,

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On the international plane it is no exaggeration to say that the very structure of international relations—as reflected in political institutions, diplomatic procedures,

and legal arrangements—has tended to become at variance with, and in large measure irrelevant to, the reality of international politics. While the former assumes the “sovereign equality” of all nations, the latter is dominated by an extreme inequality of nations, two of which are called superpowers because they hold in their hands the unprecedented power of total destruction, and many of which are called “ministrates” because their power is minuscule even compared with that of the traditional nation-states. It is this contrast and incompatibility between the reality of international politics and the concepts, institutions, and procedures designed to make intelligible and control the former that have caused, at least below the great-power level, the unmanageability of international relations, which borders on anarchy. International terrorism and the different government reactions to it, the involvement of foreign governments in the Lebanese civil war, the military operations of the United States in Southeast Asia, and the military intervention of the Soviet Union in Eastern Europe cannot be explained or justified by reference to traditional concepts, institutions, and procedures.

All these situations have one characteristic in common. The modern fact of interdependence requires a political order that takes that fact into account, while in reality the legal and institutional superstructure, harking back to the nineteenth century, assumes the existence of a multiplicity of self-sufficient, impenetrable, sovereign nation-states. These residues of an obsolescent legal and institutional order not only stand in the way of a rational transformation of international relations in light of the inequality of power and the interdependence of interests, but they also render precarious, if not impossible, more rational policies within the defective framework of such a system.

It is a characteristic of primitive thinking to personalize social problems. That tendency is particularly strong when the problem appears not to be susceptible to rational understanding and successful manipulation. When a particular person or group of persons is identified with the recalcitrant difficulty, that may seem to render the problem both intellectually accessible and susceptible to solution. Thus belief in Satan as the source of evil makes us “understand” the nature of evil by focusing the search for its origin and control upon a particular person whose physical existence we assume. The complexity of political conflict precludes such simple solutions. Natural catastrophes will not be prevented by burning witches; the threat of a powerful Germany to establish hegemony over Europe will not be averted by getting rid of a succession of German leaders. But by identifying the issue with certain persons over whom we have—or hope to have—control we reduce the problem, both intellectually and pragmatically, to manageable proportions. Once we have identified certain individuals and groups of individuals as the source of evil, we appear to have understood the causal nexus that leads from the individuals to the social problem; that apparent understanding suggests the apparent solution: eliminate the individuals “responsible” for it, and you have solved the problem.

Superstition still holds sway over our relations within society. The demonological pattern of thought and action has now been transferred to other fields of human action closed to the kind of rational enquiry and action that have driven

superstition from our relations with nature. As William Graham Sumner put it, “The amount of superstition is not much changed, but it now attaches to politics, not to religion.”<sup>1</sup> The numerous failures of the United States to recognize and respond to the polycentric nature of Communism is a prime example of this defect. The corollary of this indiscriminate opposition to Communism is the indiscriminate support of governments and movements that profess and practice anti-Communism. American policies in Asia and Latin America have derived from this simplistic position. The Vietnam War and our inability to come to terms with mainland China find here their rationale. So do the theory and practice of counterinsurgency, including large-scale assassinations under the Phoenix program in Vietnam and the actual or attempted assassinations of individual statesmen. Signs of a similar approach have been evident more recently in Central America.

The demonological approach to foreign policy strengthens another pathological tendency, which is the refusal to acknowledge and cope effectively with a threatening reality. The demonological approach has shifted our attention and concern toward the adherents of Communism—individuals at home and abroad, political movements, foreign governments—and away from the real threat: the power of states, Communist or not. McCarthyism not only provided the most pervasive American example of the demonological approach but was also one of the most extreme examples of this kind of misjudgment: it substituted the largely illusory threat of domestic subversion for the real threat of Russian power.

Finally, it is part of this approach to politics to believe that no problems—however hopeless they may appear—are really insoluble, given well-meaning, well-financed, and competent efforts. I have tried elsewhere to lay bare the intellectual and historical roots of this belief;<sup>2</sup> here I limit myself to pointing out its persistent strength despite much experience to the contrary, such as the Vietnam War and the general decline of American power. This preference for economic solutions to political and military problems is powerfully reinforced by the interests of potential recipients of economic support, who prefer the obviously profitable transfer of economic advantages to painful and risky diplomatic bargaining.

The difference between international politics as it actually is and a rational theory derived from it is like the difference between a photograph and a painted portrait. The photograph shows everything that can be seen by the naked eye; the painted portrait does not show everything that can be seen by the naked eye, but it shows, or at least seeks to show, one thing that the naked eye cannot see: the human essence of the person portrayed.

Political realism contains not only a theoretical but also a normative element. It knows that political reality is replete with contingencies and systemic irrationalities, and points to the typical influences they exert upon foreign policy. Yet it shares with all social theory the need, for the sake of theoretical understanding, to stress the rational elements of political reality; for it is these rational elements

<sup>1</sup> “Moors of the Present and Future,” in *War and Other Essays* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1911), p. 159.

<sup>2</sup> *Schwartz, Man Versus Power Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1946).

that make reality intelligible for theory. Political realism presents the theoretical construct of a rational foreign policy that experience can never completely achieve.

At the same time political realism considers a rational foreign policy to be good foreign policy; for only a rational foreign policy minimizes risks and maximizes benefits and, hence, complies with both the moral precept of prudence and the political requirement of success. Political realism wants the photographic picture of the political world to resemble as much as possible its painted portrait. Aware of the inevitable gap between good—that is, rational—foreign policy and foreign policy as it actually is, political realism maintains not only that theory must focus upon the rational elements of political reality but also that foreign policy ought to be rational in view of its own moral and practical purposes.

Hence, it is no argument against the theory here presented that actual foreign policy does not or cannot live up to it. That argument misunderstands the intention of this book, which is to present not an indiscriminate description of political reality but a rational theory of international politics. 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.

3. Realism assumes that its key concept of interest defined as power is an objective category that is universally valid, but it does not endow that concept with a meaning that is fixed once and for all. The idea of interest is indeed of the essence of politics and is unaffected by the circumstances of time and place. Thucydides' statement, born of the experiences of ancient Greece, that "identity of interests is the surest of bonds whether between states or individuals" was taken up in the nineteenth century by Lord Salisbury's remark that "the only bond of union that endures" among nations is "the absence of all clashing interests." It was erected into a general principle of government by George Washington:

A small knowledge of human nature will convince us, that, with far the greatest part of mankind, interest is the governing principle; and that almost every man is more or less, under its influence. Motives of public virtue may for a time, or in particular instances, actuate men to the observance of a conduct purely disinterested; but they are not of themselves sufficient to produce preserving conformity to the refined dictates and obligations of social duty. Few men are capable of making a continual sacrifice of all views of private interest, or advantage, to the common good. It is vain to exclaim against the depravity of human nature on this account; the fact is so, the experience of every age and nation has proved it and we must in a great measure, change the constitution of man, before we can make it otherwise. No institution, not built on the presumptive truth of these maxims can succeed.<sup>3</sup>

It was echoed and enlarged upon in the twentieth century by Max Weber's observation:

Interests (material and ideal), not ideas, dominate directly the actions of men. Yet the "images of the world" created by these ideas have very often served as switches determining the tracks on which the dynamism of interests kept actions moving.<sup>4</sup>

Yet 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 formulated. The goals that might be pursued by nations in their foreign policy can run the whole gamut of objectives any nation has ever pursued or might possibly pursue.

The same observations apply to the concept of power. Its content and the manner of its use are determined by the political and cultural environment. Power may comprise anything that establishes and maintains the control of man over man. Thus power covers all social relationships that serve that end, from physical violence to the most subtle psychological ties by which one mind controls another. Power covers the domination of man by man, both when it is disciplined by moral ends and controlled by constitutional safeguards, as in Western democracies, and when it is that untamed and barbaric force that finds its laws in nothing but its own strength and its sole justification in its aggrandizement.

Political realism does not assume that the contemporary conditions under which foreign policy operates, with their extreme instability and the ever-present threat of large-scale violence, cannot be changed. The balance of power, for instance, is indeed a perennial element of all pluralistic societies, as the authors of *The Federalist* papers well knew; yet it is capable of operating, as it does in the United States, under the conditions of relative stability and peaceful conflict. If the factors that have given rise to these conditions can be duplicated on the international scene, similar conditions of stability and peace will then prevail there, as they have over long stretches of history among certain nations.

What is true of the general character of international relations is also true of the nation-state as the ultimate point of reference of contemporary foreign policy. While the realist indeed believes that interest is the perennial standard by which political action must be judged and directed, the contemporary connection between interest and the nation-state is a product of history and is therefore bound to disappear in the course of history. Nothing in the realist position militates against the assumption that the present division of the political world into nation-states will be replaced by larger units of a quite different character, more in keeping with the technical potentialities and the moral requirements of the contemporary world.

The realist parts company with other schools of thought before the all-important question of how the contemporary world is to be transformed. The realist is persuaded that this transformation can be achieved only through the workmanlike

<sup>3</sup>The *Writings of George Washington*, edited by John C. Fitzpatrick (Washington, DC: United States Printing Office, 1931-44), Vol. X, p. 363.

<sup>4</sup>Marianne Weber, *Max Weber* (Tübingen, J.C.B. Mohr, 1926), pp. 347-48. See also Max Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1920), p. 252.

manipulation of the perennial forces that have shaped the past as they will the future. The realist cannot be persuaded that we can bring about that transformation by confronting a political reality that has its own laws with an abstract ideal that refuses to take those laws into account.

4. Political realism is aware of the moral significance of political action. It is also aware of the ineluctable tension between the moral command and the requirements of successful political action. And it is unwilling to gloss over and obliterate that tension and thus to obfuscate both the moral and the political issues by making it appear as though the stark facts of politics were morally more satisfying than they actually are, and the moral law less exacting that it actually is.

Realism maintains that universal moral principles cannot be applied to the actions of states in their abstract universal formulation but that they must be filtered through the concrete circumstances of time and place. The individual may say for himself, "*Fiat justitia, pereat mundus* (Let justice be done, even if the world perish)," but the state has no right to say so in the name of those who are in its care. Both individual and state must judge political action by universal moral principles, such as that of liberty. Yet while the individual has a moral right to sacrifice himself in defense of such a moral principle, the state has no right to let its moral disapprobation of the infringement of liberty get in the way of successful political action, itself inspired by the moral principle of national survival. There can be no political morality without prudence, that is, without consideration of the political consequences of seemingly moral action. Realism, then, considers prudence—the weighing of the consequences of alternative political actions—to be the supreme virtue in politics. Ethics in the abstract judges action by its conformity with the moral law; political ethics judges action by its political consequences. Classical and medieval philosophy knew this, and so did Lincoln when he said:

I do the very best I know how, the very best I can, and I mean to keep doing so until the end. If the end brings me out all right, what is said against me won't amount to anything. If the end brings me out wrong, ten angels swearing I was right would make no difference.

5. Political realism refuses to identify the moral aspirations of a particular nation with the moral laws that govern the universe. As it distinguishes between truth and opinion, so it distinguishes between truth and idolatry. All nations are tempted—and few have been able to resist the temptation for long—to clothe their own particular aspirations and actions in the moral purposes of the universe. To know that nations are subject to the moral law is one thing, while to pretend to know with certainty what is good and evil in the relations among nations is quite another. There is a world of difference between the belief that all nations stand under the judgment of God, inscrutable to the human mind, and the blasphemous conviction that God is always on one's side and that what one wills oneself cannot fail to be willed by God also.

The lighthearted equation between a particular nationalism and the counsels of Providence is morally indefensible, for it is that very sin of pride against

which the Greek tragedians and the biblical prophets have warned rulers and ruled. That equation is also politically pernicious, for it is liable to engender the distortion in judgment that, in the blindness of crusading frenzy, destroys nations and civilizations—in the name of moral principle, ideal, or God himself.

On the other hand, it is exactly the concept of interest defined in terms of power that saves us from both that moral excess and that political folly. For if we look at all nations, our own included, as political entities pursuing their respective interests defined in terms of power, we are able to do justice to all of them. And we are able to do justice to all of them in a dual sense: we are able to judge other nations as we judge our own and, having judged them in this fashion, we are then capable of pursuing policies that respect the interests of other nations while protecting and promoting those of our own. Moderation in policy cannot fail to reflect the moderation of moral judgment.

6. The difference, then, between political realism and other schools of thought is real, and it is profound. However much of the theory of political realism may have been misunderstood and misinterpreted, there is no gainsaying its distinctive intellectual and moral attitude to matters political.

Intellectually, the political realist maintains the autonomy of the political sphere, as the economist, the lawyer, the moralist maintain theirs. He thinks in terms of interest defined as power, as the economist thinks in terms of interest defined as wealth; the lawyer, of the conformity of action with legal rules; the moralist, of the conformity of action with moral principles. The economist asks: "How does this policy affect the wealth of society, or a segment of it?" The lawyer asks: "Is this policy in accord with the rules of law?" The moralist asks: "Is this policy in accord with moral principles?" And the political realist asks: "How does this policy affect the power of the nation?" (Or of the federal government, of Congress, of the party, of agriculture, as the case may be.)

The political realist is not unaware of the existence and the relevance of standards of thought other than political ones. As political realist he cannot but subordinate these other standards to those of politics. And he parts company with other schools when they impose standards of thought appropriate to other spheres upon the political spheres. It is here that political realism takes issue with the "legalistic-moralistic approach" to international politics. That this issue is not, as has been contended, a mere figment of the imagination but goes to the very core of the controversy can be shown from many historical examples. Three will suffice to make the point.<sup>5</sup>

In 1939 the Soviet Union attacked Finland. This action confronted France and Great Britain with two issues, one legal, the other political. Did that action violate the Covenant of the League of Nations, and, if it did, what countermeasures

<sup>5</sup>See the other examples discussed in Hans J. Morgenthau, "Another 'Great Debate': The National Interest of the United States," *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. XLVI (December 1952), pp. 979 ff. See also Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics in the 20th Century*, Vol. 1, *The Decline of Democratic Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), pp. 79 ff, and abridged edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), pp. 204 ff.



should France and Great Britain take? The legal question could easily be answered in the affirmative, for obviously the Soviet Union had done what was prohibited by the Covenant. The answer to the political question depends, first, upon the manner in which the Russian action affected the interests of France and Great Britain; second, upon the existing distribution of power between France and Great Britain, on the one hand, and the Soviet Union and other potentially hostile nations, especially Germany, on the other; and, third, upon the influence that the countermeasures were likely to have upon the interests of France and Great Britain and the future distribution of power. France and Great Britain, as the leading members of the League of Nations, saw to it that the Soviet Union was expelled from the League, and they were prevented from joining Finland in the war against the Soviet Union only by Sweden's refusal to allow their troops to pass through Swedish territory on their way to Finland. If this refusal by Sweden had not saved them, France and Great Britain would shortly have found themselves at war with the Soviet Union and Germany at the same time.

The policy of France and Great Britain was a classic example of legalism in that they allowed the answer to the legal question, legitimate within its sphere, to determine their political actions. Instead of asking both questions, that of law and that of power, they asked only the question of law; and the answer they received could have no bearing on the issue that their very existence might have depended upon.

The second example illustrates the "moralistic approach" to international politics. It concerns the international status of the Communist government of China. The rise of that government confronted the Western world with two issues, one moral, the other political. Were the nature and policies of that government in accord with the moral principles of the Western world? Should the Western world deal with such a government? The answer to the first question could not fail to be in the negative. Yet it did not follow with necessity that the answer to the second question should also be in the negative. The standard of thought applied to the first—the moral—question was simply to test the nature and the policies of the Communist government of China by the principles of Western morality. On the other hand, the second—the political—question had to be subjected to the complicated test of the interests involved and the power available on either side, and of the bearing of one or the other course of action upon these interests and power. The application of this test could well have led to the conclusion that it would be wiser not to deal with the Communist government of China. To arrive at this conclusion by neglecting this test altogether and answering the political question in terms of the moral issue was indeed a classic example of the "moralistic approach" to international politics.

The third case illustrates strikingly the contrast between realism and the legalistic-moralistic approach to foreign policy. Great Britain, as one of the guarantors of the neutrality of Belgium, went to war with Germany in August 1914 because Germany had violated the neutrality of Belgium. The British action could be justified in either realistic or in legalistic-moralistic terms. That is to say, one could argue realistically that for centuries it had been axiomatic for British foreign policy

to prevent the control of the Low Countries by a hostile power. It was then not so much the violation of Belgium's neutrality per se as the hostile intentions of the violator that provided the rationale for British intervention. If the violator had been another nation but Germany, Great Britain might well have refrained from intervening. This is the position taken by Sir Edward Grey, British foreign secretary during that period. Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs Hardinge remarked to him in 1908: "If France violated Belgian neutrality in a war against Germany, it is doubtful whether England or Russia would move a finger to maintain Belgian neutrality, while if the neutrality of Belgium was violated by Germany, it is probable that the converse would be the case." Whereupon Sir Edward Grey replied: "This is to the point." Yet one could also take the legalistic and moralistic position that the violation of Belgium's neutrality per se, because of its legal and moral defects and regardless of the interests at stake and of the identity of the violator, justified British and, for that matter, American intervention. This was the position that Theodore Roosevelt took in his letter to Sir Edward Grey of January 22, 1915:

To me the crux of the situation has been Belgium. If England or France had acted toward Belgium as Germany has acted I should have opposed them, exactly as I now oppose Germany. I have emphatically approved your action as a model for what should be done by those who believe that treaties should be observed in good faith and that there is such a thing as international morality. I take this position as an American who is no more an Englishman than he is a German, who endeavors loyally to serve the interests of his own country, but who also endeavors to do what he can for justice and decency as regards mankind at large, and who therefore feels obliged to judge all other nations by their conduct on any given occasion.

This realist defense of the autonomy of the political sphere against its subversion by other modes of thought does not imply disregard for the existence and importance of these other modes of thought. It rather implies that each should be assigned its proper sphere and function. Political realism is based upon a pluralistic conception of human nature. Real man is a composite of "economic man," "political man," "moral man," "religious man," etc. A man who was nothing but "political man" would be a beast, for he would be completely lacking in moral restraints. A man who was nothing but "moral man" would be a fool, for he would be completely lacking in prudence. A man who was nothing but "religious man" would be a saint, for he would be completely lacking in worldly desires.

Recognizing that these different facets of human nature exist, political realism also recognizes that in order to understand one of them one has to deal with it on its own terms. That is to say, if I want to understand "religious man," I must for the time being abstract from the other aspects of human nature and deal with its religious aspect as if it were the only one. Furthermore, I must apply to the religious sphere the standards of thought appropriate to it, always remaining aware of the existence of other standards and their actual influence upon the religious qualities of man. What is true of this facet of human nature is true of all the others. No

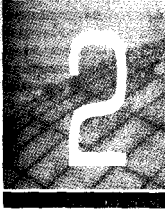
modern economist, for instance, would conceive of his science and its relations to other sciences of man in any other way. It is exactly through such a process of emancipation from other standards of thought, and the development of one appropriate to its subject matter, that economics has developed as an autonomous theory of the economic activities of man. To contribute to a similar development in the field of politics is indeed the purpose of political realism.

It is in the nature of things that a theory of politics that is based upon such principles will not meet with unanimous approval—nor does, for that matter, such a foreign policy. For theory and policy alike run counter to two trends in our culture that are not able to reconcile themselves to the assumptions and results of a rational, objective theory of politics. One of these trends disparages the role of power in society on grounds that stem from the experience and philosophy of the nineteenth century; we shall address ourselves to this tendency later in greater detail.<sup>6</sup> The other trend, opposed to the realist theory and practice of politics, stems from the very relationship that exists, and must exist, between the human mind and the political sphere. For reasons that we shall discuss later,<sup>7</sup> the human mind in its day-by-day operations cannot bear to look the truth of politics straight in the face. It must disguise, distort, belittle, and embellish the truth—the more so, the more the individual is actively involved in the processes of politics, and particularly in those of international politics. For only by deceiving himself about the nature of politics and the role he plays on the political scene is man able to live contentedly as a political animal with himself and his fellow men.

Thus it is inevitable that a theory that tries to understand international politics as it actually is and as it ought to be in view of its intrinsic nature, rather than as people would like to see it, must overcome a psychological resistance that most other branches of learning need not face. A book devoted to the theoretical understanding of international politics therefore requires a special explanation and justification.

<sup>6</sup>See pages 37 ff.

<sup>7</sup>See pages 101 ff.



## UNDERSTAI

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## The Balance of Power

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

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

### **SOCIAL EQUILIBRIUM**

#### **Balance of Power as Universal Concept**

The concept of “equilibrium” as a synonym for “balance” is commonly employed in many sciences—physics, biology, economics, sociology, and political science.

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<sup>1</sup>The term “balance of power” is used in the text with four different meanings: (1) as a policy aimed at a certain state of affairs, (2) as an actual state of affairs, (3) as an approximately equal distribution of power, or (4) as any distribution of power. Whenever the term is used without qualification, it refers to an actual state of affairs in which power is distributed among several nations with approximate equality. For the term referring to any distribution of power, see pages 222 ff.

It signifies stability within a system composed of a number of autonomous forces. Whenever the equilibrium is disturbed either by an outside force or by a change in one or the other elements composing the system, the system shows a tendency to reestablish either the original or a new equilibrium. Thus equilibrium exists in the human body. While the human body changes in the process of growth, the equilibrium persists as long as the changes occurring in the different organs of the body do not disturb the body's stability. This is especially so if the quantitative and qualitative changes in the different organs are proportionate to each other. When, however, the body suffers a wound or loss of one of its organs through outside interference, or experiences a malignant growth in or a pathological transformation of one of its organs, the equilibrium is disturbed, and the body tries to overcome the disturbance by reestablishing the equilibrium either on the same or a different level from the one that obtained before the disturbance occurred.<sup>2</sup>

The same concept of equilibrium is used in a social science, such as economics, with reference to the relations between the different elements of the economic system, for instance, between savings and investments, exports and imports, supply and demand, or costs and prices. Contemporary capitalism itself has been described as a system of "countervailing power."<sup>3</sup> It also applies to society as a whole. Thus we search for a proper balance between different geographical regions, such as the East and the West, and the North and the South; between different kinds of activities, such as agriculture and industry, heavy and light industries, big and small businesses, producers and consumers, and management and labor; and between different functional groups, such as city and country, the old, the middle-aged, and the young, the economic and the political sphere, and the middle classes and the upper and lower classes.

<sup>2</sup>Cf., for instance, the impressive analogy between the equilibrium in the human body and in society in Walter B. Cannon, *The Wisdom of the Body* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1932), pp. 293-94: "At the outset it is noteworthy that the body politic itself exhibits some indications of crude automatic stabilizing processes. In the previous chapter I expressed the postulate that a certain degree of constancy in a complex system is itself evidence that agencies are acting or are ready to act to maintain that constancy. And moreover, that when a system remains steady it does so because any tendency towards change is met by increased effectiveness of the factor or factors which resist the change. Many familiar facts prove that these statements are to some degree true for society even in its present unbalanced condition. A display of conservatism excites a radical revolt and that in turn is followed by a return to conservatism. Loose government and its consequences bring the reformers into power, but their tight reins soon provoke restiveness and the desire for release. The noble enthusiasts and sacrifices of war are succeeded by moral apathy and orgies of self-indulgence. Hardly any strong tendency in a nation continues to the stage of disaster; before that extreme is reached corrective forces arise which check the tendency and they commonly prevail to such an excessive degree as themselves to cause a reaction. A study of the nature of these social swings and their reversal might lead to valuable understanding and possibly to means of more narrowly limiting the disturbances. At this point, however, we merely note that the disturbances are roughly limited, and that this limitation suggests, perhaps, the early stages of social homeostasis." (Reprinted by permission of the publisher. Copyright 1932, 1939, by Walter B. Cannon.)

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

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

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

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

This policy of supplying, by opposite and rival interests, the defect of better motives, might be traced to the whole system of human affairs, private as well as public. We see it particularly displayed in all the subordinate distributions of power, where the constant aim is to divide and arrange the several offices in such a manner as that each may be a check on the other—that the private interests of every individual may be a sentinel over the public rights. These inventions of prudence cannot be less requisite in the distribution of the supreme powers of the state.

In the words of John Randolph, "You may cover whole skins of parchment with limitations, but power alone can limit power."<sup>4</sup>

### Balance of Power in Domestic Politics

The concept of equilibrium or balance has indeed found its most important application, outside the international field, in the sphere of domestic government

<sup>4</sup>Quoted after William Cabell Bruce, *John Randolph of Roanoke* (New York and London: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1922), Vol. II, p. 211.

and politics.<sup>5</sup> Parliamentary bodies have frequently developed within themselves a balance of power. A multiparty system lends itself particularly to such a development. Here two groups, each representing a minority of the legislative body, often oppose each other, and the formation of a majority depends upon the votes of a third group. The third group will tend to join the potentially or actually weaker of the two, thus imposing a check upon the stronger one. Even the two-party system of the United States Congress displayed the typical configuration of this checking-and-balancing process when, in the last years of Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration and during most of Truman's, the Southern Democrats constituted themselves a third party, voting on many issues with the Republican minority. They thus checked not only the Democratic majority in Congress but also the executive branch, which was also controlled by the Democratic party.<sup>6</sup>

It hardly needs to be pointed out that, while the balance of power is a universal social phenomenon, its functions and results are different in domestic and international politics. The balance of power operates in domestic politics within a relatively stable framework of an integrated society, kept together by a strong consensus and the normally unchallengeable power of a central government. On the international scene, where consensus is weak and a central authority does not exist, the stability of society and the freedom of its component parts depend to a much greater extent upon the operations of the balance of power. More concerning this will be said in Chapter 14.

Cf. also J. Allen Smith, *The Growth and Decline of Constitutional Government* (New York: Henry Holt, 1930), pp. 241, 242: "In the absence of any common and impartial agency to interpret international law and supervise international relations, every state is anxious not only to increase its own authority but to prevent, if possible, any increase in the authority of rival states. The instinct of self-preservation, in a world made up of independent nations, operates to make each desire power in order to secure itself against the danger of external aggression. The fact that no country alone is sufficiently strong to feel secure against any possible combination of opposing states makes necessary the formation of alliances and counteralliances through which each state seeks to ensure the needed support in case its safety is menaced from without. This is usually referred to as the struggle to maintain the balance of power. It is merely an application of the check and balance theory of the state to international politics. It is assumed, and rightly so, that if any state should acquire a predominant position in international affairs, it would be a distinct menace to the interests and well-being of the rest of the world. Power, even though it may have been acquired as a means of protection, becomes a menace to international peace as soon as the country possessing it comes to feel stronger than any possible foe. It is no less necessary to maintain the balance of power in international politics than it is to prevent some special interest from gaining the ascendancy in the state. But since this balance of power idea is based on the fear of attack and assumes that every nation should be prepared for war, it can not be regarded as in any real sense a guaranty of international peace." (Reprinted by permission of the publisher.) Cf. also *The Cambridge Modern History* (New York: Macmillan, 1908), Vol. V, p. 276.

<sup>5</sup>Cf. the illuminating discussion of the general problem in John Stuart Mill, *Considerations on Representative Government* (New York: Henry Holt, 1882), p. 142: "In a state of society thus composed, if the representative system could be made ideally perfect, and if it were possible to maintain it in that state, its organization must be such that these two classes, manual laborers and their affiliates on one side, employers of labor and their affiliates on the other, should be, in the arrangement of the representative system, equally balanced, each influencing about an equal number of votes in Parliament; since, assuming that the majority of each class, in any difference between them, would be mainly governed by their class interests, there would be a minority of each in whom the consideration would be subordinate to reason, justice, and the good of the whole; and this minority of either, joining with the whole of the other, would turn the scale against any demands of their own majority which were not such as ought to prevail." See also page 147 and, concerning the balance of power within federal states, pages 9 and 191.

The American government is the outstanding modern example of a governmental system whose stability is maintained by an equilibrium among its component parts. In the words of Lord Bryce:

The Constitution was awowedly created as an instrument of checks and balances. Each branch of the government was to restrain the others, and maintain the equipoise of the whole. The legislature was to balance the executive, and the judiciary both. The two houses of the legislature were to balance one another. The national government, taking all its branches together, was balanced against the State governments. As the equilibrium was placed under the protection of a document, unchangeable save by the people themselves, no one of the branches of the national government has been able to absorb or override the others . . . each branch maintains its independence and can, within certain limits, defy the others.

But there is among political bodies and offices (i.e. the persons who from time to time fill the same office) of necessity a constant strife, a struggle for existence similar to that which Mr. Darwin has shown to exist among plants and animals; and as in the case of plants and animals so also in the political sphere this struggle stimulates each body or office to exert its utmost force for its own preservation, and to develop its aptitudes in any direction where development is possible. Each branch of the American government has striven to extend its range and its powers; each has advanced in certain directions, but in others has been restrained by the equal or stronger pressure of other branches.<sup>7</sup>

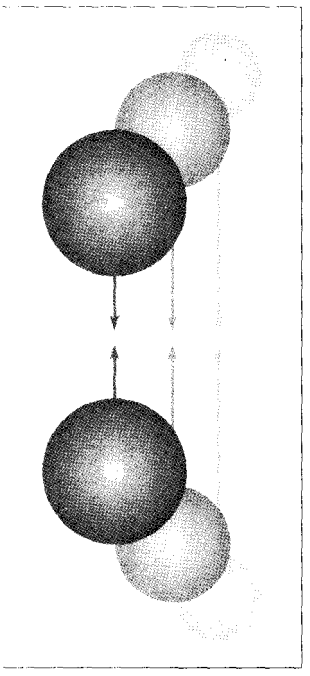
No. 51 of *The Federalist* has laid bare the power structure of this "dynamic equilibrium" or "moving parallelogram of force," as it was called by Charles A. Beard:<sup>8</sup> ". . . the defect must be supplied, by so contriving the interior structure of the government as that its several constitutional parts may, by their mutual relations, be the means of keeping each other in their proper places. . . . But the great security against a gradual concentration of the several powers in the same department, consists in giving to those who administer each department the necessary constitutional means and personal motives to resist the encroachment of others. . . . The provision for defense must in this, as in all other cases, be made commensurate to the danger of attack. Ambition must be made to counteract ambition. The interest of the man must be connected with the constitutional rights of the place. . . ." The aim of these constitutional arrangements is "to guard one part of the society against the injustices of the other part. Different interests necessarily exist in different classes of citizens. If a majority be reunited by a common interest, the rights of the minority will be insecure."

<sup>7</sup>*The American Commonwealth* (New York: Macmillan, 1891), Vol. 1, pp. 390-91.

<sup>8</sup>*The Republic* (New York: Viking Press, 1944), pp. 190-91.

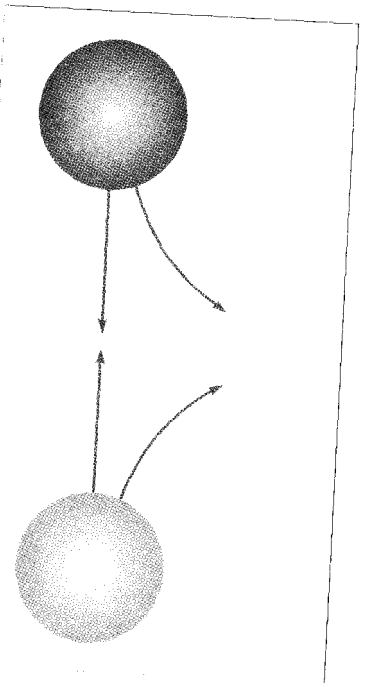
power. One of the two functions the balance of power is supposed to fulfill is stability in the power relations among nations; yet these relations are, as we have seen, by their very nature subject to continuous change. They are essentially unstable. Since the weights that determine the relative position of the scales have a tendency to change continuously by growing either heavier or lighter, whatever stability the balance of power may achieve must be precarious and subject to perpetual adjustments in conformity with intervening changes. The other function that a successful balance of power fulfills under these conditions is to insure the freedom of one nation from domination by the other.

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

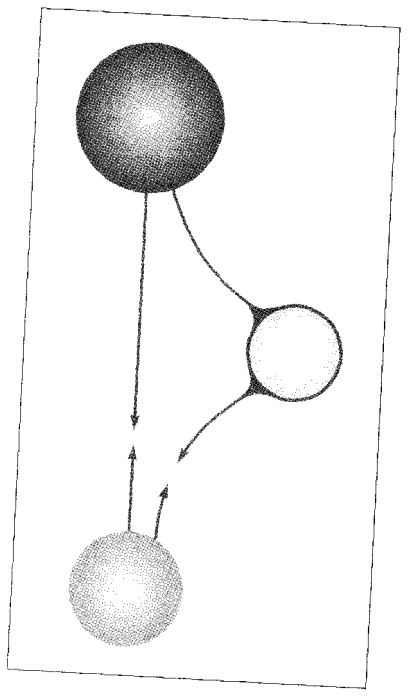


### The Pattern of Competition

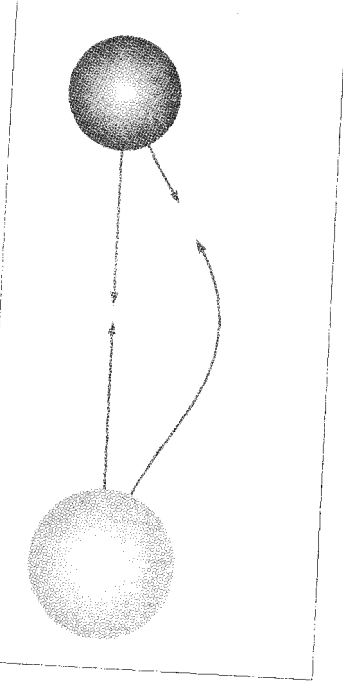
In the other pattern, the pattern of competition, the mechanics of the balance of power are identical with those discussed. The power of A necessary to dominate C in the face of B's opposition is balanced, if not outweighed, by B's power, while, in turn, B's power to gain dominion over C is balanced,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



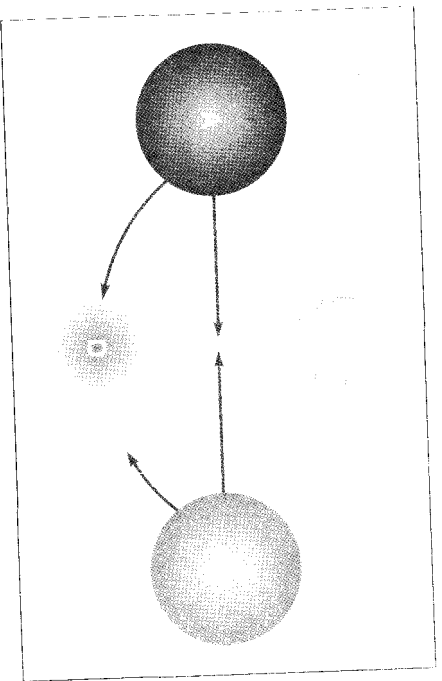
If these relations take a decisive turn in favor of the imperialistic nation—that is, A—the independence of C will at once be in jeopardy:



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



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



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

As long as those two princes [the king of Prussia and the German emperor], are at variance, so long the liberties of Germany are safe. But if ever they should so far understand one another as to be persuaded that they have a more direct and more certainly defined interest in a proportioned mutual aggrandizement than in a reciprocal reduction, that is, if they come to think that they are more likely to be enriched by a division of spoil than to be rendered secure by keeping to the old policy of preventing others from being spoiled by either of them, from that moment the liberties of Germany are no more.<sup>10</sup>

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

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

### **Korea and the Balance of Power**

All these different factors have brought to bear successively upon the fate of Korea. Because of its geographic location in the proximity of China, it has existed as an autonomous state for most of its long history by virtue of the control or intervention of its powerful neighbor. Whenever the power of China was not sufficient to protect the autonomy of Korea, another nation, generally Japan, would try to gain a foothold on the Korean peninsula. Since the first century B.C.E., the international status of Korea has by and large been determined either by Chinese supremacy or by rivalry between China and Japan.

The very unification of Korea in the seventh century was a result of Chinese intervention. From the thirteenth century to the decline of Chinese power in the nineteenth century, Korea stood in a relationship of subservience to China as its suzerain and accepted Chinese leadership in politics and culture. From the end of the sixteenth century, Japan, after it had invaded Korea without lasting success, opposed to the claim of China its own claim to control of the country. Japan was able to make good that claim as a result of its victory in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–95. Then Japan was challenged in its control of Korea by Russia, and from 1896 on the influence of Russia became dominant. The rivalry between Japan and Russia for control of Korea ended with the defeat of Russia in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–05. Japanese control of Korea, thus firmly established, was terminated with the defeat of Japan in the Second World War. From then on, the United States replaced Japan as a check upon Russian ambitions in Korea. China, by intervening in the Korean War, resumed its traditional interest in the control of Korea. Thus for more than two thousand years the fate of Korea has been a function either of the predominance of one nation controlling Korea or of a balance of power between two nations competing for that control.

<sup>10</sup> *Works* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1889), Vol. IV, p. 331.

# Different Methods of the Balance of Power

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

## DIVIDE AND RULE

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

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

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

## COMPENSATIONS

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

The three partitions of Poland in 1772, 1793, and 1795, which in a sense mark the end of the classic period of the balance of power, for reasons we shall discuss later,<sup>1</sup> reaffirm its essence by proceeding under the guidance of the principle of compensations. Since territorial acquisitions at the expense of Poland by any one of the interested nations—Austria, Prussia, and Russia—to the exclusion of the others would have upset the balance of power, the three nations agreed to divide Polish territory in such a way that the distribution of power among themselves would be approximately the same after the partitions as it had been before. In the treaty of 1772 between Austria and Russia, it was even stipulated that "the acquisitions . . . shall be completely equal, the portion of one cannot exceed the portion of the other."

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

In the latter part of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries the principle of compensations was again deliberately applied to the distribution of colonial territories and the delimitation of colonial or semicolonial spheres of influence. Africa, in particular, was during that period the object of numerous treaties delimiting spheres of influence for the major colonial powers. Thus the competition between France, Great Britain, and Italy for the domination of Ethiopia was provisionally resolved, after the model of the partitions of Poland, by the treaty of 1906, which divided the country into three spheres of influence

<sup>1</sup>See page 213.



for the purpose of establishing in that region a balance of power among the nations concerned. Similarly, the rivalry between Great Britain and Russia with respect to Iran led to the Anglo-Russian treaty of 1907, which established spheres of influence for the contracting parties and a neutral sphere under the exclusive domination of Iran. The compensation consists here not in the outright cession of territorial sovereignty but rather in the reservation, to the exclusive benefit of a particular nation, of certain territories for commercial exploitation, political and military penetration, and eventual establishment of sovereignty. In other words, the particular nation has the right, without having full title to the territory concerned, to operate within its sphere of influence without competition or opposition from another nation. The other nation, in turn, has the right to claim for its own sphere of influence the same abstinence on the part of the former.

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

## ARMAMENTS

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

It is in recognition of situations such as these that, since the end of the Napoleonic Wars, repeated attempts have been made to create a stable balance of power, if not to establish permanent peace, by means of the proportionate disarmament of competing nations. The technique of stabilizing the balance of power by means of a proportionate reduction of armaments is somewhat similar to the technique of territorial compensations. For both techniques require a quantitative evaluation of the influence that the arrangement is likely to exert on the respective power of the individual nations. The difficulties in making such a quantitative evaluation—in correlating, for instance, the military strength of the French army of 1932 with the military power represented by the

industrial potential of Germany—have greatly contributed to the failure of most attempts at creating a stable balance of power by means of disarmament. The only outstanding success of this kind was the Washington Naval Treaty of 1922, in which Great Britain, the United States, Japan, France, and Italy agreed to a proportionate reduction and limitation of naval armaments. Yet it must be noted that this treaty was part of an overall political and territorial settlement in the Pacific that sought to stabilize the power relations in that region on the foundation of Anglo-American predominance.<sup>2</sup>

## ALLIANCES

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

### The General Nature of Alliances

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

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

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

With regard to the continent of Europe, the United States and Great Britain have had one interest in common: the preservation of the European balance of

<sup>2</sup>The problem of disarmament will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 23.

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

Not every community of interests, calling for common policies and actions, also calls for legal codification in an explicit alliance. Yet, on the other hand, an alliance requires of necessity a community of interests for its foundation.<sup>3</sup> Under what conditions, then, does an existing community of interests require the explicit formulation of an alliance? What is it that an alliance adds to the existing community of interests?

An alliance adds precision, especially in the form of limitation, to an existing community of interests and to the general policies and concrete measures serving them.<sup>4</sup> The interests nations have in common are not typically so precise and limited as to geographic region, objective, and appropriate policies as has been the American and British interest in the preservation of the European balance of power. Nor are they so incapable of precision and limitation as concerns the prospective common enemy. For, while a typical alliance is directed against a specific nation or group of nations, the enemy of the Anglo-American community of interests could in the nature of things not be specified beforehand, since whoever threatens the European balance of power is the enemy. As Jefferson shifted his sympathies back and forth between Napoleon and Great Britain according to who seemed to threaten the balance of power at the time, so during the century following the Napoleonic Wars, Great Britain and the United States had to decide in the light of circumstances ever liable to change who posed at the moment the greatest threat to the balance of power. This blanket character of the enemy, determined not individually but by the function he performs, brings to mind a similar characteristic of collective security, which is directed against the abstractly designed aggressor, whoever he may be.

The typical interests that unite two nations against a third are both more definite as concerns the determination of the enemy and less precise as concerns the objectives to be sought and the policies to be pursued. In the last decades of the nineteenth century, France was opposed to Germany, and Russia was opposed to Austria, while Austria was allied with Germany against France and Russia. How could the interests of France and Russia be brought upon a common denominator, determining policy and guiding action? How could, in other

words, the *casus foederis* be defined so that both friend and foe would know what to expect in certain contingencies affecting their respective interest? It was for the treaty of alliance of 1894 to perform these functions. Had the objectives and policies of the Franco-Russian alliance of 1894 been as clear as were the objectives and policies of Anglo-American cooperation in Europe, no alliance treaty would have been necessary. Had the enemy been as indeterminate, no alliance treaty would have been feasible.

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

The Anglo-American alliance with regard to Europe provides the classic example of an alliance serving identical interests; the objective of one partner—the preservation of the balance of power in Europe—is also the objective of the other. The alliance between the United States and Pakistan is one of many contemporary instances of an alliance serving complementary interests. For the United States it serves the primary purpose of expanding the scope of the policy of containment; for Pakistan it serves primarily the purpose of increasing her political, military, and economic potential vis-à-vis her neighbors.

The pure type of an ideological alliance is presented by the Treaty of the Holy Alliance of 1815 and the Atlantic Charter of 1941. Both documents laid down general moral principles to which the signatories pledged their adherence, and general objectives whose realization they pledged themselves to seek. The Treaty of the Arab League of 1945 provides an example of an alliance, expressing, since the war against Israel of 1948, primarily ideological solidarity.

Much more typical is the addition of ideological commitments to material ones in one and the same treaty of alliance.<sup>5</sup> Thus the Three Emperors' League of 1873 provided for military assistance among Austria, Germany, and Russia in case of attack on any of them and, at the same time, emphasized the solidarity of the three monarchies against republican subversion. In our times the ideological commitment against Communist subversion, inserted in treaties of alliance, performs a similar function. The ideological factor also manifests itself in the official interpretation of an alliance, based upon material interests, in terms of an ideological

<sup>3</sup>See the quotations from Thucydides and Lord Salisbury, page 10.

<sup>4</sup>Glancing through the treaties of alliance of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, one is struck by the meticulous precision with which obligations to furnish troops, equipment, logistic support, food, money, and the like were defined.

<sup>5</sup>It ought to be pointed out that the Holy Alliance and the Atlantic Charter usually supplement material commitments contained in separate legal instruments.

solidarity transcending the limitations of material interests. The conception of the Anglo-American alliance, common before the British invasion of Egypt in 1956, as all-inclusive and world-embracing, based upon common culture, political institutions, and ideals, is a case in point.

As concerns the political effect of this ideological factor upon an alliance, three possibilities must be distinguished. A purely ideological alliance, unrelated to material interests, cannot but be stillborn; it is unable to determine policies or guide actions and misleads by presenting the appearance of political solidarity where there is none. The ideological factor, when it is superimposed upon an actual community of interests, can lend strength to the alliance by marshaling moral convictions and emotional preferences to its support. It can also weaken it by obscuring the nature and limits of the common interests that the alliance was supposed to make precise and by raising expectations, bound to be disappointed, for the extent of concerted policies and actions. For both these possibilities the Anglo-American alliance can again serve as an example.

The distribution of benefits within an alliance should ideally be one of complete mutuality; here the services performed by the parties for each other are commensurate with the benefits received. This ideal is more likely to be approximated in an alliance concluded among equals in power and serving identical interests; here the equal resources of all, responding to equal incentives, serve one single interest. The other extreme in the distribution of benefits is one-sidedness, a *societas leonina* in which one party receives the lion's share of benefits while the other bears the main bulk of burdens. Insofar as the object of such an alliance is the preservation of the territorial and political integrity of the receiving party, such an alliance is indistinguishable from a treaty of guarantee. Complementary interests lend themselves most easily to this kind of disproportion, since they are by definition different in substance and their comparative assessment is likely to be distorted by subjective interpretation. A marked superiority in power is bound to add weight to such interpretations.

The distribution of benefits is thus likely to reflect the distribution of power within an alliance, as is the determination of policies. A great power has a good chance to have its way with a weak ally as concerns benefits and policies, and it is for this reason that Machiavelli warned weak nations against making alliances with strong ones except by necessity.<sup>6</sup> The relationship between the United States and South Korea exemplifies this situation.

However, this correlation between benefits, policies, and power is by no means inevitable. A weak nation may well possess an asset that is of such great value for its strong ally as to be irreplaceable. Here the unique benefit the former is able to grant or withhold may give it within the alliance a status completely out of keeping with the actual distribution of material power. In recent history the relationships between the United States and Spain with regard to bases and between the United States and Saudi Arabia with regard to oil come to mind.

The misinterpretation of the Anglo-American alliance, mentioned before, also illustrates the confusion between limited and general alliances. In the age of total war, wartime alliances tend to be general in that they comprise the total interests of the contracting parties both with regard to the waging of the war and the peace settlement. On the other hand, peacetime alliances tend to be limited to a fraction of the total interests and objectives of the signatories. A nation will conclude a multitude of alliances with different nations that may overlap and contradict one another on specific points.

A typical alliance attempts to transform a small fraction of the total interests of the contracting parties into common policies and measures. Some of these interests are irrelevant to the purposes of the alliance, others support them, others diverge from them, and still others are incompatible with them. Thus a typical alliance is imbedded in a dynamic field of diverse interests and purposes. Whether and for how long it will be operative depends upon the strength of the interests underlying it as over against the strength of the other interests of the nations concerned. The value and the chances of an alliance, however limited in scope, must be considered in the context of the overall policies within which it is expected to operate.

General alliances are typically of temporary duration and most prevalent in wartime; for the overriding common interest in winning the war and securing through the peace settlement the interests for which the war was waged is bound to yield, once victory is won and the peace treaties are signed, to the traditionally separate and frequently incompatible interests of the individual nations. On the other hand, there exists a correlation between the permanency of an alliance and the limited character of the interests it serves; for only such a specific, limited interest is likely to last long enough to provide the foundation for a durable alliance.<sup>7</sup> The alliance between Great Britain and Portugal, concluded in 1703, has survived the centuries because Portugal's interest in the protection of her ports by the British fleet and the British interest in the control of Atlantic approaches to Portugal have endured. Yet it can be stated as a general historical observation that, while alliance treaties have frequently assumed permanent validity by being concluded "in perpetuity" or for periods of ten or twenty years, they could not have been more durable than the generally precarious and fleeting configurations of common interests that they were intended to serve. As a rule, they have been short-lived.

The dependence of alliances upon the underlying community of interests also accounts for the distinction between operative and inoperative alliances. For an alliance to be operative—that is, able to coordinate the general policies and concrete measures of its members—those members must agree not only on general objectives but on policies and measures as well. Many alliances have remained scraps of paper because no such agreement was forthcoming, and it was not forthcoming because the community of interests did not extend beyond general objectives

<sup>7</sup>This correlation, however, cannot be reversed. Especially in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, limited alliances were frequently concluded *ad hoc*—that is, to counter an attack, to engage in one, or to embark upon a particular expedition. With the passing of the specific occasion in view of which the alliance was concluded, the alliance itself lost its object and came to an end.

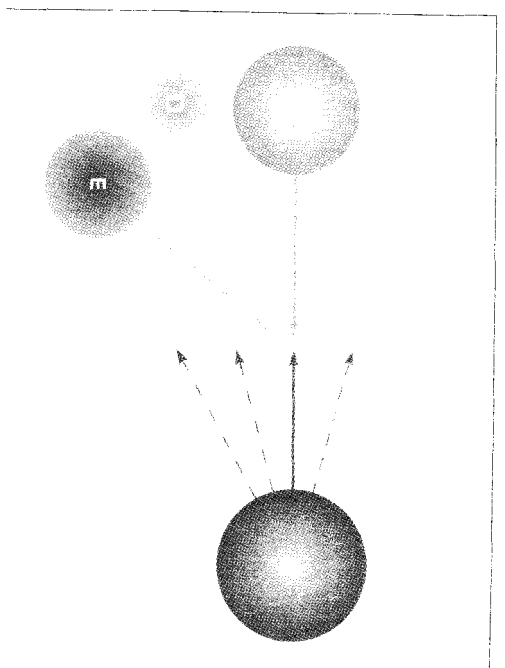
to concrete policies and measures. The classic case of an inoperative alliance is that of the United States and France, made inoperative by Washington's Neutrality Proclamation of 1793 after the War of the First Coalition had broken out between France and the monarchies of Europe. Hamilton justified that proclamation with an argument of general applicability: "There would be no proportion between the mischiefs and perils to which the United States would expose themselves, by embarking in the war, and the benefit which the nature of their stipulation aims at securing to France, or that which it would be in their power actually to render her by becoming a party." The Franco-Russian alliances of 1935 and 1944 and the Anglo-Russian alliance of 1942 are other cases in point. The legal validity of a treaty of alliance and its propagandistic invocation can easily deceive the observer about its actual operational value. The correct assessment of this value requires examination of the concrete policies and measures that the contracting parties have taken in implementation of the alliance.

These considerations are particularly relevant for alliances between a nuclear power (A) and a nonnuclear power (B), directed against another nuclear power (C). Will A risk nuclear destruction at the hands of C in order to honor the alliance with B? The extremity of the risk involved casts doubt upon the operational quality of such an alliance. This doubt, first explicitly raised by de Gaulle, has weakened the alliances between the United States and some of its major allies.

### Alliances vs. World Domination

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

The Carthaginians, being shut in on all sides, were obliged to resort to an appeal to the states in alliance with them. Hiero during the whole of the present war had been most prompt in meeting their requests, and was now more complaisant than ever, being convinced that it was in his own interest for securing both its Sicilian dominions and his friendship with the Romans, that Carthage should be preserved, and that the stronger Power should not be able to attain its ultimate object entirely without effort. In this he reasoned very wisely and sensibly, for such matters should never be neglected, and we should never contribute to the attainment by one state of a power so preponderant, that none dare dispute with it even for their acknowledged rights.<sup>8</sup>



In modern times, Francis Bacon was, after the Florentine statesmen and historians Rucellai and Guicciardini, the first to recognize the essence of the balance of power by way of alliances. In his essay *Of Empire* he says:

First, for their neighbors, there can no general rule be given (the occasions are so variable), save one which ever holdeth—which is, that princes do keep due sentinel, that none of their neighbors do overgrow so (by increase of territory, by embracing of trade, by approaches, or the like,) as they become more able to annoy them than they were. . . . During that triumvirate of kings, King Henry VIII of England, Francis I, king of France, and Charles V, emperor, there was such a watch kept that none of the three could win a palm of ground, but the other two would straightways balance it, either by confederation, or, if need were, by a war, and would not in any wise take peace at interest; and the like was done by that League (which Guicciardine saith was the security of Italy,) made between Ferdinando, kind of Naples, Lorenzius Medices, and Ludovicus Sforza, potentates, the one of Florence, the other of Milan.

The alliances France I concluded with Henry VIII and the Turks in order to prevent Charles V of Hapsburg from stabilizing and expanding his empire are the first modern example on a grand scale of the balance of power operating between an alliance and one nation intent upon establishing a universal monarchy. In the second half of the seventeenth century, Louis XIV of France took over the role of the Hapsburgs and called forth a similar reaction among the European nations. Alliances were formed around England and the Netherlands with the purpose of protecting the European nations from French domination and establishing a new balance of power between France and the rest of Europe.

The wars against the France of 1789 and against Napoleon show the same configuration of one preponderant nation aiming at world domination and

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

### Alliances vs. Counteralliances

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

To mention only a few of the more important examples: The coalitions that fought the Thirty Years' War under the leadership of France and Sweden, on the one hand, and of Austria, on the other, sought to promote the imperialistic ambitions, especially of Sweden and Austria, and, at the same time, to keep the ambitions of the other side in check. The several treaties settling the affairs of Europe after the Thirty Years' War tried to establish a balance of power serving the latter end. The many coalition wars that filled the period between the Treaty of Utrecht of 1713 and the first partition of Poland of 1772 all attempted to maintain the balance that the Treaty of Utrecht had established and that the decline of Swedish power and the rise of Prussian, Russian, and British strength tended to disturb. The frequent changes in the alignments, even while war was in progress, have startled the historians and have made the eighteenth century appear to be particularly unprincipled and devoid of moral consideration. It was against that kind of foreign policy that Washington's Farewell Address warned the American people.

Yet the period in which that foreign policy flourished was the golden age of the balance of power in theory as well as in practice. It was during that period that most of the literature on the balance of power was published and that the princes

of Europe looked to the balance of power as the supreme principle to guide their conduct in foreign affairs. As Frederick the Great wrote:

It is easy to see that the political body of Europe finds itself in a violent condition: it has, so to speak, lost its equilibrium and is in a state where it cannot remain for long without risking much. It is with it as it is with the human body which subsists only through the mixture of equal quantities of acids and alkalis: when either of the two substances predominates, the body resents it and its health is considerably affected. And when this substance increases still more, it can cause the total destruction of the machine. Thus when the policy and the prudence of the princes of Europe lose sight of the maintenance of a just balance among the dominant powers, the constitution of the whole body politic resents it: violence is found on one side, weakness on the other; in one, the desire to invade everything, in the other impossibility to prevent it; the most powerful imposes laws, the weakest is compelled to subscribe to them; finally, everything concurs in augmenting the disorder and the confusion; the most powerful, like an impetuous torrent, overflows its banks, carries everything with it, and exposes this unfortunate body to the most disastrous revolutions.<sup>9</sup>

It is true that the princes allowed themselves to be guided by the balance of power in order to further their own interests. By doing so, it was inevitable that they would change sides, desert old alliances, and form new ones whenever it seemed to them that the balance of power had been disturbed and that a realignment of forces was needed to restore it. In that period foreign policy was indeed a sport of kings, not to be taken more seriously than games and gambles, played for strictly limited stakes, and utterly devoid of transcendent principles of any kind. Since such was the nature of international politics, what looks in retrospect like treachery and immorality was then little more than an elegant maneuver, a daring piece of strategy, or a finely contrived tactical movement, all executed according to the rules of the game, which all players recognized as binding. The balance of power of that period was amoral rather than immoral. The technical rules of the art of politics were its only standard. Its flexibility, which was its peculiar merit from the technical point of view, was the result of imperviousness to moral considerations, such as good faith and loyalty, a moral deficiency that to us seems deserving of reproach.

From the beginning of the modern state system at the turn of the fifteenth century to the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815, European nations were the active elements in the balance of power. Turkey was the one notable exception. Alliances and counteralliances were formed in order to maintain the balance or to restore it. The century from 1815 to the outbreak of the First World War saw the gradual extension of the European balance of power into a worldwide system. One might say that this epoch started with President Monroe's message to Congress in 1823, stating what

<sup>9</sup>Frederick the Great, "Considerations on the Present State of the Political Body of Europe," *Œuvres de Frédéric le Grand*, (Berlin: Rudolph Decker, 1848), Vol. VIII, p. 24. I have supplied the translation from the French.

is known as the Monroe Doctrine. By declaring the mutual political independence of Europe and the Western Hemisphere and thus dividing the world, as it were, into two political systems, Monroe laid the groundwork for the subsequent transformation of the European into a worldwide balance-of-power system.

This transformation was for the first time clearly envisaged and formulated in the speech George Canning made as British foreign secretary to the House of Commons on December 12, 1826. Canning had been criticized for not having gone to war with France in order to restore the balance of power that had been disturbed by the French invasion of Spain. In order to disarm his critics, he formulated a new theory of the balance of power. Through the instrumentality of British recognition of their independence, he included the newly freed Latin American republics as active elements in the balance. He reasoned thus:

But were there no other means than war for restoring the balance of power?—Is the balance of power a fixed and unalterable standard? Or is it not a standard perpetually varying, as civilization advances, and as new nations spring up, and take their place among established political communities? The balance of power a century and a half ago was to be adjusted between France and Spain, the Netherlands, Austria, and England. Some years after, Russia assumed her high station in European politics. Some years after that again, Prussia became not only a substantive, but a preponderating monarchy.—Thus, while the balance of power continued in principle the same, the means of adjusting it became more varied and enlarged. They became enlarged, in proportion to the increased number of considerable states—in proportion, I may say, to the number of weights which might be shifted into the one or the other scale. . . . Was there no other mode of resistance, than by a direct attack upon France—or by a war to be undertaken on the soil of Spain? What, if the possession of Spain might be rendered harmless in rival hands—harmless as regarded us—and valueless to the possessors? Might not compensation for disparagement be obtained . . . by means better adapted to the present time? If France occupied Spain, was it necessary, in order to avoid the consequences of that occupation—that we should blockade Cadiz? No. I looked another way—I saw materials for compensation in another hemisphere. Contemplating Spain, such as our ancestors had known her, I resolved that if France had Spain, it should not be Spain “*with the Indies*.” I called the New World into existence, to redress the balance of the Old.<sup>10</sup>

This development toward a worldwide balance of power operating by means of alliances and counteralliances was consummated in the course of the First World War, in which practically all nations of the world participated actively on one or the other side. The very designation of that war as a “world” war points to the consummation of the development.

In contrast to the Second World War, however, the First World War had its origins exclusively in the fear of a disturbance of the European balance of power,

which was threatened in two regions: Belgium and the Balkans. Belgium, located at the northeastern frontier of France and guarding the eastern approaches to the English Channel, found itself a focal point of great power competition, without being strong enough to participate actively in that competition. That the independence of Belgium was necessary for the balance of power in Europe was axiomatic. Its annexation by any of the great European nations would of necessity make that nation too powerful for the security of the others. This was recognized from the very moment when Belgium gained its independence with the active support of Great Britain, Austria, Russia, Prussia, and France. These nations, assembled at a conference in London, declared on February 19, 1831, that “they had the right, and the events imposed upon them the duty to see to it that the Belgian provinces, after they had become independent, did not jeopardize the general security and the European balance of power.”<sup>11</sup>

In furtherance of that aim, in 1839 the five nations concerned concluded a treaty in which they declared Belgium to be “an independent and perpetually neutral state” under the collective guaranty of the five signatories. This declaration sought to prevent Belgium forever from participating, on one or the other side, in the European balance of power. It was the German violation of Belgium’s neutrality which in 1914 crystallized the threat to the balance of power emanating from Germany and enabled Great Britain to justify its participation in the war on the side of France, Russia, and their allies.

The concern of Austria, Great Britain, and Russia in the preservation of the balance of power in the Balkans was concomitant with the weakening of Turkish power in that region. The Crimean War of 1854–56 was fought by an alliance of France, Great Britain, and Turkey against Russia for the purpose of maintaining the balance of power in the Balkans. The alliance treaty of March 13, 1854, declared “that the existence of the Ottoman Empire in its present extent, is of essential importance to the balance of power among the states of Europe.” The subsequent rivalries and wars, especially the events that led to the Congress of Berlin of 1878 and the Balkan Wars of 1912 and 1913, are all overshadowed by the fear that one of the nations mainly interested in the Balkans might gain an increase in that region out of proportion to the power of the other nations concerned.

In the years immediately preceding the First World War, the balance of power in the Balkans increased in importance, for, since the Triple Alliance between Austria, Germany, and Italy seemed approximately to balance the Triple Entente between France, Russia, and Great Britain, the power combination that gained a decisive advantage in the Balkans might easily gain a decisive advantage in the overall European balance of power. It was this fear that motivated Austria in July 1914 to try to settle its accounts with Serbia once and for all and that induced Germany to support Austria unconditionally. It was the same fear that brought Russia to the support of Serbia, and France to the support of Russia. In his telegraphic message of August 2, 1914, to George V of England, the Russian czar summed the situation up well when he said that the effect of the predominance of

<sup>10</sup>*Speeches of the Right Honourable George Canning* (London, 1836), Vol. VI, pp. 109–11.

<sup>11</sup>*Protocols of Conferences in London Relative to the Affairs of Belgium* (1830–31), p. 60.

Austria over Serbia "would have been to upset balance of power in Balkans, which is of such vital interest to my Empire as well as to those Powers who desire maintenance of balance of power in Europe. . . . I trust your country will not fail to support France and Russia in fighting to maintain balance of power in Europe."<sup>12</sup>

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

Thus the period between the two world wars stands in fact under the sign of the balance of power by alliances and counteralliances, although in theory the principle of the balance of power was supposed to have been superseded by the League of Nations principle of collective security. Yet, actually, collective security, as will be shown later in greater detail,<sup>13</sup> did not abolish the balance of power. Rather, it reaffirmed it in the form of a universal alliance against any potential aggressor, the presumption being that such an alliance would always outweigh the aggressor. Collective security differs, however, from the balance of power in the principle of association by virtue of which the alliance is formed. Balance-of-power alliances are formed by certain individual nations against other individual nations or an alliance of them on the basis of what those individual nations regard as their separate national interests. The organizing principle of collective security is the respect for the moral and legal obligation to consider an attack by any nation upon any member of the alliance as an attack upon all members of the alliance. Consequently, collective security is supposed to operate automatically; that is, aggression calls the counteralliance into operation at once and, therefore, protects peace and security with the greatest possible efficiency. Alliances within a balance-of-power system, on the other hand, are frequently uncertain in actual operation, since they are dependent upon political considerations of the individual nations. The defection of Italy from the Triple Alliance in 1915 and the disintegration of the French system of alliances between 1935 and 1939 illustrate this weakness of the balance of power.

## THE "HOLDER" OF THE BALANCE

Whenever the balance of power is to be realized by means of an alliance—and this has been generally so throughout the history of the Western world—two possible variations of this pattern have to be distinguished. To use the metaphor of the balance,

the system may consist of two scales, in each of which are to be found the nation or nations identified with the same policy of the status quo or of imperialism. The continental nations of Europe have generally operated the balance of power in this way.

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

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

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

The holder of the balance can use this power in three different ways. It can make its joining one or the other nation or alliance dependent upon certain

<sup>12</sup>*British Documents on the Origins of the War, 1898-1914* (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1926), Vol. XI, p. 276.

<sup>13</sup>See Chapter 24.

conditions favorable to the maintenance or restoration of the balance. It can make its support of the peace settlement dependent upon similar conditions. It can, finally, in either situation see to it that the objectives of its own national policy, apart from the maintenance of the balance of power, are realized in the process of balancing the power of others.

France under Louis XIV and Italy in the decade before the First World War attempted to play this role of arbiter of the European balance of power. But France was too deeply involved in the struggle for power on the European continent, too much a part of its balance of power, and too much lacking in the commanding superiority to play that role successfully. Italy, on the other hand, had not enough weight to throw around to give it the key position in the balance of power. For this reason it earned only the moral condemnation, but not the respect, that similar policies had brought Great Britain. Only Venice in the sixteenth century and Great Britain since the reign of Henry VIII were able to make the holding of the balance between other nations one of the cornerstones of their foreign policies, using the three methods mentioned above either severally or jointly.

The idea appeared for the first time with reference to the Venetians in a letter written in 1553 by Queen Mary of Hungary to the imperial ambassador in England. She pointed out that the Italians had good reason to oppose France; but, she continued: "You know how they fear the power of the one and of the other of the two princes [Charles V and Francis I] and how they are concerned to balance their power."<sup>14</sup> In the following years, on the occasion of Venice's refusals of French offers of alliance, French statesmen characterized the foreign policy of Venice in similar terms, with special reference to the aspects of isolation and detachment from alliances with either side. In 1554, for instance, Henry II of France was reported by a Venetian ambassador to have explained such refusals by the fear of Venice that, in the event of the death of Charles V, Spain might become inferior to France; Venice, however, tried to "keep things in balance (*tener le cose in equale stato*)."<sup>15</sup> Another Venetian ambassador reported in 1558 that the French explained the foreign policy of Venice by its suspicion of the increase in power of France and Spain. Venice wanted to prevent "that the balance tip to either side (*que la bilancia non pendesse da alcuna parte*)."<sup>16</sup> The ambassador added that "this policy is being praised and even admired by intelligent people; in these turbulent times the weak find protection nowhere but in the Republic of Venice and therefore all Italians in particular, desire her independence and welcome her armaments."<sup>17</sup>

The classic example of the balancer has, however, been provided by Great Britain. To Henry VIII is attributed the maxim *cui adhaerere praesert* (he whom I support will prevail). He is reported to have had himself painted holding in his right hand a pair of scales in perfect balance, one of them occupied by France, the other

by Austria, and holding in his left hand a weight ready to be dropped in either scale. Of England under Elizabeth I it was said "that France and Spain are as it were the Scales in the Balance of Europe and England the Tongue or the Holder of the Balance."<sup>18</sup> In 1624 a French pamphlet invited King Jacob to follow the glorious example of Elizabeth and Henry VIII, "who played his role so well between the Emperor Charles V and King Francis by making himself feared and flattered by both and by holding, as it were, the balance between them."

With the appearance of Louis XIV as a new aspirant for the universal monarchy, it became more and more common, in England and elsewhere, to consider it the English mission to act as "arbiter of Europe" by keeping the Hapsburgs and France in balance. This same standard was applied critically to the foreign policies of Charles II and James II, who made common cause with Louis XIV, the strongest rival of British power, against the Netherlands, and in support of the anti-French policies of William III. With the War of the Spanish Succession, that standard was erected into a dogma, especially in England. It remained, as applied to ever new combinations of powers, practically unchallenged until the Manchester liberals after the middle of the nineteenth century advocated complete and permanent detachment from the affairs of the European continent—that is, isolationism—as the principle of British foreign policy. As the tradition and practice of British diplomacy, this variety of the balance of power seems to have disappeared only in recent years with the decline of British, and the growth of American and Russian, power.<sup>19</sup> When that tradition and practice were about to disappear, Sir Winston Churchill summarized it most eloquently in a speech to the Conservative Members Committee on Foreign Affairs in March 1936:

For four hundred years the foreign policy of England has been to oppose the strongest, most aggressive, most dominating Power on the Continent, and particularly to prevent the Low Countries falling into the hands of such a Power. Viewed in the light of history these four centuries of consistent purpose amid so many changes of names and facts, of circumstances and conditions, must rank as one of the most remarkable episodes which the records of any race, nation, state or people can show. Moreover, on all occasions England took the more difficult course. Faced by Philip II of Spain, against Louis XIV under William III and Marlborough, against Napoleon, against William II of Germany, it would have been easy and must have been very tempting to join with the stronger and share the fruits of his conquest. However, we always took the harder course, joined with the less strong Powers, made a combination among them, and thus defeated and frustrated the Continental military tyrant whoever he was, whatever nation he led. Thus we preserved the liberties of Europe, protected the growth of its vivacious and

<sup>14</sup> *Papiers d'état du Cardinal de Granvelle* (Paris, 1843), Vol. IV, p. 121.

<sup>15</sup> Eugenio Alben, *Le Relazioni degli Ambasciatori Veneti al Senato*, Series I (Firenze, 1862), Vol. II, pp. 287, 464.

<sup>16</sup> William Camden, *Annals of the History of the Most Renowned and Victorious Princess Elizabeth, Late Queen of England* (London, 1635), p. 196.

<sup>17</sup> On this point see the detailed discussion in Chapter 21.



varied society, and emerged after four terrible struggles with an ever-growing fame and widening Empire, and with the Low Countries safely protected in their independence. Here is the wonderful unconscious tradition of British foreign policy. All our thoughts rest in that tradition today. I know of nothing which has occurred to alter or weaken the justice, wisdom, valour and prudence upon which our ancestors acted. I know of nothing that has happened to human nature which in the slightest degree alters the validity of their conclusions. I know of nothing in military, political, economic, or scientific fact which makes me feel that we are less capable. I know of nothing which makes me feel that we might not, or cannot, march along the same road. I venture to put this very general proposition before you because it seems to me that if it is accepted everything else becomes much more simple.

Observe that the policy of England takes no account of which nation it is that seeks the overlordship of Europe. The question is not whether it is Spain, or the French Monarchy, or the French Empire, or the German Empire, or the Hitler regime. It has nothing to do with rulers or nations; it is concerned solely with whoever is the strongest or the potentially dominating tyrant. Therefore we should not be afraid of being accused of being pro-French or anti-German. If the circumstances were reversed, we could equally be pro-German and anti-French. 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.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup>Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War*, Vol. I, *The Gathering Storm* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1948), pp. 207-8. (Reprinted by permission of the publisher.)



## DOMINANT

We have spoken of comprehending variation, however of subsystems themselves a be different system mates because c others are, as it

Thus in t between France kept the Italian a separate balar with which the 1 Sea. The transfc brought about a Austria as its m great," was dis Germanic Conf year. The eighte power occasion of the principle first spectacular

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