

INDIA AND THE BALANCE OF POWER*

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“If you wish for peace understand war” writes Captain Liddle Hart. What he implies is that for ensuring peace we must understand the nature of the future war and then prepare for it. While preparation for war acts as a deterrent, understanding the nature of the future war ensures the effectiveness of such a deterrent. No wonder the stress is on understanding. When he rewrote his line as “if you wish for peace understand war; especially guerrilla warfare”, he only stressed the understanding of the future wars further, but takes for granted that future wars will mostly be guerrilla wars. This may not be quite true in the context of what we have seen of the wars so far, but this does not in any way alter the concept of understanding the future war and building an effective deterrent for ensuring peace.

The nature of the future war depends on the enemy that one has to fight, and the enemy will be the one with whom there is clash of interests. During peace all countries engage themselves in serving their economic and political interests. Humans beings and nations being what they are, clash of interests is bound to occur. Every country must, therefore, have defence interests to protect its economic and political interests. By a careful and analytic study of international behaviour during peace, the inevitable enemy, the nature of the future war and the appropriate deterrent necessary to prevent such a war, could be accurately assessed.

The concept of Balance of Power aims at establishing this deterrent for peace. In fact, whatever peace that exists today is because of Balance of Power that exists between potential enemies. Conversely all wars result directly from military imbalances between the contending parties. All countries, therefore, base their defence policies on the concept of Balance of Power, whatever their outward professions may be. Indeed many an international behaviour that is otherwise inexplicable becomes perceptible when viewed in light of the concept of the Balance of Power.

Unfortunately for us, if there is anything that evokes general indignation in our country, it is any reference to the concept of Balance of Power. This is because Chanakya lives in this country no more and we, today, live under the spell of utopian idealism, which prevents us from grasping the reality “that is”.

THE CONCEPT

The concept of Balance of Power implies that the armed strengths of potential enemies be so balanced as to deter one from taking recourse to war as a means for settling disputes with the other. The forces being balanced, decisive victory is assured to neither and makes wars not worthwhile. The balance of power not only makes the chances of victory fifty-fifty for either side, but also threatens to cripple even the marginal victor so badly that neither side is tempted to take a chance. On the other hand when there is military imbalance between contending parties, the militarily stronger is tempted to use force – the quickest way of settling disputes in such cases. Whatever the outward excuses for wars, therefore, the root cause of all wars is military imbalance. The peace that exists today between Russia and America in spite of the greatest provocation that they often provide each other is due to the Balance of Power between the two. On the other hand we faced invasion from China because of the military imbalance between us

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and the Chinese. In the case of Pakistan although directly there existed a balance of power between us, there was complete imbalance between us and Pakistan and China put together. It was, therefore, again this imbalance that started the wars. That China did not join the affray is another matter. As a matter of fact wars flow out from military imbalances as a law of nature as much as low lying areas get inundated during floods.

The whole concept is based on the solid fact of life that even at the height of civilization, the laws of the Jungle, might being right, and the survival of the fittest, still rule the world. Even during the short span of 25 years of our freedom, world events have amply demonstrated that political power does grow out of the barrel of the gun. After all what is the basis of the power of the Veto with the "big five" or for that matter what is the basis of their being considered "big". It is certainly not their size and population; but sheer military might. These countries use their political power, which they have attained through their military might, not only for looking after their bona fide interests but also for expansionistic designs or enlarging spheres of influence. But even if a country does not have imperialistic aims it would still need political strength as a measure of self defence. Consequently every country would require adequate armed strength to ensure the necessary political power. The quantum of armed strength so required by any country will be decided by what ensures the Balance of Power.

INDIRECT METHODS

A country striving to maintain the Balance of Power may do so directly or indirectly. Directly, by developing its war potential to such an extent as to leave no doubt in the mind of the adversary that starting a war by him would not be worth while, and indirectly by actively supporting all that could prevent the potential enemy from growing stronger or that which would keep him militarily occupied elsewhere. One way of achieving this would be by helping the enemy's enemy either directly or by just adding fuel to the fire. This would also include supporting insurgencies within the enemy country. While the direct method costs money and could put a strain on the country's economy, the indirect method, which is mostly diplomacy, costs little. So, although balance must primarily be maintained directly by acquiring an effective military deterrent, indirect methods could be employed with great advantage to supplement this.

Matching the military strength with that of the potential enemy is not purely a mathematical calculation. The ability of a country to resist aggression is as much dependent on the form of its strategy, tactics and the *will* to fight, as on the strength of the armed forces. Matching the enemy's strategy, tactics, and the will to fight, is, therefore, as important in maintaining the Balance of Power, as matching of the armed strength. This is how Israel, with its armed forces below par with her enemies, is not only maintaining the balance but even a little tilt in her favour. For us this type of thinking would be necessary while we are matching our strength with the Chinese threat.

Balance of Power may also be maintained jointly by two or more countries with common interests against a common enemy through defence alliances (or whatever one may like to call them). There are, however, certain prerequisites to such arrangements in order that they may succeed. The prime one is that the alliance must be between equals and both must derive equal benefits out of it. This is necessary to prevent exploitation of one by the other and the consequent break up of the alliance. It was perhaps due to this prerequisite not having been fulfilled that many alliances broke up in the past. In any case alliances are of necessity a temporary measure. It is said that there are no permanent friends among countries but only permanent interests. Alliances will therefore last only as long as they serve the interests of allied countries. Alliances

that are maintained by force by a super power with its satellites amounts to down right imperialism and do not fall under the purview of this subject.

Unfortunately, there are no set rules to this game of balancing power and every country plays it its own way. There being no accurate measure of assessing a country's armed potential, there is much scope for rationalisation. Even the most belligerent who is hell bent on upsetting the balance for furthering imperialistic designs does so, on the pretext of maintaining it. This is the reason why the concept appears to smack of imperialism. No wonder the idealists condemn it. The more worldly condemn it too. Not because they do not believe in the necessity for maintaining the "Balance of Power", but while some do so to cover their imperialistic aims, others do so to avoid being maligned and unjustifiably being branded an imperialists. In practice, however, they still base their policies on the concept of Balance of Power – whether it be for maintaining it or tilting it in their favour. As a cover they may have to use high sounding slogans like "moral obligations", "fighting imperialism", "saving democracy" and what not; but it is Balance of Power for all.

INDIAN INTERESTS

We in India have nothing to feel guilty about. We too need political power and consequently a military deterrent for safe-guarding our national interests. Somehow, we have a tendency to associate all political power with imperialism. This is not quite correct. Excessive and unchallenged political power may be employed for imperialistic designs, but by itself political power is not imperialistic. Some political power is absolutely essential for ensuring that bona fide interests of a country are not sacrificed by might becoming right. The mere righteousness of a cause is no guarantee for it to succeed. World opinion has time and again proved to be ineffective in its role of settling issues and ensuring peace. The cause of the people of Bangladesh is one glaring example. The conscience of the most ardent of our idealists should start pricking them if and when we show signs of so over-growing as to pose a threat to others and not now when we are so much below strength in comparison with the existing threat from our neighbours. We must keep growing militarily till we balance the forces that are threatening our national interests. Maintaining the balance of power should, in fact, form the basis of our defence objectives as it does for others.

Some of the major Indian interests that would require the backing of political and military power are: -

- (a) ensuring territorial integrity;
- (b) equitable solution to political disputes with some of our neighbouring countries;
- (c) defending democracy;
- (d) preservation of political freedom; and
- (e) protection of lines of communication on the seas.

Territorial Integrity

Three states of the Indian Union – Jammu and Kashmir, Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland – are strategically important and, therefore, a source of interest to more than one country. Some of these countries cannot keep their greedy eyes off these states and pose a perpetual threat to the territorial integrity of our country. We would require much political and military strength to meet this threat.

Political disputes

Political disputes between neighbouring countries are bound to occur, but there are some that are deliberately created by the militarily strong for using as a pretext for committing aggression with motives that have nothing to do with the dispute as such. We have such type of disputes with China and Pakistan. (Pakistan has along been considering herself to be stronger than India on the basis of the strength of her allies and her fanatical ego of possessing “superior soldiers”). Such disputes, for obvious reasons, cannot be sorted out across the conference table. We would need force to keep our opponents at bay.

Defending Democracy

India is the largest democracy in the world and by virtue of this a special responsibility for preserving it in the world devolves on her. In India’s strength the enemies of democracy, (it is a pity that the US has to be one of them), see a source of inspiration for the smaller ones whom they would like to bring under their sway. It is but natural that India should be the first target of attack for all anti democratic forces. In its size and population also India possesses the potential for challenging the supremacy of the “big five” and must naturally be a source of worry to them. We have to protect ourselves from these powers.

Preservation of Freedom

With the big powers trying to carve out for themselves spheres of influence for serving their political, economic and defence interests, preservation of political freedom by developing countries has become a big problem for them. The two main strangle-holds of these powers are the economic and defence aids. There can be no aid without strings, no matter who is giving it and who is receiving it. There is no “ism” greater than nationalism, and every country, whatever its outward professions, has its national interests foremost in all its international dealings. A country seeking political freedom must be able to stand on its own feet; if not economically at least in matters of defence. What is applicable to others is applicable to us also.

Lines of Communication

Protection of lines of communication through the sea is a matter of grand strategy in national defence. War on land may well be lost only due to the inability of a country to protect its lines of communication. This is how Pakistan lost to India. Vulnerability of the lines of communication is not at times realised till they are actually blocked at the time the hostilities break out. We must realise how vulnerable our lines of communications through the Indian Ocean are and that safety of our sea routes is one of our major interests.

POWER POLITICS

To appreciate what India is up against with regards to the safeguarding of her national interests it would be necessary to analyse the power politics on the Indian Sub Continent. As is the case with other regions, here too the main contestants are America, China and Russia. Normally it is very difficult to see through the game that each of these powers plays but what happened on the Indian Sub Continent was so sudden that it took the world by surprise and completely exposed the politics of the big powers. India has many lessons to learn from what has come to light.

The American Interest

When the US moved her 7th Fleet into the Bay of Bengal against the Indian Navy, the feelings in India were more of shock than fear. In spite of the differences in opinion between India and the US, Indians, by and large, had never had any ill-will against America. What

shocked them was that a country that had rushed unconditional help to them during the Chinese invasion had joined China against India. The “saviours of democracy” not only closed their eyes to the blood cuddling acts of barbarism committed by the Pakistani dictatorship on defenceless people of Bangladesh, but also aided these by providing unqualified support (material and moral) to the Pakistani military Junta. The spate of articles that appeared in the Indian press was certainly indicative of the shocked feelings of the country but few could find an explanation for this type of behaviour on the part of the American Government.

The American conduct is, however, not difficult to explain if their interests were to be properly analysed. Its prime interest is to contain Russia and China. What better method of containing both could there be than to balance one with the other. The Russian strength thus tied up with China would eliminate or at least reduce the Russian challenge to the American supremacy in the world. A strong India on the other hand, which could by itself balance with China, would relieve the Chinese pressure on Russia and consequently increase the Russian pressure on America. America would naturally not like to see India strong and as a check would wish Pakistan to balance with India. Throwing ideals, (and which country has any), to the winds, America had, therefore, to support Pakistan against India out of pure self interest. When she had supported us against China in 1962, at that time conditions were different. Russia and China were still brothers (as Khrushchev put it then) and the Chinese might was growing unchecked. India was the only country that could check it.

The other reason why America would not like India to grow unchecked may be that she sees in India the potential that Napoleon saw in China when he said “Let China sleep; for when she wakes world will be sorry”. This is, perhaps, not without justification, but for what she is doing to India today she might be sorriest of all. In any case, as things stand today, American hostilities towards India are likely to continue. In pursuance of this policy she had no option but to recognise Bangladesh and wean her away from India. She did it unabashedly though and announced her recognition even before the 7th Fleet could return to its original position. The CIA and the famous American dollar will do the rest. She may have earned a little bit of Pakistan’s ill will but with Pakistan firmly in her grip she can afford it. Time and dollar will heal as usual.

Russian Interests

The Russian interests are just the opposite of American interests. Russia would wish India to be strong for the same reason that America would not. A strong India that could balance with China would free Russia to deal with America. Further more Russia too sees in India the potential that Napoleon saw in China, and with America trying to seek alliance with China against Russia, what better partner than India could Russia have for maintaining the Balance of Power. The Indo-Russian friendship will, therefore, last as long as the Sino-American collusion lasts.

The Chinese Interests

The Chinese interests are based on their general declared policy of fomenting world revolution, meaning, in fact, world domination. China too has realised India’s military potential and in India’s strength she sees a serious challenge to her supremacy in Asia. She also knows how Russia is grooming India to pose this challenge to her. China’s interests have, therefore coincided with that of America and that is the reason for this unholy alliance between the two to make Pakistan strong enough to check India’s growth. It was thus that a “Peoples’ government”

opposed all that it stands for, (peoples' wars of liberation and what not), and shamelessly supported a military despot who created history in tyranny.

After Bangladesh became a reality her interests lay in breaking up the Indo-Bangladesh friendship. It must be said to her credit that she has done a wonderful job of it; pr at least better than what could be expected of her with the initial advantage lying with India. What is more she has done this without loosing her grip on Pakistan, while she herself outwardly kept up unflinching support to Pakistan, her agents went into action in Bangladesh nearly as soon as Yahya thought of surrendering. The agents, and the followers the have created by fishing in troubled waters are too loyal to be shaken by her Veto barring Bangladesh's entry into the UN or for that matter her other anti Bangladesh actions. As a matter of rule the conscience of pro-Chinese communist never pricks, (Maulana Bhashani is a living example of thoroughly brain-washed and unscrupulous pro-Chinese communist), but those of their sympathisers whose conscience ever pricks can seek comfort in a large variety of anti-Indian slogans that have been provided to them to choose from.

The Indian Interests

For obvious reasons the Indian interests lie in seeing Bangladesh free and friendly. It is, however, doubtful whether she is in a position to counter the prevalent power politics directed against both the freedom of Bangladesh and her remaining friendly towards India. India has neither the know-how nor the resources to do so. She is solely dependent on morality for support. She feels that the fact that the Indians have shed blood for the freedom of Bangladesh is in itself a guarantee for everlasting friendship between the two Peoples. It would have been so, had the people of Bangladesh been allowed to think for themselves and not subjected to malicious anti-Indian propaganda by those who wish otherwise.

By hastening to withdraw her armed forces from Bangladesh, India certainly won a great moral victory but it can also be termed as a diplomatic defeat. It would appear that we played into the hands of those who wanted to take advantage of Bangladesh's helplessness without armed strength during the crucial period of instability. Even Bangladesh, in her eagerness to show that she was free of foreign influence and thus qualified for world recognition, did not realise that by seeking immediate withdrawal of Indian troops she only helped the anti-national forces and made their task easier. No wonder that in spite of India laying down thousands of lives for the creation of Bangladesh and the exemplary conduct of the Indian armed forces (perhaps unparalleled in world history) anti-Indian slogans and anti-Government demonstrations started as soon as the last batch of Indian troops left Bangladesh soil. No doubt Mujib and his government are solidly with India but the support of a large section of the people has been subverted by the Chinese and the Americans. This should be a source of great concern for us. Governments come and go and do not matter as much as the people who make governments. We are, perhaps, lucky that at least one Super Power, capable of counter-acting the other two wishes us well.

DEFENCE OBJECTIVES

India's defence objectives flow automatically from the study we have made of the power politics in the region. Primarily India too would have to base her defence objectives on the concept of Balance of Power but not the type of balance America and China would wish for. Our maintaining balance with Pakistan alone will not ensure peace in the region. With China and Pakistan acting in unison, the threat from one includes threat from the other. We must, therefore,

be able to pose a deterrent to both. While maintaining balance with Pakistan amounts to just matching of our armed strength with theirs, with China we shall also have to cater for their fifth column.

It would also be worth examining the indirect methods of maintaining balance of power with our potential enemies. Some of these methods could be as under: -

- (a) Actively supporting insurgencies
- (b) Actively supporting our enemy's enemies
- (c) Forming pacts for collective security

Supporting Insurgencies

Both China and Pakistan have been actively supporting our insurgents. We react while they act. It is high time that we wrest initiative from them and fling their weapon back at them. Both of them are very vulnerable in this regard and we could easily tie up a large portion of their armed strengths looking after their insurgents and save on our defence forces.

Supporting Enemy's Enemies

We must keep ourselves in readiness to go to the aid of any country in the region which might become a victim of Chinese or Pakistani aggression, rather than taking action only when we are attacked. This we should do even though we may not have entered into a defence pact with these countries.

Defence Pacts

Even with our best efforts it may not be possible for us to balance the forces that are poised against us and it may be necessary for us to seek collective security. For this we could enter into defence pacts (or whatever we may like to call them) with like minded countries. Any pact that we may enter into must fulfil a prerequisite in that it should be between equals and should benefit all parties equally, lest the stronger partner be tempted to exploit his position. Our friendship pact with the Soviet Union is too lopsided and though it could be useful as an instrument for promoting friendship and co-operation between the two countries, it cannot form the basis of our defence objectives. There could be an effective defence pact only with countries who are also threatened with Chinese or Pakistani aggression.

A defence pact would particularly be necessary for ensuring the security of our lines of communications through the Indian Ocean. It may not be possible for us to raise a Navy to fill the vacuum in the Indian Ocean, caused by the withdrawal of the British, by ourselves. Cooperation of countries in the region with common interests and who could make a common cause of it, is, therefore, necessary. The combined strength of India, Bangladesh, Malaysia and Australia should be able to stand up to any challenge on the sea.

CONCLUSION

The only way of ensuring peace in the world is through maintaining the Balance of Power between potential enemies. Every country would, therefore, be justified to grow militarily to the extent that it ensures such a balance. What would not be justified is for any country to over-grow so as to tilt the balance in its own favour. Unfortunately there are no set rules to this game of balancing power and there is much scope for rationalisation. Even those engaged in upsetting the balance with imperialistic objectives, do so in the name of maintaining it. The resultant involvement of peace-loving countries in the evils of an arms race is in fact only their

struggle for existence and therefore fully justified. This is a necessary evil which should not unnecessarily perturb the minds of the idealists in our country.

We have all along been quite confused with regard to our defence objectives. These could become very clear when we view them in the light of the concept of Balance of Power. We have some major bona fide political interests for protection of which we would require armed strength. The quantum of armed strength so required will naturally be decided by what would ensure an effective deterrent for our potential enemies; in other words that which would constitute the Balance of Power.