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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 power¹ 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 politi-

¹The term "balance of power" is used in the text with four different meanings: (1) as a policy aimed at a certain state of affairs, (2) as an actual state of affairs, (3) as an approximately equal distribution of power, (4) as any distribution of power. Whenever the term is used without qualification, it refers to 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 231 ff.

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

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

²Cf., for instance, the impressive analogy between the equilibrium in the human body and in society in Walter B. Cannon, *The Wisdom of the Body* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1932), pp. 293, 294: "At the outset it is noteworthy that the body politic itself exhibits some indications of crude automatic stabilizing processes. In the previous chapter I expressed the postulate that a certain degree of constancy in a complex system is itself evidence that agencies are acting or are ready to act to maintain that constancy. And moreover, that when a system remains steady it does so because any tendency towards change is met by increased effectiveness of the factor or factors which resist the change. Many familiar facts prove that these statements are to some degree true for society even in its present unstabilized condition. A display of conservatism excites a radical revolt and that in turn is followed by a return to conservatism. Loose government and its consequences bring the reformers into power, but their tight reins soon provoke restiveness and the desire for release. The noble enthusiasms and sacrifices of war are succeeded by moral apathy and orgies of self-indulgence. Hardly any strong tendency in a nation continues to the stage of disaster; before that extreme is reached corrective forces arise which check the tendency and they commonly prevail to such an excessive degree as themselves to cause a reaction. A study of the nature of these social swings and their reversal might lead to valuable understanding and possibly to means of more narrowly limiting the disturbances. At this point, however, we merely note that the disturbances are roughly limited, and that this limitation suggests, perhaps, the early stages of social homeostasis." (Reprinted by permission of the publisher. Copyright 1932, 1939, by Walter B. Cannon.)

³John 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."⁴

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 govern-

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

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Evaluation of the Balance of Power

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

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

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

or potential warfare points up the three main weaknesses of the balance of power as the guiding principle of international politics: its uncertainty, its unreality, and its inadequacy.

THE UNCERTAINTY OF THE BALANCE OF POWER

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

The balance of power, mechanically conceived, is in need of an easily recognizable quantitative criterion by which the relative power of a number of nations can be measured and compared. For it is only by means of such a criterion, comparable to the pounds and ounces of a real pair of scales, that one can say with any degree of assurance that a certain nation tends to become more powerful than another or that they tend to maintain a balance of power between them. Furthermore, it is only by means of such a criterion that variations in power can be converted into quantitative units to be transferred from one scale to the other in order to restore the balance. The theory and practice of the balance of power found such a criterion, as we have seen, in territory, population, and armaments. The policies of compensations and of competitive armaments have served throughout the history of the modern state system as the practical application of that criterion.

But does the power of a nation actually repose in the extension of its territory? Is a nation the more powerful the more territory it possesses? Our examination of the factors that make for the power of a nation has shown that the answer can be in the affirmative only with qualifications so far-reaching as almost to nullify the affirmative character of the answer. The size of French territory was greater at the end of Louis XIV's reign than it had been at its beginning, but France was weaker at the end of the reign than it had been at its beginning. The same inverse relation of size of territory and national power is revealed by a comparison of Prussian territory and power at the death of Frederick the Great in 1786 with the same factors ten years later. Until the beginning of the nineteenth century, Spain and Turkey possessed vast territories exceeding in size the territories of any of the major nations of Europe.

But they were counted among the weakest nations actively engaged in international politics. While geography, of which territorial expansion is a part, is indeed a factor that goes into the making of national power, it is but one among other factors. Even if one takes into consideration, after the model of the compensations at the turn of the eighteenth century, the quality of the territory and the quality and quantity of the population within it, one still deals with fewer than all the factors of which the power of a nation is composed. The same holds true if one makes the quantity and quality of armaments the standard of comparison.

National character and, above all, national morale and the quality of government, especially in the conduct of foreign affairs, are the most important, but also the most elusive, components of national power. It is impossible for the observer of the contemporary scene or the explorer of future trends to assess even with approximate accuracy the relative contributions these elements may make to the power of different nations. Furthermore, the quality of these contributions is subject to incessant change, unnoticeable at the moment the change actually takes place and revealed only in the actual test of crisis and war. Rational calculation of the relative strength of several nations, which is the very lifeblood of the balance of power, becomes a series of guesses the correctness of which can be ascertained only in retrospect.¹ As Bolingbroke, one of the great practitioners of the balance of power, put it:

The precise point at which the scales of power turn, like that of the solstice in either tropic, is imperceptible to common observation; and, in one case as in the other, some progress must be made in the new direction, before the change is perceived. They who are in the sinking scale, for in the political balance of power, unlike to all others, the scale that is empty sinks, and that which is full rises; they who are in the sinking scale do not easily come off from the habitual prejudices of superior wealth, or power, or skill, or courage, nor from the confidence that these prejudices inspire. They who are in the rising scale do not immediately feel their strength, nor assume that confidence in it which successful experience gives them afterwards. They who are the most concerned to watch the variations of this balance, misjudge often in the same manner, and from the same prejudices. They continue to dread a power no longer able to hurt them, or they continue to have no apprehensions of a power that grows daily more formidable.²

An eighteenth-century opponent of the balance of power tried to demonstrate the absurdity of the calculations common at the time by asking which of two princes was more powerful: one who possessed three pounds of military strength, four pounds of statesmanship, five pounds of zeal, and two pounds of ambition, or one who had twelve pounds of military strength, but only one pound of all the other qualities? The author gives the advantage to the former prince, but whether his answer will be correct under all circum-

¹See the extensive discussion of this problem in Chapter 10.

²"On the Study and Use of History," *The Works of Lord Bolingbroke*, Vol. II (Philadelphia: Carey and Hart, 1841), p. 258.

stances is certainly open to question, even under the assumption—patently hypothetical—that the quantitative determination of the relative weight of these different qualities were possible.

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

One of the masters of the balance of power, Frederick the Great, made wise by sad experiences, called the attention of his successor to this problem. He said in his Political Testament of 1768:

A frequently deceptive art of conjecture serves as foundation for most of the great political designs. One takes as one's point of departure the most certain factor one knows of, combines it, as well as one can, with other factors, but imperfectly known, and draws therefrom the most correct conclusions possible. In order to make that clearer, I shall give an example. Russia seeks to gain the support of the King of Denmark. She promises him the duchy of Holstein-Gottorp, which belongs to the Russian Grand Duke, and hopes in this way to gain his support forever. But the King of Denmark is fickle. How can one foresee all the ideas that might pass through that young head? The favorites, mistresses and ministers, who will take hold of his mind and offer him advantages from another power which appear to him to be greater than those offered by Russia, are they not going to make him change sides as an ally? A similar uncertainty, although every time in another form, dominates all operations of foreign policy so that great alliances have often a result contrary to the one planned by their members.³

These words, written when the classical period of the balance of power was drawing to a close, lose nothing of their poignancy when tested by the events of recent history. The composition of the alliances and counteralliances which one might have foreseen in August 1938, immediately before the denouement of the Czechoslovakian crisis, was certainly quite different from that which came to pass a year later, at the outbreak of the Second World War, and from that which developed more than two years later in conse-

³*Die politischen Testamente Friedrichs des Grossen* (Berlin, 1920), p. 192.

quence of the attack upon Pearl Harbor. No statesman, however great his knowledge, wisdom, and foresight, could have anticipated all these developments and based his balance-of-power policies upon them.

Immediately before the outbreak of the First World War in July 1914, it was by no means certain whether Italy would fulfill its obligations under the Treaty of the Triple Alliance and join Germany and Austria in a war against France, Great Britain, and Russia, whether it would remain neutral, or whether it would join the other side. Nor were the responsible statesmen of Germany and Austria certain, as late as July 30, 1914, that Russia would oppose Austria in order to maintain the balance of power in the Balkans. On that day, the British Ambassador to Germany reported to his government as the opinion held by these statesmen "that a general war was out of the question as Russia neither could, nor wanted to, go to war."⁴ According to the reports of the British Ambassador, the same belief was held at Vienna.

Nor was it evident to everybody concerned that Great Britain would enter the First World War on the side of France and Russia. As late as June 1, 1914, the British Secretary of Foreign Affairs declared in the House of Commons, confirming a declaration of the Prime Minister made the previous year, that Great Britain was bound by no obligation, unknown to Parliament and to the public, that might lead it into war. The British government was convinced that the secret exchange of letters between the Secretary of Foreign Affairs and the French Ambassador, which had taken place in November 1912, did not affect its freedom of action in case of a continental war. The French and Russian governments relied upon British intervention without being certain of it.⁵ The British Ambassador reported from Berlin on July 30, 1914, that the

⁴*British Documents, on the Origins of the War, 1898-1914* (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1926), Vol. XI, p. 361.

⁵How ambiguous the situation was which this exchange of letters created is evident from the text of the letter that Sir Edward Grey, British Foreign Secretary, wrote on November 22, 1912, to Mr. Paul Cambon, the French Ambassador to Great Britain, and that is substantially reiterated by the French Ambassador's reply of the next day.

"From time to time in recent years the French and British naval and military experts have consulted together. It has always been understood that such consultation does not restrict the freedom of either Government to decide at any future time whether or not to assist the other by armed force. We have agreed that consultation between experts is not, and ought not to be regarded as, an engagement that commits either Government to action in a contingency that has not arisen and may never arise. The disposition, for instance, of the French and British fleets respectively at the present moment is not based upon an engagement to co-operate in war.

"You have, however, pointed out that, if either Government had grave reason to expect an unprovoked attack by a third Power, it might become essential to know whether it could in that event depend upon the armed assistance of the other.

"I agree that, if either Government had grave reason to expect an unprovoked attack by a third Power, or something that threatened the general peace, it should immediately discuss with the other whether both Governments should act together to prevent aggression and to preserve peace, and, if so, what measures they would be prepared to take in common. If these measures involved action, the plans of the General Staffs would at once be taken into consideration, and the Governments would then decide what effect should be given to them." *Collected Diplomatic Documents Relating to the Outbreak of the European War* (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1915), p. 80.

The ambiguity of the situation is also well illustrated by the Czar's telegram quoted on page 174.

French Ambassador "is continuously scolding me about England keeping her intentions so dark and says that the only way by which a general war can be prevented is by . . . stating . . . that England will fight on the side of France and Russia."⁶ The governments of the Central Powers were altogether ignorant of this exchange of letters until after the First World War had actually broken out. Thus they assumed that Great Britain would remain neutral; ". . . up to the last moment," reports the British Ambassador to Berlin, "they thought England would not come in."⁷ Therefore, they concluded that the balance of power favored them. France and Russia started with the opposite assumption and arrived at the opposite conclusion.

The British policy of secrecy about Britain's commitments toward France has been widely criticized on the ground that Germany would never have gone to war against France and Russia if it had known in advance that Great Britain would join the latter powers; that is, if it had been able to make its balance-of-power calculations in knowledge of the Anglo-French agreement of November 1912. However, neither the British nor the French and Russian governments were themselves entirely sure beforehand what this agreement would mean for the balance of power in August 1914. Therefore, even if the German government had known about the agreement it could not have been certain what the actual distribution of power would be on the eve of the First World War. It is in this condition of extreme uncertainty, inherent in any balance-of-power system composed of alliances, that one must seek the reasons for the failure of the balance of power to prevent the First World War. The German Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs expressed spontaneously the insecurity to which the system of alliance and counteralliances had led when he said to the British Ambassador on August 1, 1914, that Germany, France, "and perhaps England" had been drawn into the war, "None of whom wanted war in the least and . . . that it came from 'this d——d system of alliances' which were the curse of modern times."⁸

THE UNREALITY OF THE BALANCE OF POWER

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

⁶*British Documents*, loc. cit., p. 361.

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 363.

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 284.

tively engaged in the struggle for power must actually aim not at a balance—that is, equality—of power, but at superiority of power in their own behalf. And since no nation can foresee how large its miscalculations will turn out to be, all nations must ultimately seek the maximum of power obtainable under the circumstances. Only thus can they hope to attain the maximum margin of safety commensurate with the maximum of errors they might commit. The limitless aspiration for power, potentially always present, as we have seen,⁹ in the power drives of nations, finds in the balance of power a mighty incentive to transform itself into an actuality.

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

The scales of the balance of power will never be exactly poised, nor is the precise point of equality either discernible nor necessary to be discerned. It is sufficient in this, as in other human affairs, that the deviation be not too great. Some there will always be. A constant attention to these deviations is therefore necessary. When they are little, their increase may be easily prevented by early care and the precautions that good policy suggests. But when they become great for want of this care and these precautions, or by the force of unforeseen events, more vigor is to be exerted, and greater efforts to be made. But even in such cases, much reflection is necessary on all the circumstances that form the conjuncture; lest, by attacking with ill success, the deviation be confirmed, and the power that is deemed already exorbitant become more so; and lest, by attacking with good success, whilst one scale is pillaged, too much weight of power be thrown into the other. In such cases, he who has considered, in the histories of former ages, the strange revolutions that time produces, and the perpetual flux and reflux of public as well as private fortunes, of kingdoms and states as well as of those who govern or are governed in them, will incline to think, that if the scales can be brought back by a war, nearly, though not exactly, to the point they were at before this great deviation from it, the rest may be left to accidents, and to the use that good policy is able to make of them.¹

⁹See pages 70 and 82 ff.

¹Op. cit., p. 291.

Preventive war, however abhorred in diplomatic language and abhorrent to democratic public opinion, is in fact a natural outgrowth of the balance of power. Here again, the events leading to the outbreak of the First World War are instructive; for it was on that occasion that foreign affairs were conducted for the last time according to the classical rules of the balance of power. Austria was resolved to change the balance of power in the Balkans in its favor once and for all. It believed that, although Russia was not yet ready to strike, its power was on the increase and that, therefore, postponement of decisive action would make the distribution of power less favorable to itself. Similar calculations were made in Berlin with respect to the distribution of power between Germany and Russia. Russia, on the other hand, was resolved not to permit Austria to change the distribution of power in its favor by crushing Serbia. Russia calculated that such an instant increase in the power of its prospective enemy might more than outweigh any probable future increase in its own power. It was partly in consideration of these Russian calculations that Great Britain refused until the last moment to declare openly its support of the Franco-Russian Alliance. As the British Ambassador to Germany put it on July 30, 1914: "A statement to that effect at the present stage, while it might cause Germany to hesitate, might equally urge Russia on; and if Russia attacked Austria, Germany would have to come in whether she feared the British fleet or not."² The Grand General Staff of Germany, in a memorandum to the Imperial Chancellor, on July 29, 1914, analyzed the mechanics of the balance of power with unusual clarity: Russia

announces that she intends to mobilize when Austria advances into Serbia, as she cannot permit the destruction of Serbia by Austria, though Austria has explained that she intends nothing of the sort.

What must and will the further consequences be? If Austria advances into Serbia she will have to face not only the Serbian army but also the vastly superior strength of Russia; thus she can not enter upon a war with Serbia without securing herself against an attack by Russia. That means that she will be forced to mobilize the other half of her Army, for she can not possibly surrender at discretion to a Russia all prepared for war. At the moment, however, in which Austria mobilizes her whole Army, the collision between herself and Russia will become inevitable. But that, for Germany, is the *casus foederis*. If Germany is not to be false to her word and permit her ally to suffer annihilation at the hands of Russian superiority, she, too, must mobilize. And that would bring about the mobilization of the rest of Russia's military districts as a result. But then Russia will be able to say: I am being attacked by Germany. She will then assure herself of the support of France, which, according to the compact of alliance, is obliged to take part in the war, should her ally, Russia, be attacked. Thus the Franco-Russian alliance, so often held up to praise as a purely defensive compact, created only in order to meet the aggressive plans of Germany, will become active, and the mutual butchery of the civilized nations of Europe will begin.³

²British Documents, loc. cit., p. 361.

³Max Montgelas and Walther Schuecking, editors, *Outbreak of the World War: German Documents Collected by Karl Kautsky* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1924), p. 307.

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

The opposition, under the conditions of the balance of power, between one status quo nation or an alliance of them and one imperialistic power or a group of them is very likely to lead to war. In most instances, from Charles V to Hitler and Hirohito, they actually did lead to war. The status quo nations, which by definition are dedicated to peaceful pursuits and want only to hold what they have, will hardly be able to keep pace with the dynamic and rapid increase in power characteristic of a nation bent upon imperialistic expansion.

The relative increases in the power of Great Britain and France, on the one hand, and of Germany, on the other, from 1933 to the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939 illustrate vividly the different pace and dynamics in the power increases of status quo and imperialistic nations. In such an armaments race the status quo nations are bound to lose, and their relative position cannot fail to deteriorate at an accelerated pace the longer the race lasts. Time is on the side of the imperialistic nations, and as time goes on, their scale sinks lower and lower under the ever increasing weight of their power, while the scale of the status quo nations rises ever higher. Thus it becomes more and more difficult for the latter to redress the balance, and they cannot fail to realize that, if the trend is not forcibly reversed, the position of the imperialistic nations must become well-nigh unassailable, while their own chances for redressing the balance will be irretrievably lost. This was the situation in which Great Britain and France found themselves in September 1939. In such a situation, war, with its incalculable possibilities, seems to be the only alternative to an inglorious absorption into the power orbit of the imperialistic nation. The dynamics of international politics, as they play between status quo and imperialistic nations, lead of necessity to such a disturbance of the balance of power that war appears as the only policy that offers the status quo nations at least a chance to redress the balance of power in their favor.

Yet the very act of redressing the balance carries within itself the elements of a new disturbance. The dynamics of power politics as outlined previously make this development inevitable. Yesterday's defender of the status quo is transformed by victory into the imperialist of today, against whom yesterday's vanquished will seek revenge tomorrow. The ambition of the victor who took up arms in order to restore the balance, as well as the resentment of the loser who could not overthrow it, tend to make the new balance a

virtually invisible point of transition from one disturbance to the next. Thus the balancing process has frequently led to the substitution of one predominant power, disturbing the balance, for another one. Charles V of Hapsburg was thwarted in his aspirations for a universal monarchy by France, only to be succeeded by Louis XIV of France, whose similar aspirations united all of Europe against him. Once the balance had been restored against Louis XIV, a new disturbing factor arose in Frederick the Great of Prussia. The bid for world domination by France under Napoleon I was followed by a similar bid on the part of the Holy Alliance under the leadership of the most potent of Napoleon's former enemies, Austria and Russia. The defeat of the latter brought in its wake the rise of Prussia to dominance in Germany and of Germany in Europe. Twenty years after its defeat in the First World War Germany was again the predominant nation in Europe, while Japan had risen to a similar position in Asia. The very moment these two nations were removed as active factors in the balance of power a new power contest took shape between the United States, on the one hand, and the Soviet Union and Communist China, on the other. With the breakup of the Sino-Soviet bloc, China drew closer to the United States and the West while retaining its independence, thus contributing to a more complex balance of power.

The Balance of Power as Ideology

Our discussion has thus far proceeded on the assumption that the balance of power is a device for the self-defense of nations whose independence and existence are threatened by a disproportionate increase in the power of other nations. What we have said of the balance of power is true only under the assumption that the balance of power is used genuinely for its avowed purposes of self-protection. Yet we have already seen how the power drives of nations take hold of ideal principles and transform them into ideologies in order to disguise, rationalize, and justify themselves. They have done this with the balance of power. What we have said above about the popularity of anti-imperialistic ideologies in general applies to the balance of power.

A nation seeking empire has often claimed that all it wanted was equilibrium. A nation seeking only to maintain the status quo has often tried to give a change in the status quo the appearance of an attack upon the balance of power. When, at the outbreak of the Seven Years' War in 1756, England and France found themselves at war, British writers justified the policy of their country in terms of the necessities of the European balance of power, while French publicists claimed that France was compelled to oppose English supremacy on the sea and in North America in order to restore the "balance of commerce."

When the Allied Powers in 1813 submitted their conditions of peace to Napoleon, they invoked the principle of the balance of power. When Napoleon rejected these conditions, he, too, invoked "the equilibrium of rights and interests." When, early in 1814, the Allies confronted the representative of

Napoleon with an ultimatum demanding that France, in the name of the balance of power, give up all conquests made since 1792, the French representative replied: "Did the allied sovereigns not . . . want to establish a just equilibrium in Europe? Do they not declare that they want it still today? To maintain the same relative power which she always has had is also the sole actual desire of France. But Europe is no longer what it was twenty years ago." And he arrived at the conclusion that in the light of geography and strategy even the retention by France of the left bank of the Rhine would hardly be sufficient to restore the balance of power in Europe. The allied representatives declared in reply: "France, by retreating into the dimensions of 1792, remains one of the strongest powers on the continent by virtue of her central position, her population, the riches of her soil, the nature of her frontiers, the number and distribution of her strong points." Thus both sides tried to apply the principle of the balance of power to the same situation and arrived at irreconcilable results with the effect that the efforts to end the war failed.

A similar situation occurred forty years later for similar reasons. At the Conference of Vienna, which in 1855 tried to end the Crimean War, Russia agreed with its opponents to make the maintenance of the balance of power in the Black Sea the basis of the settlement. Yet, while Russia declared that "the preponderance of Russia in the Black Sea . . . is absolutely necessary for the European equilibrium," its adversaries sought to put an end to that preponderance and declared that the Russian navy was "still too strong in comparison to the Turkish fleet." Peace was concluded in 1856 on the latter terms.

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

In this sense one speaks, for instance, of the balance of power in the Western Hemisphere which might be disturbed by the policies of non-

American nations, or of the balance of power in the Mediterranean which must be defended against Russian intrusion. Yet what one means to defend in either case is not the balance of power but a particular distribution of power regarded as favorable to a particular nation or group of nations. The *New York Times* wrote in one of its reports on the Foreign Ministers' Conference in Moscow in 1947: "The new unity of France, Britain and the United States . . . may be only temporary but it does alter the balance of power perceptibly."⁴ What was actually meant was not that the balance of power in the proper meaning of the term had been altered, but that the distribution of power which existed after the conference was more favorable to the Western powers than the one that existed before.

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

THE INADEQUACY OF THE BALANCE OF POWER

We have recognized the actual contribution that the balance of power, during the period of its flowering in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, has made to the stability of the modern state system and to the preservation of the independence of its members. Yet was it the balance of power alone that attained these beneficial results, or was, during that period of history, another factor in operation without which the balance of power could not have attained them?

Restraining Influence of a Moral Consensus

Gibbon pointed to such a factor in 1781 at a moment when his country was fighting a losing war with its American Colonies, France, Spain, and Holland. He then proposed:

. . . to consider Europe as one great republic, whose various inhabitants have attained almost the same level of politeness and cultivation. The balance of power will continue to fluctuate, and the prosperity of our own or the neighboring kingdoms may be alternately exalted or depressed; but these events cannot essentially

⁴April 27, 1947, p. E3.

injure our general state of happiness, the system of arts, and laws, and manners, which so advantageously distinguish, above the rest of mankind, the Europeans and their colonies. . . . The abuses of tyranny are restrained by the mutual influence of fear and shame; republics have acquired order and stability; monarchies have imbibed the principles of freedom, or, at least, of moderation; and some sense of honour and justice is introduced into the most defective constitutions by the general manners of the times. In peace, the progress of knowledge and industry is accelerated by the emulation of so many active rivals: in war, the European forces are exercised by temperate and undecisive contests.⁵

Comments Professor Toynbee on this passage:

And yet Gibbon's confidence was justified in the event by the peace settlement of A.D. 1783. In the American Revolutionary War Great Britain was eventually defeated by an overwhelming coalition of opposing forces; but her opponents did not think of crushing her. They had been fighting for the limited and precise objective of establishing the insurgent colonies' independence of the British Crown—the colonists because, for them, this independence was an end in itself, and the colonists' French allies because, in the estimation of a refined French statesmanship, the secession of the thirteen American colonies from the British Empire would just suffice to restore a Balance of Power which had been unduly inclined in Great Britain's favour by the cumulative effect of successive British victories in three previous wars. In A.D. 1783, when the victory was once more with the French for the first time in nearly a hundred years, French statesmanship was content to attain a minimum objective with a maximum economy of means. No rancorous memory of previous reverses tempted the French Government to seize this opportunity for paying off old scores. They were not even tempted to fight on for the disannexation of Canada, the principal American dominion of the French Crown, which had been conquered by the British Crown during the Seven Years' War and had been officially ceded by King Louis to King George in the peace settlement of A.D. 1763, only twenty years back. In the peace settlement of A.D. 1783 Canada was left in the British Crown's possession by a victorious France; and Great Britain, let off with the loss of her thirteen

⁵*The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (The Modern Library Edition), Vol. II, pp. 93–5. A similarly brilliant account of the beneficial results of the balance of power is found in an anonymous contribution to the *Edinburgh Review*, Vol. I (January 1803), p. 348: "But had it not been for that wholesome jealousy of rival neighbours, which modern politicians have learned to cherish, how many conquests and changes of dominion would have taken place, instead of wars, in which a few useless lives were lost, and some superfluous millions were squandered? How many fair portions of the globe might have been deluged in blood, instead of some hundreds of sailors fighting harmlessly on the barren plains of the ocean, and some thousands of soldiers carrying on a scientific, and regular, and quiet, system of warfare, in countries set apart for the purpose, and resorted to as the arena where the disputes of nations may be determined? We may indeed look to the history of the last century as the proudest area in the annals of the species; the period most distinguished for learning, and skill, and industry; for the milder virtues, and for common sense; for refinement in government, and an equal diffusion of liberty; above all, for that perfect knowledge of the arts of administration, which has established certain general rules of conduct among nations; has prevented the overthrow of empires, and the absorption of weak states into the bodies of devouring neighbours; has set bounds to the march of conquest, and rendered the unsheathing of the sword a measure of the last adoption; whereas, in other times, it was always resorted to in the first instance."

colonies, could congratulate herself, in Gibbonian language, upon having survived, without shipwreck, a fluctuation in the Balance of Power in which her turn had come to see her prosperity depressed, but in which no essential injury had been done to the general state of happiness of a polite society which was the common spiritual home of the subjects of King George and the subjects of King Louis.⁶

The great political writers of that age were aware of this intellectual and moral unity, upon whose foundations the balance of power reposes and which makes its beneficial operations possible. We shall mention only three of these writer: Fénelon, Rousseau, and Vattel.

Fénelon, the great philosopher of the reign of Louis XIV and mentor of the latter's grandson, wrote in the *Supplement to the Examination of Conscience about the Duties of Royalty*:

This attention for the maintenance of a kind of equality and of equilibrium among neighboring nations assures tranquility for all. In this respect, all nations which are neighbors and have commercial relations form a great body and a kind of community. For instance, Christendom forms a kind of general republic which has its common interests, fears, and precautions. All members which compose this great body owe it to each other for the common good, and owe it also to themselves, in the interest of national security, to forestall any step on the part of any member which might overturn the equilibrium and bring about the inevitable ruin of all the other members of the same body. Whatever changes or impairs this general system of Europe is too dangerous and brings in its train infinite evils.⁷

Rousseau took up the same theme by stating that "The nations of Europe form among themselves an invisible nation. . . . The actual system of Europe has exactly that degree of solidity which maintains it in a state of perpetual agitation without overturning it."⁸ And, according to Vattel, the most influential of the eighteenth-century writers on international law:

Europe forms a political system, a body where the whole is connected by the relations and different interests of nations inhabiting this part of the world. It is not as anciently a confused heap of detached pieces, each of which thought itself very little concerned in the fate of others, and seldom regarded things which did not immediately relate to it. The confined attention of sovereigns . . . makes Europe a kind of republic, the members of which, though independent, unite, through the ties of common interest, for the maintenance of order and liberty. Hence arose that famous scheme of the political equilibrium or balance of power; by which is understood such a disposition of things as no power is able absolutely to predominate, or to prescribe laws to others.⁹

⁶Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History* (London: Oxford University Press, 1939), Vol. IV, p. 149. (Reprinted by permission of the publisher.)

⁷*Oeuvres* (Paris, 1870), Vol. III, pp. 349, 350.

⁸*Oeuvres complètes* (Brussels: Th. Lejeune, 1827), Vol. 10, pp. 172, 179.

⁹*The Law of Nations* (Philadelphia, 1829), Book III, Chapter III, pp. 377-8.

The statements of the writers are echoed in the declarations of the statesmen. From 1648 to the French Revolution of 1789, the princes and their advisors took the moral and political unity of Europe for granted and referred as a matter of course to the "republic of Europe," "the community of Christian princes," or "the political system of Europe." But the challenge of the Napoleonic Empire forced them to make explicit the moral and intellectual foundations upon which the old balance of power had reposed. The Holy Alliance and the Concert of Europe, both of which shall be dealt with later in detail,¹ are attempts at giving institutionalized direction to these moral and intellectual forces which had been the lifeblood of the balance of power.

The Treaty of the Holy Alliance of September 26, 1815, obligated its signatories—all the sovereigns of Europe except three—to nothing more than to act in relation to each other and to their subjects in accordance with Christian principles. Yet the other treaties of the same year, which tried to reconstitute the European political system and which are popularly known by the name of the Holy Alliance, were directed against the recurrence of revolution anywhere, especially, of course, in France. Since the French Revolution had been the great dynamic force that destroyed the balance of power, it was believed that any revolution would carry with it a similar threat. Thus the principle of legitimacy and the inviolability of the frontiers of 1815 became the foundation stones upon which at least Austria, Prussia, and Russia tried to re-erect the political structure of Europe.

As late as 1860, when France obtained the cession of Savoy and Nice as compensation for the increase of territory obtained by Sardinia in Italy, England intervened by invoking one of the principles of 1815. "Her Majesty's Government," Earl Russell, the British Foreign Secretary, wrote to the British Ambassador to France, "must be allowed to remark that a demand for cession of a neighbor's territory, made by a State so powerful as France, and whose former and not very remote policy of territorial aggrandizement brought countless calamities upon Europe, cannot well fail to give umbrage to every State interested in the Balance of Power and in the maintenance of the general peace."

The Concert of Europe—diplomacy by conferences among the great powers which would meet all threats to the political system by concerted action—became the instrument by which first the principles of the Holy Alliance and then, after the latter's disintegration culminating in the liberal revolutions of 1848, the common interests of Europe were to be realized. The Concert of Europe functioned on many occasions during the century from its inception in 1814 to the outbreak of the First World War in 1914. The conception underlying it—that is, the political unity of Europe or, in the words of the British statesman Castlereagh, "the general system of Europe"—was referred to in many official declarations. Thus the allied powers declared to-

¹See Chapter 27.

ward the end of 1813 that they "shall not lay down their arms . . . before the political status of Europe has been anew reaffirmed and before immutable principles have taken their rights over vain pretensions in order to assure Europe a real peace." In the declaration of February 5, 1814, from which the Concert of Europe is generally dated, the representatives of Austria, Great Britain, Prussia, and Russia stated that they did not speak solely in the name of their respective countries, "but in the name of Europe which forms but a single whole."

The same nations, joined by France, established in Protocol 19 of the 1831 Conference of London the independence of Belgium and, in the interest of the balance of power, put its neutrality under their joint guaranty. In justification, they declared: "Every nation has its laws, but Europe, too, has her law; the social order has given it to her." During the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, the French Minister Thiers, searching in vain for aid from the other European nations in order to prevent the overthrow of the balance of power by Germany, complained that "Europe was not to be found." In that phrase he paid his respects to the same principle of European unity which since 1648 has been the lifeblood of the balance of power. It was to the same principle that British Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey appealed in vain when on the eve of the First World War he invited the nations of Europe to a conference in order to settle their differences. One might even say that British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, when in 1938 he forced Czechoslovakia to cede the Sudetenland to Nazi Germany, acted under the mistaken assumption that the moral, intellectual, and political unity of Europe still existed and that Nazi Germany formed an integral part of it.

Moral Consensus of the Modern State System

The confidence in the stability of the modern state system that emanates from all these declarations and actions derives, it will be noted, not from the balance of power, but from a number of elements, intellectual and moral in nature, upon which both the balance of power and the stability of the modern state system repose. "In politics as in mechanics," as John Stuart Mill put it, "the power which is to keep the engine going must be sought for *outside* the machinery; and if it is not forthcoming, or is insufficient to surmount the obstacles which may reasonably be expected, the contrivance will fail."²

²*Considerations on Representative Government* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1882), p. 21. Cf. also the penetrating remarks on pp. 235-6 on the importance of the moral factor for the maintenance of the balance of power in domestic politics: "When it is said that the question is only one of political morality, this does not extenuate its importance. Questions of constitutional morality are of no less practical moment than those relating to the constitution itself. The very existence of some governments, and all that renders others enduring, rests on the practical observance of doctrines of constitutional morality; traditional notions in the minds of the several constituted authorities, which modify the use that might otherwise be made of their powers. In unbalanced governments—pure monarchy, pure aristocracy, pure democracy—such maxims are

What, for instance, Gibbon has pointed to with particular eloquence and insight as the fuel that keeps the motor of the balance of power moving is the intellectual and moral foundation of Western civilization, the intellectual and moral climate within which the protagonists of eighteenth-century society moved and which permeated all their thoughts and actions. These men knew Europe as "one great republic" with common standards of "politeness and cultivation" and a common "system of arts, and laws, and manners." The common awareness of these common standards restrained their ambitions "by the mutual influence of fear and shame," imposed "moderation" upon their actions, and instilled in all of them "some sense of honour and justice." In consequence, the struggle for power on the international scene was in the nature of "temperate and undecisive contests."

Of the temperateness and indecisiveness of the political contests, from 1648 to the Napoleonic Wars and then again from 1815 to 1914, the balance of power is not only the cause but also the metaphorical and symbolic expres-

the only barrier which restrains the government from the utmost excess in the direction of its characteristic tendency. In imperfectly balanced governments, where some attempt is made to set constitutional limits to the impulses of the strongest power, but where that power is strong enough to overstep them with at least temporary impunity, it is only by doctrines of constitutional morality, recognized and sustained by opinion, that any regard at all is preserved for the checks and limitations of the constitution. In well-balanced governments, in which the supreme power is divided, and each sharer is protected against the usurpations of the others in the only manner possible, namely, by being armed for defense with weapons as strong as the others can wield for attack, the government can only be carried on by forbearance on all sides to exercise those extreme powers, unless provoked by conduct equally extreme on the part of some other sharer of power; and in this case we may say that only by the regard paid to maxims of constitutional morality is the constitution kept in existence."

Cf. on this point also the analogy between industrial warfare and the international balance of power in R. H. Tawney, *The Acquisition Society* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1920), pp. 40, 41: "That motive produces industrial warfare, not as a regrettable incident, but as an inevitable result. It produces industrial war, because its teaching is that each individual or group has a right to what they can get, and denies that there is any principle, other than the mechanism of the market, which determines what they ought to get. For, since the income available for distribution is limited, and since, therefore, when certain limits have been passed, what one group gains another group must lose, it is evident that if the relative incomes of different groups are not to be determined by their functions, there is no method other than mutual self-assertion which is left to determine them. Self-interest, indeed, may cause them to refrain from using their full strength to enforce their claims, and, in so far as this happens, peace is secured in industry, as men have attempted to secure it in international affairs, by a balance of power. But the maintenance of such a peace is contingent upon the estimate of the parties to it that they have more to lose than to gain by an overt struggle, and is not the result of their acceptance of any standard of remuneration as an equitable settlement of their claims. Hence it is precarious, insincere and short. It is without finality, because there can be no finality in the mere addition of increments of income, any more than in the gratification of any other desire for material goods. When demands are conceded the old struggle recommences upon a new level, and will always recommence as long as men seek to end it merely by increasing remuneration, not by finding a principle upon which all remuneration, whether large or small, should be based."

See also p. 50: "But the balance, whether in international politics or in industry, is unstable, because it reposes not on the common recognition of a principle by which the claims of nations and individuals are limited, but on an attempt to find an equipoise which may avoid a conflict without adjuring the assertion of unlimited claims. No such equipoise can be found, because, in a world where the possibilities of increasing military or industrial power are illimitable, no such equipoise can exist." (Reprinted by permission of the publisher.)

sion as well as the technique of realization. Before the balance of power could impose its restraints upon the power aspirations of nations through the mechanical interplay of opposing forces, the competing nations had first to restrain themselves by accepting the system of the balance of power as the common framework of their endeavors. However much they desired to alter the distribution of the weights in the two scales, they had to agree in a silent compact, as it were, that, whatever the outcome of the contest, the two scales would still be there at the end of it. They had to agree that, however high one might have risen and however low the other might have sunk, the scales would still be joined together as a pair, hanging from the same beam and, hence, able to rise and fall again as the future distribution of weights would determine. Whatever changes nations might seek in the status quo, they all had at least to recognize as unchangeable one factor, the existence of a pair of scales, the "status quo" of the balance of power itself. And whenever a nation might tend to forget that indispensable precondition of independence and stability, as Austria did in 1756 with regard to Prussia, or France from 1919–23 with regard to Germany, the consensus of all the other nations would not allow it to forget for long.

This consensus grew in the intellectual and moral climate of the age and drew its strength from the actual power relations, which under normal conditions made an attempt at overthrowing the system of the balance of power itself a hopeless undertaking. This consensus, in turn, as an intellectual and moral force, reacted upon the intellectual and moral climate and upon the power relations, strengthening the tendencies toward moderation and equilibrium. As Quincy Wright put it:

The States were so bounded and organized that aggression could not succeed unless it was so moderated and so directed that the prevailing opinion of the Powers approved it. Such approval was generally given to the Balkan revolts which gradually disintegrated the Ottoman Empire, to the Belgian revolt which separated that country from the Netherlands, to Prussian and Sardinian aggressions which united modern Germany and Italy, and to numerous aggressions in Africa, Asia, and the Pacific which increased European empires, and extended European civilization to these areas.³

It is this consensus—both child and father, as it were, of common moral standards and a common civilization as well as of common interests—that kept in check the limitless desire for power, potentially inherent, as we know, in all imperialisms, and prevented it from becoming a political actuality. Where such a consensus no longer exists or has become weak and is no longer sure of itself, as in the period starting with the partitions of Poland and ending with the Napoleonic Wars, the balance of power is incapable of fulfilling its function for international stability and national independence.

Such a consensus prevailed from 1648 to 1772 and from 1815 to 1933. In

³"The Balance of Power," in Hans Weigert and Vilhjalmur Stefansson, editors, *Compass of the World* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1944), pp. 53–4.

the former period, the state system resembled nothing so much as a competitive society of princes, each of whom accepted the reason of state—that is, the rational pursuit, within certain moral limitations, of the power objectives of the individual state—as the ultimate standard of the behavior of states. Each expected, and was justified in expecting, everybody else to share this standard. The passions of the religious wars yielded to the rationalism and the skeptical moderation of the Enlightenment. In that tolerant atmosphere, national hatreds and collective enmities, nourished by principles of any kind, could hardly flourish. Everybody took it for granted that the egotistical motives that animated his own actions drove all others to similar actions. It was then a matter of skill and luck as to who would come out on top. International politics became indeed an aristocratic pastime, a sport for princes, all recognizing the same rules of the game and playing for the same limited stakes.

After the interlude of the Napoleonic Wars, the dual fear of revolution and of a renewal of French imperialism called into being the morality of the Holy Alliance, with its blend of Christian, monarchical, and European principles. The Concert of Europe in the latter part of the nineteenth century, and the League of Nations after the First World War, added to this heritage the idea of the nation state. This idea became, as a principle of national self-determination, one of the cornerstones upon which successive generations, from the liberal revolutions of 1848 to the outbreak of the Second World War, tried to erect a stable political structure. What the French Foreign Minister De la Valette wrote in 1866 to a French diplomatic representative became one of the basic convictions of this period of history—proclaimed again by Woodrow Wilson and made one of the standards of the Peace Treaties of 1919: “The emperor . . . sees a real equilibrium only in the satisfied wishes of the nations of Europe.”⁴

What is left of this heritage today? What kind of consensus unites the nations of the world in the period following the Second World War? Upon the examination of the component elements of this consensus will depend the estimate of the role that the balance of power can be expected to play today for the freedom and stability of the community of nations.

⁴The importance of the moral factor for the preservation of the independence of small nations is well pointed out by Alfred Cobban, *National Self-Determination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), pp. 170, 171: “But even the policies of great empires are influenced by the climate of opinion, and there has for long been a prejudice in favour of the rights of small independent states. With the sources of this prejudice we need not concern ourselves, but its existence is a fact which the student of international affairs cannot ignore. The various factors we have mentioned all undoubtedly have their importance, but in our opinion it was not the strength of national feeling in the smaller states, or even the effects of the balance of power, so much as the general recognition that the destruction of an independent sovereignty was an exceptional, and normally an unjustifiable, act which ultimately protected many of the small states of Europe, some no larger than a single city, from absorption by the greater powers. Even in the eighteenth century, when the power of the larger states was increasing rapidly, contemporary opinion, influenced by the classical city-state ideal, held up the smaller states for admiration and believed in their independence. During the nineteenth century the growth of the nationalist ideal did much to undermine this view, but in 1919, as we have seen, it still exercised considerable influence.” (Reprinted by permission of the University of Chicago Press.)