



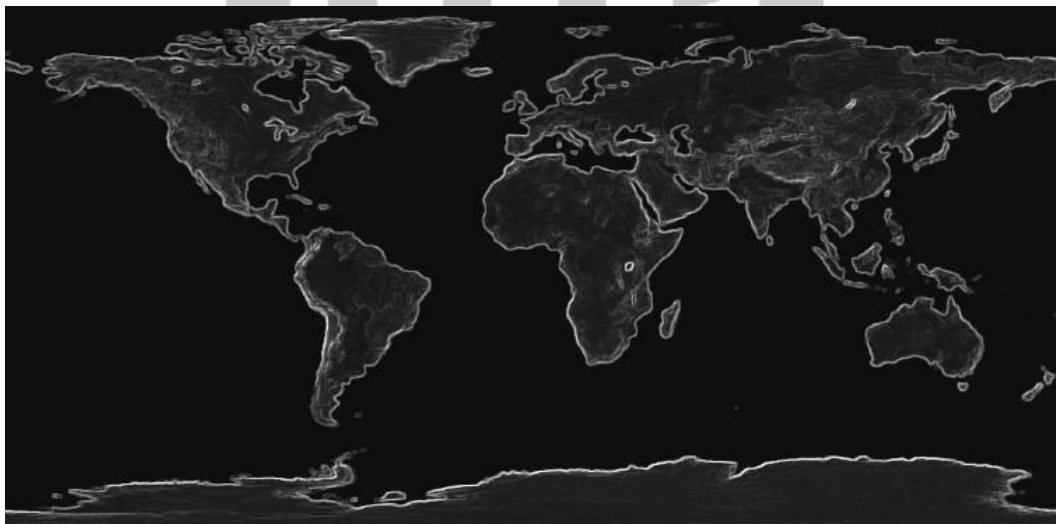
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***TRANSITION BALANCING –  
EVOLUTION OF TRADITIONAL  
BALANCE OF POWER***

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*Balance of Power, a black and white concept throughout the Cold War has transformed in today's multipolar world. What does it hold for the decades to come?*

***Veritas et Aequitas***



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## I. INTRODUCTION

Balance of Powers survives and lives on through the challenges and changes in the geopolitical landscape during the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Rise of smaller states, terrorism, mass people movements, non-western forms of democracy, and empowerment of international and regional organizations have led to massive changes in the political landscape, which realism and balance of power theory attempts to explain. Critics have been vocal of the irrelevance of Balance of Theory since the fall of the Soviet Union, mainly due to the shock and unexpected nature of events in 1991, which led to an intense debate over whether balance of power theory and realism in general constituted a “degenerative” research program (Vasquez 2003). An unexplainable event barely disproves the entire theory on which the states have known to function since the explanation of the Peloponnesian war by Thucydides around 430 BC. Following the revival of the principle in 1979 with Kenneth Waltz’s Principles of International Politics, the balance of power between states began to be understood in a more comprehensive and better manner (Waltz 1979).

Critics of realism believe that global social forces have forced it to die out, while the realists contend that balance of power still lives in different forms and varying intensities (Vasquez 2003). The two sides of arguments by scholars contending the applicability of BOP theory are based on the following assumptions: 1) Smaller and weaker states bandwagon to bigger states, instead of indulging in the balance of power (Schweller 1994); 2) United States has been a sole superpower since the climax of Second World War, and throughout Cold War (Joffe 2002); 3) Rise of International and Regional Organizations eliminate the necessity and means for survival of BOP theory.

This paper aims to provide analysis and evidence that would disprove these assumptions and provide countering analysis to explain the prevalence of liberalist structures such as United Nations and Bretton Woods Institutions as the reasons for survival of realism and BOP theory along with multiple others. This paper shall prove the applicability of Hard Balancing, and Soft Balancing in the current power equations, both regionally and internationally (Paul 2004). The paper shall introduce Transition Balancing as a novel concept in the explanation of BOP theory along with its interplay between Hard and Soft Balancing.

The paper aims to design a BOP Spectrum for classifying the countries and their status in the International Community. The paper also aims to classify and explain the external and internal factors that determine the applicability of the BOP theory by States and the type of balancing that they undergo in today’s world. This paper will play the role played by International and Regional Organizations in facilitating the Balance of Power Theory and defining the roles for countries in the BOP Spectrum. Finally, the paper will analyze the effects of this BOP theory on world peace, international security, and sustainable development in the future.



## II. HARD, SOFT, AND TRANSITION BALANCING

*“Hard balancing is a strategy often exhibited by states engaged in intense interstate rivalry. States thus adopt strategies to build and update their military capabilities, as well as create and maintain formal alliances and counter alliances, to match the capabilities of their key opponents. The traditional realist and neorealist conceptions of balancing are mainly confined to hard balancing.” (Paul 2004).*

*“Soft balancing involves tacit balancing short of formal alliances. It occurs when states generally develop ententes or limited security understandings with one another to balance a potentially threatening state or a rising power. Soft balancing is often based on a limited arms buildup, ad hoc cooperative exercises, or collaboration in regional or international institutions; these policies may be converted to open, hard-balancing strategies if and when security competition becomes intense and the powerful state becomes threatening.” (Paul 2004).*

Balance of Theory is no more confined to the hard balancing and should not be limited to soft balancing while referring to them as the contrasting sides without an existing continuum between them. Transition Balancing can be defined in two different stages for countries. In the first stage of this balancing the countries begin to move away from bandwagoning practices with bigger nations to soft balancing, while in the second stage the countries start moving away from soft balancing against the bigger powers towards hard balancing. These processes transition from regional to international level as well through which countries can move either individually or in groups. The concept of transition balancing could explain the rise and fall of states in the global sphere of influence. Transition Balancing is affected by factors such as national interests, territorial, ideological and economic disputes with other states, membership to regional and sub-regional organizations, democratization of process and working methods in multilateral alliances.

Critics of the Balance of Power theory often point towards regional hegemon that lead the security alliances, and how their presence makes the other states bandwagon instead of attempting to reach for a balance regionally. The advent of globalization, technological development, and improving international trade has made countries self-reliant and capable of forging alliances with countries that may not be in the geographical vicinity to attempt balancing against a regional hegemon. There is an increased respect and popularity for self-determination, sovereignty, democracy, and nationalism amongst the states today and these makes the governments more accountable to their people which makes them portray the role of a balancer rather than a bandwagon.

Smaller states are often confined to the first and second stages of transition balancing rather than being an absolute soft or hard balancing power. Throughout the history there have been instances of countries attempting to rise to a soft balancer from a bandwagon and following a particular event, go back to being a bandwagon, as in the case of Brazil in 1965, when in spite of having extended support to the Argentine rejection of U.S. hegemony during World War II, sent troops to the Dominican Republic in 1965 to enforce U.S. hegemony (Marres 1988). Yet, following the turn of the century Brazil has grown to become a second stage transition balancing power between soft and hard balancing power. Brazil also plays a leadership role in Latin America, making it a hard-balancing power regionally. This showcases a dynamic spectrum of balancing of powers from bandwagon to hard balancing, and geographically too.



### III. FACTORS FOR THE BALANCE OF POWER SPECTRUM

In order to effectively explain the changing actions and initiatives of the States in the sphere of international relations and geopolitics it is imperative that a dynamic spectrum split between bandwagon, soft balance and hard balance along with two staged transition balance is designed. This spectrum takes into consideration factors such as – public opinion, economic independence and dominance, strategic realities, military power, regional objectives, disputes, sphere of influence, and form of government in the particular state (Walt 1985). The diverse factors affecting the application of the BOP Spectrum also takes into consideration that balance of power, *ceteris paribus*, does not have to present an equally powerful and opposite acting force in every aspect to balance the opposite bloc or state. Critics of BOP theory argue that the United States of America has been the sole superpower since the end of the Second World War as the Soviet Union, the last known hard balancing power against the United States, was not an equal to the latter in terms of economic prowess, alliances, conventional military power such as delivery systems for nuclear weapons and rapidly growing military complex in the country (Joffe 2002). Thereby, considering that Soviet Union which was believed to be the Balance of Power against the United States was built on a false pretense that realists believed.

Balance of Power between blocs and states is built on the principles of realism, where no unilateral power can be allowed to rise to become the Leviathan or a superpower, and the other states coordinate and collaborate to limit the rise of this power. The purpose of balancing is to prevent a rising power from assuming hegemony, and if and when that prevention effort succeeds, a balance of power is expected to be present (Elman 2003). Considering this condition, preventing the rise of a power would go on to establish a hard balance between the states and the period during which the state attempts to prevent this rise is the transition balance. During the Cold War, in spite of the Soviet Union not being an absolute equal to the United States in terms of economic and military prowess, was able to establish a hard balance by preventing its rise as an international hegemon. This can be found in the Soviet attempts of establishing its own sphere of influence in Europe, presenting the Molotov Plan as the counter to the Marshall Plan, establishing a prominent sphere of influence in Eastern Europe, Latin America, Caribbean, and South East Asia. Each of these attempts have been far from an equal to the American alternative, yet these actions were able to bring a balance, especially with the help and support provided to regional actors such as Cuba in 1962, India in 1971 and the Soviet satellite states throughout the Cold War.

The aforementioned factors affect the states in different manner depending on the part of the BOP Spectrum they belong to at that particular moment in time. The factors, just as the spectrum itself are extremely dynamic, vis-à-vis the relations with powerful states and blocs along with their actions in the international sphere. Massive events which require global coordination and support can potentially change the effect of the aforementioned factors such as economic independence and sphere of influence. The concurrent COVID crisis brought out a similar conundrum for the entire world community, which receives massive support from China, yet the larger global community remains sceptical of the objectives and means of achieving those objectives. This global crisis has provided an impetus to the states such as India, which provides lesser support to the global community in relative comparison to China. This impetus is experienced by receiving more support and soft power due to the non-sceptical attitude that the global community holds for India in relative comparison to its Asian rival – China.



This regional balance of power leaves a huge mark on their potential global spheres of influence, and actions of their allies in the international community.

#### **IV. EFFECT OF THE RISE OF INTERNATIONAL AND REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS ON THE BOP THEORY**

International and Regional Organizations working to support the states in the financial, strategic, humanitarian, and political capability. International organizations such as the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank Group and regional organizations such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the Arab League, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, and many others were created during the period of Cold War and consisted of one or more of the major powers as the active participant. Critics of realism believe that these organizations which were built as tools of liberalism played a negative effect on the existence of realism. These organizations are primarily liberalist in nature due to the emphasis on cooperation and absolute gains rather than relative gains and competing countries.

The latter part of the assumption which portrays these organizations as an antithesis to the applicability of balance of power is not backed by any evidence. However, the balance of power is strengthened by the increased role of these international and regional organizations for two reasons: 1) United Nations through its principles, organs and working methods has been successful in limiting the rise of a single power as the sole superpower in the world. 2) International and Regional Organizations have empowered the smaller countries to make them more self-reliant and provide an opportunity for dialogue and collaboration with the international community.

United Nations has been widely successful in linking sovereignty to the will of the people and gave rise to the universal acceptance of the right to self-determination, which in turn was successful in increasing the respect for sovereignty and universal acceptance of the UN Charter which provides limited options for use of force legally (Mikanda 1996). This has given rise to a period of relative peace in the world and the weaker states do not fear an outright occupation and annexation unless they challenge a major power directly. Even in situations where a major power has annexed a state, for instance Iraq in 2003, the occupation is not tantamount to colonialization where the state was wiped off the map (Paul 2004). The success of this can be credited to the United Nations, where the states fear backlash for their actions. This attitude by the states has given rise to weaker states collaborating under the umbrella of International organizations such as the UN and not bandwagon with the major powers anymore.

Weaker states are further empowered by these organizations through their humanitarian and financial initiatives and endeavours such as IMF's grants, WTO's developing nations status, and UN's humanitarian support. This reduces the reliance of weaker states on their regional major power which could potentially grow to become a hegemon, if the weaker states are not empowered. Weaker states are also presented with the opportunity to discuss and collaborate with states which may not be in the geographic vicinity of the weaker state but share similar values and gains to be made by partnership and alliance. This reduces the ability of major powers in the trade alliance with the weaker states to grow on to become a hegemon by coercing the weaker states through economic and military threats. This subsequent reduction ensures a more fearless attitude amongst the states, providing them room to shift from a bandwagoning to soft balancing and finally, hard balancing.



## V. CONCLUSION

The following conclusions arise from this interpretation of the Balance of Power Theory and its relevance in the current power equations. First, the United States of America was not the sole superpower in the global sphere following the fall of the Soviet Union, as theorized by the principles of realism. Second, the principle of Balance of Power does not hinge on the capabilities of opposite sides being equal to each other, and the BOP is maintained if the extreme rise of a single state as a military and economic power is prevented. Third, BOP can be characterized as a wide dynamic spectrum ranging from Bandwagoning to Hard Balancing with Transition Balancing classified in two stages between Bandwagoning and Soft Balancing, and Soft Balancing and Hard Balancing, where states can be denoted as part of one of the bands depending on various factors. Fourth, the rise of International and Regional Organizations in the global sphere has further helped the states achieve a balancing approach rather than the one of bandwagoning, especially due to the imbibed respect for sovereignty arising from the principles of UN, increased capability development of states by these organizations, and a platform for open dialogue and collaboration with numerous states.

The Balance of Power theory can be of tremendous use to the policy analysts and states for determining actions, initiatives, and ideas by analyzing the position of a state on the BOP Spectrum during a particular time frame and thereby predicting their moves on the global sphere. This could be an instrumental tool in determining Foreign Policy of a state with respect to the actions of their regional rivals and allies.

## VI. NOTES

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