

Topic Page: [Balance of power](#)

Definition: **balance of power** from *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate(R) Dictionary*

(1701) : an equilibrium of power sufficient to discourage or prevent one nation or party from imposing its will on or interfering with the interests of another



Image from: [A woman worker at a textile plant in the late... in Encyclopedia of Politics](#)

Summary Article: **balance of power**

From *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*

In politics, the theory that the best way of ensuring international order is to have power so distributed among states that no single state is able to achieve a dominant position. The term, which may also refer more simply to the actual distribution of power, is one of the most enduring concepts in international relations. Since the development of nuclear weapons, it has been asserted that the balance of power has been replaced by a 'balance of terror'.

In diplomatic relations the principle of the balance of power has operated from the earliest times, for example in the leagues of the Greek city states; the maze of wars and alliance of the Italian republics; or the attempt of Wolsey and Henry VIII to make England the balancing power in Europe in the early 16th century.

The 17th and 18th centuries In the 17th and 18th centuries the balance of power was recognized as a definite formula of diplomacy. It was the guiding principle of William of Orange in his lifelong struggle against Louis XIV. It also explains the tangled diplomacy and constant wars of the 18th century, culminating in the coalition of all the powers against Napoleon. George Canning's famous remark 'I called the New World into existence to redress the balance of the Old' in regard to his recognition of the newly independent former Spanish colonies in South America illustrates the vitality of the theory.

World War I The years before World War I confirmed the balance of power as a principle of modern European policy. The Triple Alliance was countered by the Dual Alliance between France and Russia with Great Britain left its 'splendid isolation' in order to maintain the equilibrium threatened by the increase of German power and the weakness of Russia.

Between the wars The creation in 1918 of the League of Nations was an attempt, in the words of H H Asquith, to form 'a community of power' to replace the balance of power. In conjunction with the League of Nations experiment, greater emphasis was placed on arbitration. In the 1930s, however, Britain and France tended to abandon the principle of the balance of power in favour of the appeasement of the fascist dictatorships in Germany and Italy.

After 1945 From 1945 balance-of-power politics between the West and the communist world were conducted under the shadow of nuclear deterrence, but there was also emphasis on international arbitration and the United Nations as the means of settling disputes between nations. With the collapse of the Soviet empire in Europe in 1989–90, the possession of nuclear weapons as a means of maintaining the balance of power between East and West became less relevant, although China's accelerating emergence as a superpower has meant that the nuclear threat has not entirely disappeared. A balance of power in economic, rather than military, terms is a likely development.

APA

Chicago

Harvard

MLA

balance of power. (2018). In Helicon (Ed.), *The Hutchinson unabridged encyclopedia with atlas and weather guide*. Abington, UK: Helicon. Retrieved from https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/balance_of_power



© RM, 2018. All rights reserved.



© RM, 2018. All rights reserved.

APA

balance of power. (2018). In Helicon (Ed.), *The Hutchinson unabridged encyclopedia with atlas and weather guide*. Abington, UK: Helicon. Retrieved from https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/balance_of_power

Chicago

"balance of power." In *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*, edited by Helicon. Helicon, 2018. https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/balance_of_power

Harvard

balance of power. (2018). In Helicon (Ed.), *The Hutchinson unabridged encyclopedia with atlas and weather guide*. [Online]. Abington: Helicon. Available from: https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/balance_of_power [Accessed 22 September 2019].

MLA

"balance of power." *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*, edited by Helicon, 2018. *Credo Reference*, https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/balance_of_power. Accessed 22 Sep. 2019.