

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2016 · 15 marks

“The notion of balance of power is notoriously full of confusion.” In the light of this quotation, do you think that the concept of balance of power is relevant?

FLOW SNAPSHOT

how the answer moves

INTRO ROUTES

R1 realist device against domination, works in multipolarity → **Wight's** “confusion” conceded, but located in *definition*, not use • **R2** concept notoriously confused → **Inis Claude** “too many meanings,” **Morgenthau's** four / **Haas's** eight → confusion definitional, not fatal

BODY FLOW

sources of confusion (power hard to measure, interpretations differ, relations unpredictable) → yet practical worth intact: prevents hegemony, manages security competition, explains alliances / power transitions → **Waltz's** structural pull (“abhors unbalanced power”) → US-China, NATO-Russia, Quad → concept adapts not dies: **Walt's** balance of threat, **Paul's** soft balancing (direct balancing of US too costly)

COUNTER-VIEW

liberals: entrenches rivalry → stops operating under unipolarity → globalisation + transnational threats defy balancing

CONCLUSION ROUTES

R1 confused in definition but resilient in practice • **R2** survives in altered forms → relevant, not redundant

Balance of power is a realist perspective meant to stop any single state from growing strong enough to dominate the rest, and it works best in a multipolar order.

Martin Wight's remark that it is "notoriously full of confusion" is fair, but the confusion lies in defining the term, not in its usefulness. Inis Claude argues that the trouble "is not that it has no meaning, but that it has too many meanings".

Hans Morgenthau listed four connotations and Ernst Haas as many as eight. This muddle is natural, because power is hard to measure, interpretations differ, and state relations remain unpredictable.

Definitional confusion, however, has not weakened its practical worth. The concept explains how states prevent hegemony, manage security competition and form alliances during power transitions.

For Kenneth Waltz it is not a passing fashion but a structural pull i.e. "as nature abhors a vacuum, so international politics abhors unbalanced power." Present rivalries between the US and China, NATO and Russia, and the working of the Quad show it in operation.

Stephen Walt's balance of threat and T.V. Paul's soft balancing recognise that balancing the US directly is too costly, so states resort to diplomacy and institutions. Critics like liberals argue it entrenches rivalry and it stops operating under unipolarity.

Globalisation and transnational threats defy simple balancing. It stays confused in definition but resilient in practice & relevant in altered forms.