



## Study of Foreign Policy in International Relations

Dr. Kusum Lata “Assistant Professor, Defence Study, CRM Jat College Hisar

**Abstract:** Foreign Policy decision-making is agreed to be one of the greatest instrument at a state’s disposal to pursue its national interests. It is considered as a full political activity of states. A good Foreign Policy would obviously lead a state in fulfilling its national interests and acquiring rightful place among comity of nations. As such the study of Foreign Policy forms an important part of International Studies. However, the first problem that one faces in the study of Foreign Policy is the problem of definition or clear meaning of the term. When used, it is either out of context or entails a different meaning. As such, it becomes a “neglected concept” as most people dealing with the subject have felt confident that they knew what foreign policy was. This neglect has been one of the most serious obstacles to providing more adequate and comprehensive explanations of Foreign Policy. This article, seeks to provide a comprehensive meaning about the concept of Foreign Policy, and also look into some of the things that determines the foreign policy decision-making of a country. This work, will give many students, researchers and policy makers a good idea of what foreign policy entails and how such policy decisions are being made.

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### What is Foreign Policy?

After the treaty of Westphalia and the end of the First and Second World War, the international system has witnessed an increasing growth in the development of nation states. The end product of this development is thus, the creation of an interaction between these nation states. In addition, the establishment of United Nations and the process of decolonization that has liberated many states into sovereign entities have further provided the impetus to interrelationships among states. Such has resulted into the formation of ‘foreign policies’. With the aim of determining and identifying the decisions, strategies, and ends of interaction of a state with another [1]. Furthermore, the modern world of “globalization”; the “widening, deepening and speeding up of global interconnectedness” has increased this interrelationships or interactions among states. Hence, there is unanimity among scholars on the necessity of a “foreign policy” for each state, since no state will like to function in complete isolation. This made scholars like Feliks Gross, to say that even a decision to have no relations with a particular state is also a foreign policy. A state without a foreign policy has been compared to a ship in the deep sea without any knowledge of directions. Thus, foreign policy leads a state in fulfilling its national interests and acquiring rightful place among comity of nations.

The term foreign policy has been defined in various ways by scholars; however, they are certain that it is concerned with behavior of a state towards other states. Hermann for instance, defined foreign policy as “the discrete purposeful action that results from the political level decision of an individual or group of individuals. It is the observable artifact of a political level decision. It is not the decision, but a product of the decision.” By this, it can be seen that Hermann defines foreign policy as the behaviour of states.

According to Joseph Frankel, “foreign policy consists of decisions and actions, which involves to some appreciable extent relations between one state and others”. By this, foreign policy involves set of actions that are made within state’s borders, intended towards forces existing outside the country’s borders. It comprises



the formulation and implementation of a set of ideas that govern the behaviour of states while interacting with other states to defend and enhance their national interests.

In the words of Padelford and Lincoln, “A State’s Foreign Policy is totality of its dealings with the external environment. Foreign Policy is the overall result of the process by which a state translates its broadly conceived goals and interests into specific courses of action in order to achieve its objectives and preserve its interests”<sup>8</sup>. Two functions of foreign policy can be extracted from Padelford and Lincoln’s definition; first, foreign policy is to attain its conceived goals and second, to pressurize its national interests.

**Determinants of Foreign Policy Decision-Making:** In Hill’s insight, “foreign policy is the hinge of domestic and international politics”<sup>11</sup>. There is also consensus among scholars that foreign policy serves as an intersection point of domestic and international politics. Thus, from here we can say that, the foreign policy of every state is influenced by mainly two determinants; international or external and domestic or internal. These are considered as factors which help in shaping and moulding foreign policy. However, the linkage between international and domestic determinants has long been a widely debated topic in the field of international relations and Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) in particular. While others argue that domestic politics and foreign policy are two ‘independent’ arenas of issue, others are of the view that foreign policy and domestic politics are ‘interdependent’ and could spill over into each other.

While both school of scholars made convincing arguments, however, the level of influence between domestic and international determinants of foreign policies varies from state and the political environment in which these states exist. In some cases, international factors play a major role, whereas in other cases, domestic determinants are more important.

**External Determinants of Foreign Policy:** Undoubtedly, the international environment plays an important role in shaping the foreign policy of every state. Since foreign policy in general is about the interaction of a state with another, this interaction only takes place at the international level and as such, cannot be ignored in analyzing the foreign policy of any state. As scholars in this school acknowledge the importance of both international and domestic factors, however, they argue that international factors play a more important role in determining country’s foreign policy. The main external factors that determine the foreign policy of a state are but not limited to: the international system or power structure, international law, international organizations, alliances, and military strength or arm race. Now we can analyse this factors in details.

**The international system or power structure:** The modern state system has been in existence since the treaty of Westphalia in 1648. It includes big, middle and small powers. As mentioned above, the interaction between these states takes place at the international level and as such it plays a significant role in shaping and moulding the foreign policies of those interacting states. The establishment of friendly and cooperative relations between states is the aims of a sound foreign policy. Foreign policy is essentially shaped by one’s relative power within the international system. The world is continuously changing, new events and personalities create fresh foreign policy problems for all concerned<sup>12</sup>. To select events at random, the impact of the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, the rise of

Communist Power in China in 1949, the rise of De Gaulle to power in France and Hitler in Germany, and the emergence of new states in Asia and Africa; brought about significant changes in the power structure that has impacted the foreign policy of many states. A prevalent framework of world politics plays decisive role in



deciding the foreign policy of a country. As such foreign policies of states thus changes with shifts in the international power structure. In the traditional multi-polar system, it was easier for states to switch sides and gain maximum interests from both sides. Italy has used this strategy skillfully and switched sides during the height of World War I to gain its share in the post war colonial arrangement<sup>13</sup>. During the 1980s, the international system was characterized with a bi-polar system as witnessed during the Cold War, and now a unipolar with the US as the only hegemonic power. These events have restructured the power system and have a significant effect on the foreign policies of states. During the bipolar world system, it was not easy for states to switch sides easily as the ideological fault lines were clearly marked.

**International law:** The international law is generally defined as a set of rules that regulate relations between states. Cali defined it as “a system of rules created deliberately and explicitly by states. Where states have expressly willed to be bound by the rules”. The existence of international law and international norms limits the freedom to maneuver of states in the system. It is constituted by interstate agreements and treaties and thus, does not entirely favor every interest a state may have. It limits a state in one way or another. That been said, international law regulates the foreign policy of states, and has a binding function in foreign policy as it offers a legal framework through which states should interact. By foreign policy in this sense, is defined as the objectives that guide the activities and relationships of one state in its interaction with other states. It is believed that states actually obey and comply with international law because it constraints the making and enacting of their foreign policy. However, there is much debate among International Relations theorists about the consequences of international law. Whether states really comply with or observed international law and norms or not and to what extent they do obey international rules; because it is clear that some international norms are obeyed while others are ignored. One side of the debate, proponents of Realism, argue that international law has little or no independent effect on foreign policy. Henkin, for instance argued that one of the major purposes of foreign ps to “maintain international order so that states can pursue national interests.” Thus in a realist view, states have the tendency to give priority to their national interests and then sometimes violate legal norms when fundamental interests are at risk. Leaders are claimed to pursue their national interests (broadly defined to include military security and economic prosperity) without regard for international law. The US invasion of Iraq in 2003, under the Bush administration provides a clear illustration of this . Hence from this it is said, the international law lacks force because the legislative, judicial and executive functions are fundamentally decentralized. First, each nation in world affairs is its own lawgiver. Second, a nation is its own judge and can interpret the law to serve its own purposes. Finally, each nation in world affairs is its own sheriff, who must enforce the law for itself or organize a sympathetic posse.

**International organizations:** Currently, there are over 68,000 International Organizations (both active and inactive) in the world. Many International Organizations (IOs) play an enormous role in the current international system. It is hard to imagine how world affairs would operate without international bodies such as the United Nations (UN) and its affiliates, international financial institutions, such as International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB). Such organizations are considered as active actors in the field of International Relations, as they facilitate the interaction between states at the global level. A state’s foreign policies is thus, often affected by its membership of international, regional and sub-regional organizations, since they surrender partially their sovereignty to these organizations. As their operations will be guided by the constitution of the organization; the policies of member states will undoubtedly be affected by the nature of the particular institution. Nevertheless, scholars of international relations still disagree about



the role IOs play in the foreign policies of states. The realist approach in the international politics has generally had less confidence in the efficacy of international organizations. They argue, for example that the

United Nations and most other international bodies have no way to their decisions and that nation states have all the real power in the international system. Mearsheimer for instance, argued that international institutions “are basically a reflection of the distribution of power in the world. They are based on the selfinterested calculations of the great powers, and they have no independent effect on state behavior.” IOs are considered as only a marginal factor in world politics. This is otherwise regarded as the ‘bottom-up’ perspective; i.e., how the foreign policies of states impact international organizations.

**Alliances:** Alliance formulation is considered to be one of the most curious aspects of international relations. It is regarded as the cornerstone of security policy; however, conventional wisdom holds that is commitment are notoriously unreliable. Alliance formation is considered as a strategy that states use in the formulation and implementation of their foreign policies. Clinton and Palmer, examined the consequences of alliance formation for other foreign policies of a state, including defense spending and the initiation of militarized disputes, using a theory of foreign policy that is based on several assumptions.

First, states pursue two goods-change and maintenance-through their foreign policy. Second, states select a portfolio of policies designed to produce the most preferred mix of the two goods. Third, all foreign policy behaviour including alliance requires resources. Fourth, states are rational in their allocation of resources. Together this implies that an observe alliance must have been the most efficient mechanism available for acquiring the most desired and achievable foreign policy portfolio and have implications for the observation of foreign policy substitutability.

**Military strategy/Arm race:** An arm race denotes the quantity or quality of instruments of military and naval power by rival states in peacetime. The first modern arm race took place when France and Russia challenge the naval superiority of Britain in the late 19th century. The buildup of arms, was also a characteristic of the Cold War between the US and USSR. The hostility between the United States and the Soviet Union began near the end of World War I. The profound ideological differences between these two camps were problematic, which eventually had an effect on the international system. The creation of the first atomic bomb in 1945, by the USA had two objectives: a quick end of World War II and possession by US (and not USSR), would allow control of foreign policy in the global stage. However, the discovery and the detonation of an atomic bomb in 1949 by the Soviet Union, ends America’s monopoly of atomic weaponry and launches the Cold War. As such in the 1950s, arm race became the focus of the Cold War. Arm race are a competitive defense spending and military capability building between two states or bloc of states (like the cold war). Examples of such states locked in long-term rivalries with other states include India-Pakistan, China-India, North-South Korea, and Turkey- Greece.

**Domestic Determinants of Foreign Policy:** Like the external determinant factors, scholars agree that the internal environment of state also influence the nature and course of its foreign policy. Countries differ in size, socioeconomic development and political regime. They also differ in their political institutionalization and societal structures, military and economic capabilities, and strategic cultures. In the same vain, public opinion, national role conceptions, decision making rules and personality traits of political leaders vary from one state to another. These differences according to Taner, “directly affect both foreign policy making process and foreign policy decisions.” By this, the “stuff of foreign policy derives from issues of domestic politics as



well as foreign relations.” Laura Neack argued. According to Kissinger also, “.....the domestic structure is not irrelevant in any historical period. At a minimum, it determines the amount of social effect which can be devoted to foreign policy.” Therefore, we shall now look into those domestic factors that may shape the foreign policy formulation and implementation of states.

**Culture and history:** Culture provides people with ways of thinking, seeing and interpreting the things around them. It shapes our ideas and serves an instrument for us in analyzing everything happening around us. Everything from our racial features, to the food we eat, the way we dress, the language we speak, the music we listen to, and where we live, all form a part of culture.

In Frode Liland’s dictum, “the cultural side of foreign policy is a vast and treacherous area.” However, a heated debate exists among scholars on whether and how culture impacts and shapes a state’s foreign and security policy in particular as well as international relations in general. Nevertheless, many scholars of international relations argued vividly that the way we think (i.e., our culture) has an effect on the policies we make. Vlahos argued that “pattern of thought and behavior are shaped by culture; they are not the product of mere nationalism.” Frode again asserted that cultural diplomacy has deep root and can easily be found in the archives of foreign ministers. A nation inherits a style and culture which in turn influence and decide the course of actions, the nation has to follow in relation to other sovereign states.

**Conclusion:** Foreign policy decision-making entails series of processes and involves different actors. It plays an enormous role in the international affairs of a state. Without a properly formulated foreign policy, a state is tended to lose its position and prestige in world affairs and will eventually lead to a decline in achieving its national interest, whereas the opposite is true of countries with well formulated foreign policies. Thus, fully understanding the meaning and concept of the term foreign policy, is quite important for both policy makers, students and researchers.

The foreign policy of every state is influenced by mainly two determinants; ‘international’/external and ‘domestic’/internal. These are considered as factors which help in shaping and moulding foreign policy of a country. However, the linkage between international and domestic determinants has long been a widely debated topic in the field of international relations and Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) in particular. While others argue that domestic politics and foreign policy are two ‘independent’ arenas of issue, others are of the view that foreign policy and domestic politics are ‘interdependent’ and could spill over into each other.

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