
UNIT 3 OBJECTIVES AND DETERMINANTS

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3.1 INTRODUCTION

A country's foreign policy does not emerge from a vacuum; it is guided and shaped by that country's history and culture, the political system and various other factors. Some of them like geography and the natural frontiers remain unchanged, while others like domestic and external environment frequently and at times unrecognisably change. Elements of continuity and change in a country's foreign policy can be explained with reference to the important influence of these factors and forces. The influence of these determining factors on foreign policies of countries need not be uniform across the space and time span; it varies from country to country and from situation to situation. The purpose of this Unit is to trace and appreciate the major determinants of India's foreign policy with reference to its objectives and principles.

3.2 INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICY: OBJECTIVES AND PRINCIPLES

Any activity is likely to be productive when goals and objectives steer it; so is the case with India's foreign policy. Without knowing these objectives it may not be easy to appreciate and evaluate the course of the policy. India's leaders have specified right from the time of Independence those objectives. Besides, many analysts and scholars have highlighted and evaluated these goals in their writings and analyses.

Chiefly, India's foreign policy aims to safeguard and further national interest in terms of protecting the country's political independence and promoting its external security. As a country that freed itself from colonial rule, India naturally wants to follow such foreign policy that would not compromise on its existence as a free country or give scope to other countries to dictate as to how it should conduct itself. With the help of a successful foreign policy, India would like to prevent or resist threats of military attacks from foreign quarters. India's need for national security is placed in the wider and wiser backdrop of the need to jointly work for security of the whole world. In other words, it does not want other countries to be insecure while working for its own

security. India has always desired friendly relations with all countries, especially the major countries as well as countries in its neighbourhood. In short, India's foreign policy seeks to promote world peace, work for avoidance of dangerous wars like the two World Wars during the first half of the 20th Century. India wants to promote harmony and cooperation between the countries that have ideological, political and other differences.

As a country that suffered colonial rule and became free after long peaceful struggle, India's foreign policy is committed to strive for bringing an end to colonialism everywhere. Accordingly it has supported freedom struggles of the peoples of Africa and Asia. As an extension of this goal, India has been interested to direct its foreign policy towards realisation of equal rights of all peoples and nations without discrimination. Therefore, India opposed the abhorrent policy of *apartheid* in South Africa; it sought to protect the right to equality under law to all people of Indian origin wherever they are.

India's foreign policy has another important goal, viz. to promote the economic development of underprivileged nations and their peoples. For this purpose, its foreign policy seeks to develop beneficial relationship with the industrially advanced countries with a view to securing necessary assistance. India's policy aims to cater to not just its own development needs but also those of the newly independent poor countries in the Third World. A more equitable economic and social world order that would help in eventually eliminating disease and deprivations has been a vital goal of India's foreign policy.

It is equally notable that a few laudable principles guide India to pursue the above foreign policy goals. Let us take note of them here. India has tried to stand by the principle of avoiding use of force in settling differences with other countries. Indeed it preferred the peaceful methods like dialogue, negotiation and diplomacy for narrowing differences and easing tensions among countries. India has always actively supported the development of international law to regulate various problematic aspects of world affairs. India has firmly believed in strengthening the United Nations and other global and regional organisations as useful tools for international harmony and cooperation. India believes in working for reduction and final elimination of nuclear and other types of weapons of mass destruction. India's foreign policy principles as enshrined in *Panchsheel* (1954) emphasise the imperatives of non-aggression, non-interference, and peaceful co-existence among countries.

In short, through foreign policy India wants to be seen as peace-loving, mature, law-abiding and trust worthy country while trying to benefit from friendly contacts with other countries in the society of nations.

3.3 DETERMINANTS OF INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICY

There are several factors that have influenced, and continue to influence, the shaping of India's foreign policy. Some of these factors are of permanent nature while others change with the time. In this section, we will discuss major determinants of India's foreign policy, viz. geography, history and culture, domestic situation, external environment, etc.

3.3.1 Geography

India's geographical size and location have played vital role in shaping its foreign policy. India is very big in size; it is the seventh largest in the world with nearly 3 million square kilometres of territory. On its north, its boundaries are associated with the world famous Himalayan mountain range. It has 15,000 kms long land boundaries with Pakistan in the West, Bhutan, China and Nepal in the North, and Bangladesh and Myanmar in the East. Afghanistan and the former Soviet Union are in the immediate vicinity of Jammu & Kashmir. Prime minister Atal Behari Vajpayee has noted often that one can change one's friends, but not neighbours. Therefore, India has been keen to have friendly and tension-free relations with all the neighbours.

India has 7,500 kms of coastline touched by the waters of the Indian Ocean on three sides of its territory. Most of India's foreign trade is routed through the Indian Ocean just as the Indian harbours witness dense traffic of merchant ships proceeding from or towards Europe, West Asia, Southeast Asia and East Asian regions; hence geopolitical and geo-strategic significance of the ocean to India's external relations. As you will recall, the Indian Ocean brought the colonial rule of the French, British, Dutch and the Portuguese to India and East Asia during the 17-19th centuries. Clearly India's foreign policy has perceived the need to ensure that its northern frontiers along with territorial waters in the Indian Ocean remain peaceful and free from foreign military build up. India's vast coastline necessitates not only a powerful navy, but also friendly relations with other naval powers present in the Indian Ocean. These include Britain as well as the United States, which have a powerful naval base at Diego Garcia.

The location of the country is also notable. Belonging to South Asia, India lies in the heart of the biggest continent, Asia. Although India was victim of Chinese and Pakistani military attacks, it is in its interest that the channels of communication are kept open. India therefore seeks that problems with these neighbours are amicably settled. In keeping with the fact that India is the gateway of both South-East Asia and the West Asia, India's security and vital interests are closely knit with the peace and stability in the larger region of Asia. As such, India keeps close relations with regional powers such as Iran, Indonesia, Malaysia, Indonesia, Japan, Vietnam, etc. India has followed the Look East Policy and is developing economic as well as strategic relations with the ASEAN countries.

3.3.2 History and Tradition

India's foreign policy provides a mirror to its historical heritage. India never mounted aggressive campaigns outside the country for territorial expansion. Indeed it was targeted in a series of invasions and alien rule, although notably the ruling dynasties made the country their home and adapted themselves to local customs and traditions. The British colonial empire was consolidated through deliberate policy of pitting the native kingdoms against one another in battles that bled winners and losers alike. This experience as a victim of wars has turned India's foreign policy anti-war in nature. Moreover, the legacy of the non-violent freedom struggle launched under the leadership of Gandhi and his lieutenants was bound to be evident in its foreign policy.

Not only this, the legacy of an ancient civilisation and culture also helped in foreign policy formulation. The traditional values of *Vasudheva Kutumbakam*—One World—have come down to the people of India from the ancient scriptures and the spiritual works of great men like Swami Vivekananda. Particularly, the values that have helped in shaping India's foreign policy are tolerance, non-violence and universal brotherhood. The furtherance of the tradition of non-

violence in India's foreign policy, according to A. Appadorai, was "the deliberate acceptance of a method of approach to foreign policy problems which emphasised reconciliation, and the temper of peace, as opposed to a spirit of revenge and hatred."

Most of the leaders of freedom movement were educated in Britain or were exposed to the system of liberal education. They valued liberty, equality and democracy. These ideals are embedded in the Indian foreign policy. While cooperating with liberal democratic countries, India did not oppose the socialist countries either. The policy of non-alignment is not only an outcome of keeping aloof from bloc politics, but is also in accordance with the goals and ideals of freedom struggle cherished by our people.

The impact of the British rule in India and the influence of national movement and freedom struggle are clearly evident in the shaping of India's foreign policy. According to A. Appadorai, the British rule in India had a two-fold impact on India's foreign policy. Firstly, it gave a stimulus to the national movement for freedom which in turn led to India's support for the freedom of dependent peoples; secondly, racial inequality that existed during the British rule made India commit itself to root out the evils of racial discrimination.

These idealistic notions notwithstanding, the realist legacy left behind by ancient scholars of statecraft like Kautilya too have an important bearing on the country's approach towards safeguarding its vital interests by coercion if necessary. Leaders of India like Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi candidly acknowledged the limitations of idealism to guide state policy at critical junctures. The action that India took in Goa (1961) and Bangladesh (1971) situations symbolised pragmatism.

3.3.3 Economic Conditions

The possession of raw materials and natural resources and the compulsions of economic development also determine the course of a country's foreign policy. Low economic profile could impinge on a country's ability to play an influential and effective role in foreign affairs.

India is a storehouse of vast natural resources with great potential for achieving economic heights in development. Its rivers are capable of generating power and providing enough water for drinking and irrigation. Huge deposits of bauxite, coal, copper, manganese and other minerals are India's assets. Equally notable is the base of its skilled and educated work force. Despite progress made in the fields of agriculture, literacy, science and technology, there is no denying that India lags far behind in development. The bulk of its growing population finds it difficult to cater to basic necessities like food, shelter and clothing. After Independence, it was clear to our leaders that the country needs help from foreign governments in respect of transfer of funds, import of equipment and finished goods, export of Indian commodities and goods, training of technical personnel, etc. In an ideologically polarised world, India needed friendship and goodwill from both the free market economies in the West as well as the Socialist world led by the former Soviet Union. By adopting the policy of non-alignment, India hoped for assistance from both the camps. As a parallel to that external policy, India has adopted a mixed economy approach that combined public sector with heavy state investment in infrastructure areas while a strong private sector flourished in an array of other areas.

India's economic linkages with the erstwhile colonial ruler, the United Kingdom guided Nehru to forge friendly contacts with that country both bilaterally and within the Commonwealth grouping. Vast portion of India's trade involving export of raw materials like cotton, tea and import of heavy machinery and technology has been with the United States and West European countries. These countries have come forward with generous grants and loans for various projects, apart from facilitating multilateral funding through the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. The former Soviet Union too emerged as a key partner in defence and other aspects of foreign trade on favourable terms.

Also notably, heavy dependence on oil for industrial and economic needs has brought special focus on relations with oil-rich Arab countries in West Asia, apart from working for stable supplies and prices of oil in global market.

At a different level, the economic conditions of the country provide inputs to India's foreign policy to argue for easing of economic disparities between the developed and the less developed countries and for greater economic relationships among the developing countries themselves.

3.3.4 Nature of Leadership

The personal qualities of leaders guiding the destiny of a nation at a given time tend to shape that country's foreign policy in a particular direction. Who can deny the role of, for instance, Woodrow Wilson in shaping the foreign policy of the United States in the early decades of the 20th Century or that of Mikhail Gorbachev in making the Soviet policy in the closing years of the same century? Similarly, in the case of India too, the personality of the incumbent prime ministers has come to be identified in certain measure with a particular flavour given to the country's foreign policy. The country's first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, who steered India's policy for more than one and a half decades, was widely regarded as internationalist in outlook, with a preference for enlightened, rather than narrow or self-centred, approach to problems. He was indeed regarded as among the tallest of visionaries in his times. Understandably, therefore India's foreign policy during his tenure was more committed to the collective good of the comity of nations in relation to concerns like world peace and disarmament. *Panchsheel* was a typical representation of the Nehruvian outlook to approaching problems with other countries.

Quite contrasting is the case of the influence of his daughter, Indira Gandhi. By nature she came out as a strong and decisive personality. Her proclivity to be pragmatic and sensitivity to the imperatives of vital national interests left an imprint on reorienting the foreign policy along the lines of realism, more than idealism. This is how India's policy with reference to the liberation of Bangladesh, non-accession to Non-Proliferation Treaty, and strengthening of ties with the former Soviet Union may be viewed. Again, the reputed qualities as a moderate of Atal Behari Vajpayee are said to have influenced the policy of engagement with Pakistan and the United States.

3.3.5 Domestic Milieu

No country's foreign policy can be immune from the influence of the dynamics within. Indeed it is an important determinant of foreign policy. The domestic milieu refers to, *inter alia*, the nature of governing system, the political culture including the policies of political parties, public opinion, etc. tradition, structure of government and enlightened leadership.

Independent India is a living example of 'unity in diversity'. Having won freedom from British after non-violent struggle, India chose a democratic system that could offer adequate representation to diversities of all kinds—regional, religious, and cultural. The executive is accountable to people's representatives who are chosen in periodical exercise of franchise. India's political system was based (and is still based) on Westminster model of parliamentary democracy. However much the executive would like to view foreign policy as its prerogative, parliamentary control over the executive has opened channels for influencing the country's foreign policy. In general, fortunately, India's foreign policy reflected the national consensus cutting across political differences between the ruling side and the opposition. Non-alignment policy is a clear example here. This, however, is not to say that the parliament and prime minister always looked eye to eye on all foreign policy issues all the time. Even during the time of Nehru, who had exercised more discretion than any other prime minister, parliament sought to assert itself in respect of his policy vis-à-vis the boundary dispute with China and the Goa question in the late 1950s. Recently in 2003, again, India's approach to the Iraq problem was very much dictated by the sentiments articulated in parliament in as much the government agreed to become party in "deploring" the American military action against Iraq.

The political parties too at the time of elections take positions on foreign policy matters in their respective manifestoes. There are varied views expressed by the BJP at one end and the Communist Party (Marxist) at the other concerning globalisation, World Trade Organisation and several other issues. Similarly, some of the regional parties like those in Tamil Nadu (DMK, AIADMK, MDMK, etc.), and Jammu and Kashmir (the National Conference) for instance have come to determine the country's policy toward Sri Lanka and Pakistan respectively.

Public opinion ventilated through media and other channels and the activities of interest/pressure groups like the friendship societies or the business associations have gained importance as determinants of India's foreign policy. The role of ISICUS or of CII cannot be denied, for example in the context of relations with the Soviet Union and the United States respectively. The print and lately the visual media have been influential determinants of the policy. The two most notable examples of the role played by the television and print media in making India respond the way it did related to the hijacking of Indian Airlines plane to Kandahar in 1999 and the official announcement of decision not to accede to the United States request for sending troops to post-war Iraq.

3.3.6 International Trends

The broad currents of international politics at any given point of time have direct bearing on foreign policies. The difficulty in conducting the foreign policy arises because states do not have sure means of controlling the behaviour of other states. During the inter-war period (1919-39), the quest for French security, followed by the rise of Fascism in Italy and Nazism in Germany and militarism in Japan had their impact on foreign policies. The US changed its policy towards the Soviet Union and recognised it because, in 1933, Hitler's emergence in Germany posed a threat to the world order created after the War. The Japanese aggression in Manchuria (China) in 1931 provided a common threat to USA as well as USSR in the Far East. The two Powers gave up their hostility.

The Cold War era (1945-90) has determined in a big way the foreign policy of most countries.

The fear of nuclearised United States brought the countries of Eastern Europe under the control of the Soviet Union, with the result that all those countries adopted socialism and came under the Russian wings. The entire policy of containment of communism adopted by the US was evident in its setting up of NATO, SEATO and such other military alliances/arrangements. India's efforts in expounding the policy of non-alignment were directly a response to this emerging polarisation in the international environment.

The Cold War was the defining characteristic of world politics for nearly 45 years. Arms race, especially in the nuclear field, typically represented the height of suspicion and the impending disaster. India's policy to take up nuclear disarmament emanated from the imminent and perpetual threat to human civilisation if those weapons were to be accidentally or deliberately used. Related to nuclear field, India's successful testing in 1998 of nuclear weapons was justified as a necessary response to the fast changing international environment that sought to dismiss the demand for nuclear disarmament and sanctify the inequitable hierarchy between the nuclear weapon powers and non-nuclear weapon powers.

After the sudden end of the Cold War followed by the disintegration of the Soviet Union, India's foreign policy underwent appreciable shifts on numerous counts—lack of enthusiasm towards the non-aligned movement, eagerness to accommodate the American concerns, resumption of full diplomatic ties with Israel, emphasis on economic aspects of relations with Europe, Southeast Asia and even South Asia.

Again, in the post-cold war era, the increasing sensitivity in international quarters to the issues of terrorism and human rights (along with the widely spread claims of self-determination) impelled necessary adjustments in India's foreign policy. During the 1990s, the critical observers of India's foreign policy have noted the government's preoccupation with the question of Jammu and Kashmir in its contacts with major countries and in global forums. The 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks on American targets in New York and Washington presented new opportunities to India to push its anti-terrorist foreign policy with greater conviction.

3.4 SUMMARY

The multifarious objectives of India's foreign policy achieve a blend of national and international interests. India has sought to achieve its security and socio-economic advancement while at the same time working for peace, freedom, progress and justice to all nations and peoples. Non-alignment, adherence to peaceful procedures for settlement of differences, support to the initiatives for disarmament, and active participation in international bodies constituted notable principles that flow from the objectives of the country's foreign policy.

As elaborated, among several determinants of foreign policy, the relevance of factors like India's geographical size, location, its historical experiences and traditions, the state of economy, the nature of political institutions and structure, and the personality of the country's leadership have played significant role in shaping the country's policy with countries in its neighbourhood and outside. Moreover, the impact of the changing international environment—be it the cold war politics, or the post-cold war trends—too is something not to be missed while understanding shifts in our foreign policy. All in all, India seems to have done pretty well in formulating and implementing a foreign policy behind which the nation stood united and which projected the country as a peace loving, mature, democratic, and law abiding country in the realm of world

affairs.

3.5 EXERCISES

- 1) Explain briefly the objectives and principles of India's foreign policy.
- 2) Explain India's geography, history and tradition as determinants of its foreign policy.
- 3) State how the backwardness of India's economy dictated foreign policy options.
- 4) Contrast the influences of various prime ministers on identifying the objectives and other aspects of India's foreign policy.
- 5) Comment briefly on domestic milieu as a factor in shaping India's foreign policy.
- 6) Write short notes on media and foreign policy in India.
- 7) What has been the influence of changing international trends on India's foreign policy?

