

3 CHAPTER

Determinants and the Formation of Indian Foreign Policy

After reading the chapter, the reader will be able to develop an analytical understanding on the following:

- Role of MEA in foreign policy
- Role of state governments in foreign policy
- Role of Defence Ministry in foreign policy
- Role of DRDO in foreign policy
- Role of Parliament in foreign policy
- Role of Union Executive in foreign policy
- Role of private sector in foreign policy
- Role of media in foreign policy
- Role of PMO in foreign policy

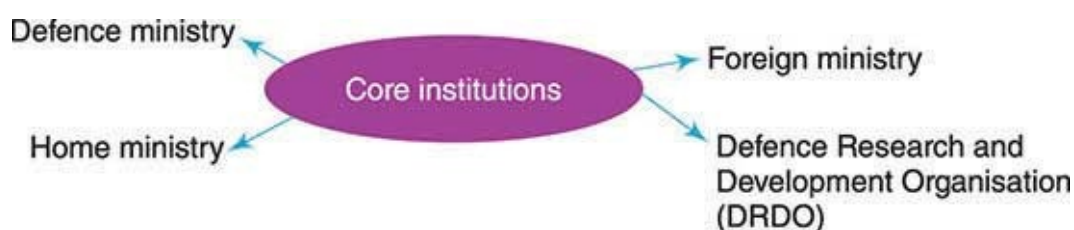
This chapter introduces the reader to various institutions responsible for foreign policy formation and execution in India. In 1947, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) was created. Initially, it was placed under the Prime Minister of India. The Indian MEA announced that friendly relations were to be established with all nations, with special attention on decolonisation. India envisaged the need to have one world. In 1947, the MEA developed two circles, one for neighbours and the other for the rest of the world. This might be interpreted as a British legacy since they had used the policy of the ring fence, and had also established buffer states and protectorates. The MEA, when created in 1947, had the infrastructure to engage with many states at their disposal.

Britain–Afghanistan and Independent India

When the British had control over India, they had decided to engage with Afghanistan. The British engagement with Afghanistan was undertaken to keep the Russians, under the Tsar, at bay. Due to British presence in Afghanistan, the situation was somewhat eased for India after 1947. In 1949, an Afghan Trade Delegation visited Delhi and concluded a Treaty of Friendship. India subsequently opened up consulates in Afghanistan to streamline the gulf operations as Britain had employed a lot of Indians to work in the oil fields in the Gulf. Thus, the Indian Government used its British links to engage with West Asia.

The World Wars also played an important role in our immediate worldview. Due to the World Wars, the British had taken a lot of Indians to work overseas. This not only

helped India to internationalise its presence in the post-independence period but also gave us insight on how to protect our frontiers. The British had taken a lot of people of Indian origin to work in other colonies. They came to constitute the Indian diaspora. The immediate task for MEA now was to provide citizenship to these migrants. Subsequently, the MEA, in later years, began to get professional diplomats recruited by Union Public Service Commission (UPSC). State governments play an important role in the foreign policy decisions in India at times, but during the electoral discourse, foreign policy is not debated as domestic politics in India has not evolved yet to use the policies of India at the international level in political campaigning. Nuclear weapon alliance, foreign diplomatic strategies and so forth are not used as campaign issues in India. Regional parties, however, try to generate regional sensation by occasionally raising up foreign policy issues. For example, DMK and AIADMK in Tamil Nadu use Tamil grievances in Sri Lanka as a plank to galvanise votes and, at times, have put tremendous pressures on the Central government to tow the regional line.



The Foreign Ministry, though it plays a very important role in the foreign policy decisions of India, is highly under-staffed. The diplomatic strength of India is very limited in comparison to Japan, the US or Germany. The officials are often overburdened. A joint secretary in MEA has a large portfolio and resultantly is unable to effectively process information. The Defence ministry has a huge pool of officials from the three forces but lacks officials with in-depth knowledge on modern complex acquisition and defence policies. The defence acquisitions fall upon career bureaucrats with little or no specialisation. There is a general tendency to delay decisions and this, overall, contributes in reduction in the influence of the military in foreign policy decisions.

Since our domestic acquisition is slow from foreign nations, at the defence level, to meet the shortage, we resort to self-sufficiency which is pledged by the Defence Research and Development Organization (DRDO). The problem repeatedly observed with DRDO is of over-promise and under-delivery. There is a huge soldier-scientist disconnect that aggravates concerns of domestic defence production. The Home Ministry provides support through the Indo Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) at the Chinese border and Border Security Force (BSF) at Pakistan and Bangladesh border and is involved in border conflicts with the nations.

In India, foreign policy and defence of the nation are domains of the Union executive that finds mention in List 1 of the seventh schedule of the Constitution. As foreign policy is the domain of the executive, there is no need of Parliamentary approval to declare treaties unlike in the US, where both houses of US Congress need to approve bills, thereby imposing limits on Federal authority. In the US, two instances are worth noting where Congress refused ratification. The first was when Woodrow Wilson agreed that the US would be a part of League of Nations which the congress rejected and same was the case in 1999, when Clinton signed Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) while the Congress rejected it again. In India, if a treaty is very significant and if some groups oppose it and if

they want to ascertain the confidence of the government's own numbers, then the Parliament could vote. This happened, for instance, in case of the Indo-US nuclear deal when a vote of confidence was sought. However, in India, the Executive does not have unbridled control as the Parliament, through the Estimates Committee, the Public Accounts Committee, and various other notions and resolutions can scrutinise the government's actions and seek explanations. For instance, in the first annual financial statement in the Parliament, some members had discussed the increase in postal rates in India and Pakistan.



Instances of Scrutiny and Checking

When India joined the Commonwealth, it was a free association of nations. Many people in India did not appreciate India joining the British Commonwealth. A heated debate took place in the Parliament and members proposed many changes. The government finally accepted the use of appropriate language to explain the reasons of joining the Commonwealth to all members lucidly. This clearly proved that even during the prime ministerial rule of Jawaharlal Nehru, he was highly checked by the forces of the Indian Parliament.

Again in November, 2013, Manmohan Singh had taken the decision to be a part of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) Summit in Colombo at a time that coincided with the fourth Eelam War. The DMK and AIADMK in Tamil Nadu Legislative Council passed a resolution urging the Indian Government to enforce economic sanctions and let UN investigate civilian genocide in Sri Lanka. The sentiment touched a raw nerve and Manmohan Singh decided not to attend CHOGM and send the Foreign Minister instead.

From 1950 to 1980, India had a closed economy and the private sector had little scope in having any role in foreign relations. However, by the end of the Cold War, the private sector had become a key player. In fact, in many bilateral relations, we find that trade diplomacy is purely dominated by the private sector. As we shall see in subsequent chapters on Africa and Latin America, Indian commercial diplomacy is primarily private sector dominated.

The media plays an important role in moulding foreign policy and taking it to the people. Media can draw attention on foreign policy issues. There have been cases where the media was responsible for creating public support for the government but at times, the media is also found to indulge in manufacturing consent. The media was highly controlled in India during Cold War and was only somewhat liberated in the post-Cold War period. In 1999, during the Kargil War, the media actually reported from the warzone and helped in creating an emotional wave of sympathy for soldiers giving rise to a feeling of nationalism. The government also used the conflict situation appropriately to empower the media.

Indian media helped shape perceptions but the lack of correspondence from abroad and reliance on foreign footage made the job difficult for them at times. The extent of how much media can mould perception is based on the government's agenda and in India, the

media is yet to evolve fully to influence the electorate as, for instance, in the US. For example, the role of media in India can be judged by the fact that when in 2004-2005, India and the US undertook aggressive rapprochement, the left parties were highly critical of growing Indo-US proximity but the media stood by the government in their support to the increasing bonhomie between India and US.

A lot of foreign policy bureaucrats do play a role in PMO as also wherever they go on deputation. At times, the PMO also creates special envoys to negotiate on issue of paramount importance, such as climate change and nuclear power. Considering the fact that India's economic profile is growing, coordination at times does become an issue.



Indian Constituency Development Abroad

India, in the recent times, has decided to develop constituencies abroad as a part of its soft policy approach. It invites students to come to India on visa for study. At times, if a student in research intends to extend his or her stay in India, then they need to approach Foreigners Regional Registration offices to renew the visa. This body is in the Home Ministry. Thus, at times, due to the lack of coordination between the MEA and the MHA, the visas get delayed. For instance, at one point of time, there was even a situation when Indian Foreign Secretary Shiv Shankar Menon wrote to then Home Secretary V K Duggal about the need is to create a faster regime due to lack of efficiency. India was unable to develop constituencies like China because of its lack of efficiency and coordination.