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## UNIT – 2 DETERMINANTS OF INDIA’S FOREIGN POLICY

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### 2.0 OBJECTIVES

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In this Unit, students would be able to know about the factors that go into shaping of the foreign policy of India. In general, foreign policy is product of a complex set of factors. After reading this Unit, you should be able to:

- Understand the nature and types of determinants of India’s foreign policy;
- Analyse and evaluate their place and weight in the making of India’s foreign policy;
- Explain the minor determinants of India’s foreign policy; and
- Analyze the complexities in the working of these determinants.

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### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

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India’s foreign policy is shaped by a number of factors. Acting in tandem with each other, these

factors determine the broad contours of a country's dealings with the rest of the world. These factors are, in fact, the harsh realities of physical and human endowments within which a country finds itself encircled. Such factors, thus, define the limits and opportunities for the foreign policy a country intends to pursue. They also determine the autonomy or dependence of a country on the rest of the world. There exists very little scope for the movers and shapers of a foreign policy to maneuver the external relations of the country. It is these determinants that ordain prime role for certain countries, compared to others, in the international relations. Conversely, many of the countries in the world remain a passive recipient of the moves and countermoves of more active players in the international relations. Such a behavior of different countries can very well be appreciated by looking at the determinants of their foreign policies.

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## **2.2 NATURE AND TYPE OF DETERMINANTS**

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Conceptually, determinants of foreign policy are a set of distinct factors ranging from the geophysical location of a country to the personality of its top leadership that go into setting the trajectory and course of a country's external relations. While many of these determinants are in the nature of permanent fixtures, many of them have the potential of undergoing subtle transformations with the changing times and circumstances. For instance, geography, history, culture, traditions are more or less permanent markers of a country's existence. On the contrary, nature and degree of economic development, personality of top leadership, domestic milieu as well as ideological orientations of a given government are the determinants that are found to be changing with change of time. At the same time, many of the determinants of a country's foreign policy are in the nature of given variables that cannot be changed at the wish of the country while there are quite a few of such factors that can be adjusted to a specific requirement with fine vision and assiduous efforts. The above is best exemplified by the axiom: 'a country can choose friends, but not the neighbours'. No country can change its neighbors, its history, its cultural moorings but it can surely change the course and degree of its economic development, its ideological predilection, domestic milieu, personality of its leadership, among others. Finally, there can also be seen the potency or impotency of maneuvering the determinants of foreign policy of a country in the long run to give a radically altered view of its external affairs as compared to the past. To illustrate, there are a number of countries in the world such as India and China which used to be on the margins in the international relations just a few decades back. But by dint of their spectacular economic growth accompanied with maneuvering of other determinants of their foreign policy, they have arrived on the centre stage of international politics in contemporary times, where they are described variously as 'emerging' powers, 'rising' powers and 'leading' powers.

Scholars have tried to classify the determinants of foreign policy into certain distinct categories. For example, some analysts categorize the determinants of foreign policy into internal and external factors. Conceptually, internal factors are those factors whose roots can be located within the boundaries of a country. Amongst such factors, they include geography, history, tradition, culture, economic development, nature of leadership, domestic milieu etc. External factors, for them, are international milieu, activities of the neighboring countries, multilateral dynamics of international politics, among others. However, such a classification does not seem to be logical and convincing given the fact that what are described as external factors are also intimately related to the domestic policies of country. External factors of a foreign policy are in fact a part product of the measures initiated as part of the internal policies of a country. Hence, in place of such a classification, a more scientific classification of determinants of a country's foreign policy would be their enumeration on the basis of their vitality in shaping the external policy. Accordingly, J. Bandhyopadhyaya, a veteran researcher on India's foreign policy, has sought to classify the determinants of Indian foreign policy into seven major and certain minor categories. For him, major determinants of Indian foreign policy could be: geography, economic development, political traditions, domestic milieu, international milieu, military strength, and national character. Amongst the minor factors, he includes, role of political institutions, public opinion, party system, pressure groups, institutions of external affairs, and personality of individuals involved in shaping the foreign policy. What follows next is, therefore, an analytical discussion on major determinants of India's foreign policy.

**Check Your Progress Exercise 1**

**Note:** i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) See the end of the unit for tips for your answer.

1) Discuss the nature and types of determinants of India's foreign policy.

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**2.3 MAJOR DETERMINANTS OF INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICY**

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The important determinants that have played a critical role in shaping the Indian foreign policy over the years include geography, economy, history, culture, domestic milieu, personality of a leader, ideology and external environment.

### **2.3.1 Geographical Factors**

Geographical factors refer to the shape, size, geophysical peculiarities, resource endowments and surrounding geopolitical environment of a country. That way, India is a fairly big country having seventh largest landmass in the world in the southern-most part of Asia. Having almost all sorts of geographical formations, weather, climate, water bodies and flora and fauna, she gets a lot of leverage by nature to play a crucial role in the international affairs. Natural boundaries on many sides of the country provide it veritable defense from inimical forces. Strategic location of India is further strengthened by the long coastline that surrounds the country from east, west and south. They make her pivot of global politics and trade in the Indian Ocean region, though the same oceanic access also became the cause of India's colonization by European powers. Thus, geographical factors place India in an unenviable position to carve out an eminent role for herself in the international relations.

Another important implication of the geographical factor relates to the neighbouring countries that have been ordained for her on account of her physical location. Quite obviously, neighbouring ambience of a country plays a very significant role in affording her a comprehensive part in the wider international relations. That way, though India is endowed by nature to play a vital role in southern, western and south-eastern parts of Asia, in practice such a role has been circumscribed by not so friendly ambience in her neighborhood. Apart from having fought wars with its two prominent neighbours, viz. China and Pakistan, India also has a 'love-hate relation' with many, if not all, of her neighbours. Hence, major preoccupation of Indian foreign policy at probably all the times has been maintaining friendly relations with all her neighbours so that it is permitted some leg space to make its presence felt in the international relations far and wide.

### **2.3.2 Economic Factors**

Economic factors include endowment of a country with natural resources such as metal, minerals, fossil fuels, fertile land, water, human resources and use of all these endowments to achieve and maintain a high rate of economic growth for the country. Though economic factors have always been the foundational determinant of a country's foreign policy, the significance of these factors have attained critical proportions in the wake of privatization, liberalization and globalization in different parts of the world. Resource exploitation has reached unprecedented rates in the wake of economic globalization. Besides, India has a favourable demographic profile. In this context, India happens to be one of the fortunate countries to be blessed with vast variety of natural and human resources. Barring a few massive imports such as fossil fuels, uranium and precious metal such as gold, India

does have sufficient, if not abundant, endowments of almost all the major natural resources that go to lay the foundation of a vibrant and happening economy in the world.

After independence, India adopted the 'mixed' economy model of development where state regulated private business with license and permits. State control and regulation had a stifling effect on private sector. As a result, for a long period of time, economic growth rate was low; and invariably lower than the annual rate of population growth. Ironically Indian policy makers seemed to be content with this low growth in the overall socialistic milieu of the time. In 1978, the noted economist Raj Krishna described this national contentment with low growth rate in the 1950s-80s decades as 'Hindu rate of growth'. Initially, due to her inadequacy in food production, its foreign policy dynamics was marred by wheat diplomacy of Western countries. For a long time, India remained predominantly an exporter of raw materials than finished goods which compromised her ability to leverage meaningful relations with the developing countries. However, things have changed remarkably during the last three decades. Vibrant economic growth of the country has enabled it to bargain hard in international parleys with the Western world. She has also been using aid diplomacy to win support of many Afro-Asian countries for her cause on international forums. Indian technocrats and wider diasporas, a product of Indian economic growth story, are also playing crucial role in securing a place of pride for India in the realm of global politics.

### **2.3.3 Historical and Cultural Factors**

History and culture set the background in which the foreign policy of a country gets shaped. India is one of the few countries in the world with ancient civilization, and rich historical and cultural legacy. At the same time, around two hundred years of colonial rule, and a long and chequered history of national movement also provide valuable inputs to the shaping of Indian foreign policy. In the year 1700, India accounted for an estimated 24.4 per cent of global GDP; two hundred fifty years of colonial exploitation had reduced its share to 4.2 per cent of global GDP in 1950. After getting independence from British colonialism, India continues to have very close relations with its former colonizer. Similarly, the values emanating during the national movement stand cherished even today and continue to become the guiding principles of Indian foreign policy. Anti-colonialism, anti-imperialism, anti-apartheid, solidarity with the cause of Afro-Asian nations, support for United Nations endeavors etc. are some of the running themes of national movement that remain ingrained in the foreign policy of the country even today.

Cultural legacies of India are inherited not only from recent history but also from hoary past. Their vitality in sustaining and fostering the causes of humanity make them inerasable features of Indian foreign policy. Cultural diplomacy of Ashok 'the Great' continues to be a major tool of Indian foreign policy. In consonance with the ideal of *vasudhaiv kutumbkam*, India has indeed been

pursuing her foreign policy taking the whole world as a family well before the wave of globalization brought about closer interactions amongst different parts of the world. Swami Vivekananda's exhortation of taking all the people as our brothers and sisters still resonate in the conduct of Indian foreign policy. Gandhian paradigms of *satyagraha*, *ahimsa* and *swadeshi* are taken as cardinal principles of Indian foreign policy since its very inception. In short, thus, history, culture and traditions have left very profound impact on determining the contours of Indian foreign policy.

#### **2.3.4 Domestic Milieu**

Theoretically, domestic milieu stands for the general circumstances and peculiar settings within a country that leave their imprint on the shaping of a country's foreign policy. India's mammoth social and cultural diversity is one of its unique selling points in international politics. For instance, having the second largest population of Muslims in the world has made it mandatory for Indian foreign policy to maintain cordial relations with the Arab and other countries having substantial Muslim population, including Pakistan, Bangladesh and Maldives. Conversely, the Islamic dimension has enabled India to develop a fairly indepth understanding of the so-called 'Muslim world'. Politics of Tamil Nadu always remain a determining factor in India's relations with Sri Lanka. Bengali bhadralok of West Bengal acts as the bedrock of India's relations with Bangladesh. Situation in Kashmir becomes the single most crucial issue determining the relations between India and Pakistan. Nepal and Bhutan surely carry distinct place in the cultural landscape of Indian populace in ways more than one.

Apart from the specific ways in which the social, cultural, ethnic, religious and linguistic aspects of India determine her foreign policy, there are also a number of episodic or contextual dimensions of domestic milieu that go to cast their impact on shaping of the country's external affairs. On the issues where there exists consensus in the country, it becomes quite easy for the government to pursue a definite line of argument without any scope for backing out of that policy. But the issues over which discordant voices are also raised vis-à-vis government's policy, it becomes difficult to pursue that policy with great degree of conviction and resoluteness. For instance, a major cause of India's discomfiture in its misadventure in Sri Lanka in 1987 was the opposition of that move by the people of Tamil Nadu. In short, thus, domestic milieu has been acting as an important, though passive, determinant of India's foreign policy ever since its inception.

#### **2.3.5 Persona of the Leadership**

Persona of the leadership also arguably plays a very important role in formulation of a decisive foreign policy of a country. Globally, on a number of occasions, decisive pushes to foreign policies of different countries have been provided by strong leaders. For instance, victory of the allied powers, especially Britain in the Second World War, has squarely been attributed to the resolute

leadership provide by Prime Minister Winston Churchill. On the contrary, weak personalities become the cause of disastrous moments in a country's foreign policy. For example, during V. P. Singh's tenure as Prime Minister, India's war against terrorism was comprehensively weakened by the release of a number of hardened Kashmiri terrorists in exchange for the meek release of daughter of Mufti Mohammad Sayeed. Likewise, many momentous incidents in the realm of international relations bear witness to the nature of leadership at a given point of time.

Imprints of the persona of leadership on the conduct of foreign policy of India are galore. Jawaharlal Nehru's idealistic vision and utopian perspective of India's relations with her neighbours not only cost her dearly in terms of loss in India-China war but also produced a number of perennial problems such as Kashmir. On the contrary, Indira Gandhi's resolute leadership not only won India her war with mischievous Pakistan but also earned all weather friends like Soviet Union and made India a nuclear country to be feared by its inimical forces. In nutshell, whenever irresolute or indecisive leadership came on the helms of Indian foreign policy, not only it compromised with the general conduct of the policy but also got inflicted severe dent in the unity and integrity of the nation. Conversely, strong and assertive leaders have always India make a mark in the conduct of its foreign policy both in immediate neighborhood as well as wider international relations.

### **2.3.6 Ideological Predilections**

Ideological predilection means the implicit or explicit commitment of a leader to a particular ideology. Acting as two poles of ideological spectrum of international relations, capitalism and socialism have remained the sole mover of international relations for almost half a century in the form of Cold War. Subsequently, such ideological commitments were also sought from the leaders of the developing countries with fear or favour. At the same time, many leaders got their ideological orientation by their genuine belief in a particular ideology. Irrespective of the method of a leader's initiation into a particular ideology, such ideological commitments surely leave definite impact on the formulation of foreign policy of a country. Formulation and conduct of Indian foreign policy since independence has most, if not all, of the times impact of a particular ideology whose obvious repercussions have been seen on India's relations with different countries at different points of time.

Given Nehru's overt inclination towards socialist ideology, it was obvious that Indian foreign policy during his stewardship would be imbued with socialist underpinnings. Though the dynamics of Cold War did not allow India to join the Soviet bloc, Nehru personal chemistry and India's overall interactions with individual nations bore ample evidence of influence of socialism in the conduct of India's foreign policy. The socialist orientation of Indian foreign policy became most obvious during the reign of Indira Gandhi when she signed the Treaty of Peace and Friendship with Soviet Union setting aside India's long standing commitment to the doctrine of Non-alignment. In recent times,

given the ideological orientation of leadership towards free market capitalism, a marked tilt in the Indian foreign policy towards the United States and other capitalist countries are quite apparent. Thus, ideological predilections of political leadership have always been one of the determining factors of Indian foreign policy.

**Check Your Progress Exercise 2**

**Note:** i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) See the end of the unit for tips for your answer.

1) Discuss the major determinants of India’s foreign policy.

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**2.3.7 International Scenario**

Apart from the internal dynamics of a country, external or international scenario plays equally, if not more, important a role in determining the nature and thrust of foreign policy of a country. To put it differently, while domestic factors help in formulation of a proactive foreign policy, international scenario presents a situation in which a country has to react to a given situation which eventually becomes the course of its foreign policy. As a matter of fact, much of the conduct of a country’s foreign policy is determined by international scenario as much as it is determined by domestic factors. The impact of international factors is so profound on foreign policies that it would not be wrong to argue that quite often what a country proposes on the domestic front of its external relations gets disposed by international scenario. Only a few countries in the world, like the superpowers or economic and military giants such as the United States, Russia, China, and France, among others, get some leeway to have a foreign policy that influences the march of international relations rather than getting influenced by that.

Determining role of international scenario on Indian foreign policy has been quite apparent from day one. As pointed out earlier, Nehru would surely have gone for a closer relations with Soviet Union given his apparent love for socialist pattern of life, but the dynamics of Cold War decisively forced him to go for the policy of Non-alignment, and equal distance from both the superpowers. Similarly,



given its penchant for peace and non-violence, India would have never gone for wars with Pakistan and China to settle its issues with them. But it was forced by its belligerent neighbours to fight wars with them at different points of time. In the same vein, had China not exploded its nuclear bomb in 1964, it would have been beyond imagination of Indian foreign and security establishments to reorient peaceful nuclear programme of the country towards explosion of nuclear devices. Even in contemporary times, much, if not all, of the foreign policy maneuvers of the present government are aimed at countering the strategic moves of China and Pakistan in as much as they are aimed at serving the sovereign national interests of the country.

### **2.3.8 Minor Determinants**

In addition to the major determinants, a number of minor factors also need to be recognized as veritable influences in the making of a country's foreign policy. To begin with, political and statutory institutions play quite important role in finalization, if not initiation, of foreign policy moves at different levels and in different times. Rejection of American entry into League of Nations by Senate is the classic case in that country. Pakistani army's role in determining that country's policy towards India is not a hidden fact. In India also, quite a few political institutions such as Parliament play significant role in strengthening foreign policy measures as has been done in the case of India-US Civil Nuclear Deal. At the same time, role of public opinion in making or unmaking of a foreign policy initiative also needs to be appreciated. The impact of public opinions attains greater significance in democratic countries where government has to be responsive to the public sentiments in running the affairs of the country. If a government shows arrogance in deciding in favour of a policy defying the public opinion, severe reprisals from the masses is also accompanied by probable failure of such a policy. This has been amply seen in the case of Indian intervention in the affairs of Sri Lanka.

Dynamics of party system in India also impacts its foreign policy to a large extent. In the days of dominance of Communist Party of India (Marxist) on the political scene of the country, Indian foreign policy was never permitted to go overtly against China. Pressure of the political parties from Tamil Nadu always influenced government's policy towards Sri Lanka in a big way. Similar tactics have also been applied by pressure groups to get a particular line of action taken by government on a particular issue in international relations. For instance, the farm lobby in India played a major role in giving shape to India's response to the World Trade Organization (WTO) proposals on agriculture and allied activities. In contemporary times, role of certain think tanks in the making of country's foreign policy has overtly been acknowledged by government. A case in point has been the New Delhi based Observer Research Foundation (ORF) which has been associated with the organization of the prestigious Raisina Hills Dialogue along with the Ministry of External Affairs in New Delhi

for the past few years. In brief, thus, there are a host of minor factors that may not be in forefront of foreign policy making but their imprints on the nature and contours a particular aspect of foreign policy of India is more than obvious.

**Check Your Progress Exercise 3**

**Note:** i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) See the end of the unit for tips for your answer.

1) Discuss the minor determinants of India’s foreign policy.

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**2.4 COMPLEXITY IN THE WORKING OF DETERMINANTS**

Enumeration of the major determinants of Indian foreign policy might tend to give the impression that they work in tandem – to simultaneously give a particular shape to the external moves of the country. However, such an understanding is only partly true as not all of the above mentioned factors work together to pull off a specific policy decision from the government. It needs to be reiterated that much of the determinants of foreign policy do not act on the decision making process in a direct way.

Rather, they tend to provide the general framework within which the decision making process has to operate and final decisions are taken. Though foreign policy per se is a collective noun standing for the sum totals of actions or non-actions of the government vis-à-vis its dealing with the rest of the world, in reality, it consists of a number of sub-components of decisions which have been taken at different points of time in response to different domestic or international unfolding of events or processes. So, different determinants of India’s foreign policy come to play their part on different occasions with other factors remaining dormant for the time being. For instance, India’s decision towards adoption of the policy of non-alignment during the beginning of its foreign policy was predominantly determined by the international scenario of cold war than any other determinant.

Interestingly, determinants of India’s foreign policy work in any of the three ways. At most of the times, these factors tend to act as positive inducements to provide affirmative persuasions for

adoption of a particular course of action in the conduct of external affairs of the country. For example, almost all the determinants of India's foreign policy presumably worked together to influence the decision makers to take the Kashmir issue to the United Nations Security Council for its consideration rather than opting for an all out action to settle the Kashmir issue for once and all. Secondly, on certain occasions, some or all of the determinants work for resisting a particular decision to be taken, and on occasions succeed in their pursuits. For example, during and quite some time after the end of Cold War, the imperatives of the policy Non-alignment necessitated that the country should either keep equal distance with both the super powers or become somewhat friendlier with the United States even without joining the military alliances sponsored by it. But the major determinants of Indian foreign policy acted probably in tandem with each other in such a way that instead of becoming friendlier or at least neutral to the geopolitics of South Asian region, the US almost turned hostile to India which further acted to push India into the lap of Soviet Union. Finally, some, if not all, of the determinants also operate with the objective of seeking to modify a particular foreign policy decision sooner or later. For instance, the imperatives of economic development of India have always sought to modify the Indian foreign policy in such a way that economic orientation rather than geopolitical and strategic orientation becomes the driving force behind dealings of the country with the rest of the world. Though such a vision has always been at the core of economic factors of Indian foreign policy, its fruition could be possible only after the 1990s when India opened its economy for others and also attuned its foreign policy towards achieving economic objectives in the long run.

**Check Your Progress Exercise 4**

**Note:** i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) See the end of the unit for tips for your answer.

1) Highlight the complexities in the working of determinants of India's foreign policy.

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**2.5 LET US SUM UP**

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Determinants of India's foreign policy have set the framework within which the broad parameters of the country's external relations are to be premised. Undoubtedly, the nature of such determinants is such that they leave much leeway for the makers of India's foreign policy to make creative reinvention of these determinants to get over the limits set by them. There are, in fact, many countries in the world such as Japan and Singapore which have been greatly handicapped by the determinants of their foreign policy to go for a respectful role in the international relations. But out of sheer vision and dynamism of their leadership, these countries are treated with much grace and dignity in the comity of nations. On that count, India is really fortunate enough to be blessed with such endowments by nature which can help it become a great power in the world. But the onus of responsibility for turning the foreign policy determinants into drivers of growth in the prestige and status of the country lies on its leaders. It is really unfortunate that the idealist and parochial vision of some of its leaders led the country to its worst defeat in war with neighbor in 1962. However, that was a hard lesson to be learnt. The country has moved miles ahead of that sad story of its past and is perfectly on the way of attaining its respectful place in the comity of nations. In such a profound pursuit, the major determinants of the country's foreign policy must be attuned to facilitate rather than debilitate her onward march towards greater and meaningful involvement in the international affairs. Though rapid expansion in India's international image and reputation has also caused consternations in many countries, it remains to be seen how they react to the unfolding situations. Since India's forays in the international relations are not aimed at being inimical to the interests of any country, it is likely that enhanced involvement of the country in international affairs would be welcomed by the wider international community. In such a pursuit, therefore, the determinants of India's foreign policy need to provide solid support to the national leadership so that the national interests of the country are not compromised in any eventuality. Only then, India can be credited with turning the challenges posed by the determinants of its foreign policy into opportunities whose obvious results are there for all to see.

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## **2.6 SOME USEFUL REFERENCES**

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## 2.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

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### Check Your Progress Exercise 1

- 1) Your answer should include different aspect of nature of determinants and their types in terms of internal as well as external determinants.

### Check Your Progress Exercise 2

- 1) You need to focus on major determinants such as geography, economy, history and culture as well as domestic milieu of India as core determinants of its foreign policy.

### Check Your Progress Exercise 3

- 1) Highlight the significance of minor determinants such statutory and political institutions, political parties, pressure groups, public opinion, among others in giving final shape to India's foreign policy.

### Check Your Progress Exercise 4

- 1) Bring out the complexity of the working of India's foreign policy by pointing out the different ways in which these determinants work to give shape to the foreign policy of India.