

MAKING OF INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICY

Though India adopted an independent foreign policy only after her independence in 1947, leaders of the freedom movement, particularly Jawaharlal Nehru were closely watching international developments even before India's independence. At his initiative, the Indian National Congress established a small foreign department in 1925 to make overseas contacts and to publicize its freedom struggle. Since then Nehru has been in the forefront to articulate the Congress stance on various international issues. As a leader of the interim government in 1946, Nehru was instrumental in laying the foundation of independent India's foreign policy. He has a fair amount of exposure and understanding of international affairs due to his frequent foreign visits and interest in foreign affairs. He was also the first foreign minister of India as he kept

foreign department with himself during his Prime Ministership.

Nehru succeeded in forging a domestic consensus on the definition of Indian national interests and foreign policy objectives. Some of these objectives are: building a unified and integrated nation based on the secular and democratic principles; defending Indian territory and protecting its security interests; guaranteeing India's foreign policy independence internationally through non-alignment; and promoting national economic development. These objective& were the product of the prevailing international environment as well as the domestic conditions of the country.

The formulation of foreign policy is a complex process, mediated by the participation of various stakeholders. India is a federal country and the subject of foreign affairs is included under the jurisdiction of Union or Central government. Besides the government bodies and authorities

like the Prime minister and Ministry of External Affairs, the political parties, media, and pressure groups also play an important role in the formulation of foreign policy. Since India is a functioning democracy, the role of non-government stakeholders is gradually increasing. The government has also initiated the mechanism of public diplomacy to enlist the support of the domestic and foreign public for her foreign policy approaches. Also, the development of a new form of information and communication technology has brought significant changes in the way the foreign policy is formulated and conducted. We need to discuss the role of some of the stakeholders in the formulation of foreign policy in India.

Jawaharlal Nehru is considered the father of India's foreign policy. Since the days of National Movement, he developed a keen interest and insight in the foreign affairs and articulated India's response to various international issues. After independence, he became the Prime Minister and retained the portfolio of Foreign

Minister also. The pattern set up by him led to the major role played by the Prime Minister in the formulation of country's foreign policy. He determined the broad contours of foreign policy and left the implementation of foreign policy to the senior members of the foreign ministry. Thus, there developed the pattern of a strong personal role for the Prime Minister in the foreign policy.

The pattern set by Nehru was followed by his successors—Lal Bahadur Shastri and Indira Gandhi. The Prime Minister Office (PMO) emerged as the most powerful center of decision-making under the Prime Ministership of Indira Gandhi. Advisers in the PMO provided channels of information and policy recommendations in addition to those offered by the Ministry of External Affairs. The Research and Analysis Wing, as a subordinate office of PMO, significantly expanded the information available to the Prime Minister and his advisers.

Rajiv Gandhi (1984-89) largely followed the pattern set by previous Prime Ministers. However, the role of PMO became weaker during the periods of coalition governments under Morarji Desai (1977-79), Viswanath Pratap Singh (1989-90), Chandra Shekhar (1990-91), and P.V. Narasimha Rao (1991-96). Under the NDA government led by Atal Bihari Vajpayee, the Prime Minister again went on to play an important role in foreign policy. In the UPA government (2004-till date i.e. June 2013) led by Manmohan Singh, the role of Prime Minister in foreign policymaking has not diminished.

2. Ministry of External Affairs:

The Ministry of External Affairs is the nodal agency which is directly concerned with foreign affairs. Formally, it is responsible for foreign policy making, the actual implementation of policy, and daily conduct of international relations. The Secretariat staff of Foreign Ministry provides information and analysis to

the Prime Minister and Minister of External Affairs, recommends specific measures when necessary, plans policy for the future, and maintains regular communications with foreign missions located in India and Indian missions located in other countries. The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) maintains 171 Indian Missions (2010) abroad, largely manned by officers of Indian Foreign Service. The Ministry is headed by a Cabinet Minister and assisted by the Deputy Foreign Minister. The Foreign Service Training Institute, New Delhi (established in 1986) provides training for officers of India Foreign Service (IFS). This includes training in a basic professional course, a comprehensive course in diplomacy and international relations, a refresher course for commercial representatives, and training in foreign languages.

The administrative structure of The MEA consists of two types of divisions.- territorial divisions and functional divisions. It has thirteen territorial divisions, each covering a large area

of the world. Each division is responsible for policy coordination in its respective area. The MEA also has functional divisions dealing with external publicity, protocol, consular affairs, Indians abroad, the United Nations (UN) and other international organizations, and international conferences.

Three functional divisions deserve special mention due to their growing importance in India's foreign, policy. The Policy Planning and Research Division is responsible for conducting research and preparing briefs and background papers for policy makers. The background papers provide information on various issues related to international developments. The briefs cover wide-ranging issues relating to India's foreign policy and its role in the changing international environment, The Economic Division has the responsibility of managing and conducting foreign economic relations. In the age of globalization, the economic division has become very .important. Its activities reflect changes in the government's economic policy

and the international economic environment. It established the Economic Coordination Unit in 1990 to assess the impact of the Persian Gulf crisis arising from Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, changes in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, and formation of a single market in the European Countries and other similar changes having an impact on India. It also tries to promote foreign investment in India. The Economic Division also runs and coordinates India's foreign aid programs, including the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation Programme (ITEC), and the Special Commonwealth African Assistance Programme. The ITEC programme launched in 1964 is the flagship programme of India for economic cooperation with developing countries.

The Public Diplomacy division was established in 2006 to initiate programmes for enlisting popular domestic and international support to India's foreign policy measures. The broad mandate of this division is to organize outreach activities inside and outside India to effectively

project India's foreign policy to the wider public. It works in close collaboration with researchers, think-tanks, civil society, media, and industry to attain its objectives. It also supports TRACK II interactions with other countries. TRACK II diplomacy refers to the involvement of non-official members and groups in the conduct of foreign relations.

The Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) and Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA) are also run by the M_EA. The ICCR arranges exhibits, visits, and cultural exchanges with other countries and oversees the activities of foreign cultural centers in India. The ICWA aims to develop a think-tank and works as an important platform for discussion on various aspects of foreign affairs of India.

3. Other Government Agencies:

Other Union Government agencies, besides the PMO and MEA, also play important role in foreign policy-making. The Ministries of Defence, Commerce, and Finance provide input

to foreign policy decision-making. In the present context, the input provided by them has an important bearing in the foreign policy. However, it is the Prime Minister or his office, the PMO which coordinates the role of various Union Government agencies in the foreign policymaking. The debate in Parliament on foreign affairs and issues also gives input to foreign Policy making in India. But the role of Parliament is limited in practical terms. The international treaties and agreements signed by the government become legally binding but these do not become part of domestic law unless passed by an act of Parliament. The Committee on External Affairs of the Lok Sabha is an important link between the Parliament and the Cabinet. It is a deliberative body on foreign affairs.

4. Political Parties and Interest Groups:

Since India is a functioning democracy, the role of political parties, media and other interest groups is receiving attention in foreign

policymaking. National political parties articulate their foreign policy perspectives in their manifestoes released during the elections. The ideology of parties affects their foreign policy perspective. For example, Communist Parties do not support close strategic relations with the US and other western countries. The Bharatiya Janata Party supports nuclear power and the policy of liberalization. During Janata party government in 1977, there was a move to go for genuine non-alignment, which meant reducing close relations with the Soviet Union. It appears that political parties in India have developed broad consensus in favour of globalization. More recently in 2008, the Communist Parties opposed the nuclear deal with the US and withdrew support from the Congress government. Though the government survived the vote of no-confidence, the nuclear deal became a bone of contention among the political parties in India.

International issues receive considerable attention in media and academic circles, but the

views expressed by journalists and scholars in these publications do not have much impact on foreign policy-making. Interest groups related with foreign relations are less organized or articulate in India. Of late, the role of business groups like FICCI and others has become more pronounced. Invariably these groups form the part of government delegations to foreign countries. There are certain lobbies in media and academic circle supporting close relations with certain countries, but such lobbies have very limited impact on foreign policy making in India.