

India's Foreign Policy

India's Foreign Policy is a very important part of the UPSC syllabus coming under the International Relations segment for the IAS exam.

Principles and Objectives

Navigating through the politics of international relations is akin to walking through a minefield, one wrong step and there will be consequences. While keeping India's interests in mind, its foreign policy must also ensure that hostile relations are not fomented in the process. These orientations and objectives form the core of India's foreign policy.

That being said, any and every foreign policy is not a static concept as it keeps on changing as per domestic and international politics. Still, there are certain principles and objectives, which are not amenable to fast changes. National security is an example of one of these core principles. No country can compromise its national security regardless of circumstances. Thus, foreign policy is the instrument to realize the national interest of a country. A foreign policy bereft of national interest is an exercise in futility.

Determinants of India's Foreign Policy

The foreign policy of India or any country is shaped by two factors – domestic and international. Domestically, India's history, culture, geography and economy have played an important role in determining the objectives and principles of India's foreign policy.

The international factor, characterized by cold war rivalry between NATO and the Warsaw Pact, the establishment of United Nations, arms race, particularly nuclear arms race, anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism etc have also influenced the priorities and objectives of our foreign policy. The first Indian Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, gave due consideration to these factors and played a leading role in shaping the country's foreign policy.

Domestic Factors

Under domestic factors, the role of geographical, historical, economic and cultural circumstances needs to be understood. Geographically, India is surrounded by the Indian Ocean from three sides, the Himalayas in the north, great desert in the west and hilly terrain in the north-east.

The Himalayas, which used to be a natural barrier against foreign attack is no longer so in view of the development of airpower. The porous and open border in the north-east creates the problem of foreign infiltration and a fertile ground for anti-India activities. The foundations of

India's foreign policy were laid during independence struggle when our leaders fought the evils of colonialism and racism. The principles of sovereign equality of all nations, respect for all races and opposition to colonialism were articulated and evolved during the freedom struggle itself.

Economically, India has been subjected to long colonial exploitation. At the time of independence, India was suffering from many economic ills like poor economic infrastructure lack of capital and technology, poverty, unemployment, hunger and poor health services. In order to overcome these evils, India needed foreign support in the form of capital and technology both. Thus, the fast economic growth became one of the primary objectives of India's foreign policy also. In view of the nascent democracy, India has to keep in mind the sensitivities of her social and cultural composition.

International Environment

When India became independent in 1947, World War II had ended and a new world order was emerging led by two superpowers—the US and the Soviet Union. Each superpower formed its own blocs in order to further their influence and objectives - the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (US) and the Warsaw Pact (Soviet Union). The UN was founded with the mandate of global peace and security. However, it was powerless to stop the rivalry between the two superpowers and intensification of the Cold War.

This led to the emergence of military alliances and the arms race, particularly the nuclear arms race. India could not afford to join either bloc because in doing so would see its own interest subverted. In addition, it would mean that its own principles of peace would be violated. Thus, in collaboration with like-minded nations, it formed the Non-Aligned Movement. India's policy of non-alignment has been influenced, to a large extent, from the prevailing international environment after World War II. In brief, the above domestic and international factors played an important role in shaping India's foreign policy.