

# **State's Foreign Policy: Determinants and Constraints**

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## **1.0 Introduction**

This paper briefly discusses determinants and constraints of state's foreign policy. It is divided into the following sections: definition of foreign policy, determinants of foreign policy, constraints of foreign policy and conclusion.

## **2.0 Unpacking the term Foreign Policy**

A country's foreign policy, also called the international relations policy, is a set of goals outlining how the country will interact with other countries economically, politically, socially and militarily, and to a lesser extent, how the country will interact with non-state actors. Foreign policy is primarily concerned with the boundaries between the external environment outside of the nation state and the internal or domestic environment, with its variety of sub-national sources of influence. (Webber and Smith, 2000). Foreign policies are designed to help protect a country's national interests, national security, ideological goals, and economic prosperity. This can occur as a result of peaceful cooperation with other nations, or through exploitation.

## **3.0 Determinants of States' Foreign Policies**

In general terms there are three determinants of foreign policies in any given state. These include its power, objectives and leadership. These have both domestic and international influence. This section highlight on these determinants and exclusively explores on both domestic and international determinants of foreign policies.

### **3.1 States' Power, Objective and Leadership**

#### **3.1.1 Power**

Within domestic politics, power is usually based on numbers, wealth, and organizational skills. A small group that is well organized may exercise considerable influence even without large sums of money. In international politics, power depends on both geopolitical factors and idiosyncratic factors. Inequalities of State Power. Different states in world differ in their powers.

The US is the world's super power, hence have greatest influence in its foreign policies. There are also micro-states and various territories that are not self-governing or not independent such as colonies. Power of state depend on the following: Location (coastal or landlocked); size (large or small territory); population; Natural Resources (oil, iron ore, forests); Technology; Type of Government (dictatorship or democracy); type of Economy (market or centrally planned); Size and Equipment of Military (nuclear or conventional) and belief systems of Country. (UCC, 2007).

### **3.1.2 Objectives of Foreign Policy**

The objectives of any state give direction to its foreign policies. Such objectives may vary greatly but all states seek to preserve themselves, maintain their independence, and security. For instance, economic development has played a dominant role in shaping Kenya's foreign policy. The need to pursue an open economic policy and the demand for foreign capital and investment flows and inter-alia FDI, has influenced Kenya's approach to foreign policy. (GoK, 2009).

### **3.1.3 Leadership**

It does matter who is elected to be the President of a particular country. Leaders and the elites who support such leaders help to shape the foreign policy of their respective countries. (UCC, 2007)

## **3.2 Domestic and International Determinants**

Determinants of state's foreign policy can also be categorized into Domestic and international determinants.

### **3.2.1 Domestic Determinants**

Internal or Domestic Determinants on States' Foreign Policies focus attention "on variations in states' attributes, such as military capabilities, level of economic development, and types of government (Kegley, 2008).

***Military Capabilities:*** This include the size of military, Equipment, Training. Leadership and nuclear or non-nuclear capabilities.

**Economic Capabilities:** Stages of Industrialization: Wood, Coal, Oil, Nuclear, Renewable Resources. Gross national product, Per Capita GNP;

Type of Economy: Free Market Economics, Centrally Planned Economies, Socially Steered Market Economies.

**Type of Government:** Constitutional democracies (presidential systems and parliamentary systems). Autocratic Systems (authoritarian and totalitarian). Military Dictatorships. Political Party Systems. Traditional monarchies (Saudi Arabia). Modern theocracies (Iran).

### **3.2.2 International or External Determinants**

The geopolitical location of a state is one of the external determinants on its foreign policy. It matters where on the globe a country is located. It matters whether the country has natural frontiers: that is whether it is protected by oceans, high mountains, or deserts. It matters who one's neighbors are and whether a given country is territorially large, populous, affluent, and well-governed. For instance, Kenya's foreign policy in the region has been shaped by factors such as the presence of overlapping ethnic community across borders and being a littoral state of the Indian Ocean which influences relations with landlocked neighbors

## **4.0 Constraints Facing State's Foreign Policies**

A country's Foreign Policy is determined by two broad considerations: the domestic and the external environment. Constraints may stem from factors imposed by the international system and human agency that is, from the role of individual choice in shaping the international system. This section explores constraints in two fold, namely domestic and international constraints.

### **4.1 Domestic Environment Issues**

The domestic environment refers essentially to features, factors and forces peculiar to the state on which foreign policy is being made. The domestic environment includes geographical location of the state, its peculiarity, natural and human resources, the nature of the political system, quality of leadership, the nature of the interaction among groups in the society (Otubanjo, 1999). Domestic environmental factors have great impact on the decision/policy making of a

country. For instance, foreign policies in Kenya today are influenced (even constrained) by such domestic factors as political system (coalition government), national integrity and sovereignty, Regional Integration (in East African community) (GoK, 2009).

#### **4.2 International Foreign Policy Issues**

International foreign policy issues have their roots from outside, that is external. For instance, the major international foreign policy issues facing America today include but may not be limited to the following (Quinn and Kerry, 2008):

- a) War on Terrorism and Al Qaeda
- b) Taliban Insurgency in Afghanistan
- c) Iran and her Nuclear Weapons Threats
- d) Middle East Peace Process between the Israelis and Palestinians
- e) Shutting The U.S. Military Prison at Guantanamo Bay
- f) Climatic Change Issues

#### **5.0 Conclusion**

To attain its set goals and interests in foreign policy, any state continues to seek effective strategies in its approach to foreign policy depending on its power, objectives and leadership. The objective to promote economic development mainly influences any state's approach to foreign policy while maintaining its traditional core principles and norms of non-alignment, non-interference in internal affairs of other states, good neighbourliness and peaceful settlement of disputes.

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