

# The effect of domestic politics on foreign policy decision making

Written by Zaara Zain Hussain

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## The effect of domestic politics on foreign policy decision making

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Foreign Policy includes all interactions of individual nation – states with other states. In the wake of globalization, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century it is particularly important, owing to the interdependence of states. With the advent of international society and globalization implications of foreign policy for each nation-state are far greater. The study of Foreign Policy therefore has become ever more critical and important. The study of Foreign Policy is not limited to any particular school of social science but is a relevant subject for all. In International Relations this study is particularly important as foreign policies form the base for international interactions between individual states.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, decisions by one state affect more than just the participating countries. Scholars as well as well policy analysts and even the general public, have a greater desire to understand foreign policy decisions and what motivates the head of government in his foreign policy decision making. Scholarly research on leadership and foreign policy decision making show a far more sophisticated and complex view of the issue than most of the simplistic views seen in the popular press. The popular press prefers pointing finger at the executor of foreign policy decisions as it is easier to blame one person than a group or a system. However scholarly research uncovers the motivations behind foreign policy decision taken by the executor or in better words head of a government.

Foreign Policies are designed by the head of government with the aim of achieving complex domestic and international agendas. It usually involves an elaborate series of steps and where domestic politics plays an important role. In this paper I will critically analyze the role of head of government of a country in foreign policy decision making and how he is influenced by domestic politics. Foreign policies are in most cases designed through coalitions of domestic and international actors and groups. When analyzing the head of government or in other words the executor of foreign policies many motivating factors can be identified to explain the rationale behind decisions taken. Some factors of influence include the leader's own personality and cognition, degree of rationality, domestic politics and international and domestic interest groups. However out of all the factors mentioned it is domestic political environment that shapes the entire framework of decision making in a country even in international context.

### Argument & structure

My argument is that the scope of the head of government in making decisions is first and foremost defined by the political system where he is operating. Depending on the power vested in his post and the importance of political and public consensus in the state in question, the head of government can make foreign policy decisions. Other factors such as rationality, personality, international organizations also hold influence on the head of government. However they can also be compromised by the political environment, again depending on the kind of system practiced.

In the course of this essay I will examine the impact of political environment on the leader's decision making, considering leaders in different political systems. I have taken cases of three countries of varying political systems to do so. The countries chosen are the United States of America, China and Jordan. The United States is a constitutional republic and representative democracy whereas China is a centrally governed socialist republic. On the other hand Jordan is constitutional monarchy. Taking these three countries as examples will allow analysis of leaders in a broad spectrum of political environments. Here we can see how in very different systems the head of government

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behaves differently and how the system influences his decisions. By viewing examples of past foreign policies made by each country, I hope to demonstrate how three very different kind of domestic political systems influenced foreign policy decisions in each case.

A thorough study of past literature as well as news, memoirs of leaders will be used in this analysis. I will conduct primary research from historical data and secondary research from scholarly material available to analyze the influence of political environment as well as other factors on foreign policy decision making. In the argument for political environment being the most important factor affecting foreign policy decision making, I will analyze factors such as power vested in the head of government, acceptability in the domestic system, consensus of others in the system, strategic decision making, personality of the leader, rationality, and the impact of interest groups. Important elements of the external environment affecting the head of government include political lobbyists, the military, and the corporate sector. International Non-governmental Organizations and Intergovernmental Organizations also hold influence over foreign policy decision making by the head of government. The paper concludes with an explanation of how foreign policy is multilevel and multifaceted phenomenon. No one theory can be completely linked to explaining foreign policy decisions. However a generalization can be made by viewing past trends to present an estimate of the rationale behind foreign policy decision making.

## Foreign Policy

To understand foreign policy decision making I will first draw on traditional explanations of foreign policy and then proceed to the influence of domestic politics, the issue of acceptability, strategic choice, rational choice, and finally psychological theories of decision making as well.

Foreign policy is the sum of official external relations conducted by an independent actor (usually a state) in international relations.<sup>[1]</sup> Foreign Policy includes not only military action but trade and humanitarian interactions as well. When trying to analyze the role of the head of government in foreign policy decision making it is important to know what is motivating him. Depending on the political system of the head of government, the influencing factors will vary. For the head of government in a democracy such as India consensus of the office and public opinion will play an important role. A socialist republic like China may be harsher in taking decisions which may not meet public consensus but have a long term national agenda.

## The political environment

The political environment of a country includes all laws, government agencies, and lobbying groups that influence or restrict individuals or organizations in the society. When talking about the head of government and his decisions the most important factor is the political environment he is operating in. Even international decisions taken by the head of government depends on domestic politics. The political system will determine the heads scope and power in foreign policy decision making.

Political system can be defined as a set of formal legal institutions that constitute a government or a nation-state. It can also be defined over a broad range of categories. For example, a country with no ruler can be called one with Anarchical system and one with a single ruler, Feudalism. However, this is a very simplified view of a much more complex system of categories involving views such as who should have authority, how religious questions should be handled, and what the government's influence on citizens should be.

The following is a list of a range of political systems and the kind of leadership followed in each. Sometimes there can be a blend of two systems in a country where as a few are very far apart in ideals.

- Democracy has rule by majority.
- Republic is rule by law.
- Islamic Democracy is also rule by majority but in Islamic context. It combines aspects of Theocracy and Democracy.
- Anarchism has rule by all or in other words no one.

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- Monarchy is ruled by one person who is absolute leader.
- Meritocracy means rule by the best.
- Technocracy is rule by scientists/intellectuals.
- Sultanates are an Islamic political structure combining features of Monarchy and Theocracy where it is believed rule is by Allah.
- Westminster system is rule by republic and representative democracy through parliament.
- Feudalism is also rule by lord or king.

## **The Domestic political environment & Foreign policy**

National leaders, especially the head of government has to play a two level game between international and domestic politics. According to Neack, the head of government in any kind of political system is motivated by two similar goals: retain political power and build and maintain policy coalitions.[2] The domestic politics can also influence him either because he wants to achieve domestic goals through foreign policies or he wants his foreign policy decisions not to interfere with domestic agendas.

Barbara Farnham especially highlights the issue of acceptability of policies and its influence on the decision making by head of government. In the modern world in most political systems, implementation of proposed policies requires a consensus by the government and not only the leader's whim. The degree of acceptability required will depend on the political system where the decision maker is operating. For example any foreign policy in a democratic system that does not have consensus is likely not to succeed. In a Feudalistic system acceptability may not be as important at all times. Regardless, in any kind of political system domestic politics interferes with foreign policy decisions. The head of the government has to cope simultaneously with international and domestic imperatives and the head of government has to maintain a good face locally and internationally.

Before considering any other characteristics of the desired policy, acceptability is most likely to be considered. The head of the government has to consider domestic sentiments as well as the international situation. If there is a conflict between domestic and international interest the head of the government will probably give emphasis to domestic interest, or surpass the situation altogether.[3]

The influence of domestic politics can be demonstrated here with the example of an India and US treaty. The foreign policy in question here was a nuclear treaty that was to be made between India and the United States in 2005. India had not signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation treaty (NPT) and demanded to hold on to and foster its nuclear capabilities to defend itself as long as other countries did so as well. There was opposition from US regarding that and especially regarding the tests conducted by India as well as the enemy state Pakistan in 1998. The 2005 treaty was designed with the aim of allowing India to continue not signing the NPT in exchange of allowing the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to conduct inspections of its civilian nuclear facilities. This treaty also allowed India to reprocess nuclear fuel for energy generation and validated its position as a nuclear weapons power. Despite it being a win win situation for India, the head of government was prepared to withdraw from this treaty to protect domestic political issues. At the time a coalition government was in power in India called the UPA. Manmohan Singh was selected by the Congress Party leadership to be prime minister and head the government. In 2007, the communist party, threatened to bring down the coalition government if this nuclear agreement was made with the United States. The main opposition party, BJP also strongly opposed this treaty as the collapse of the government would be beneficial for them. The treaty in discussion did not require the parliament's approval but pressured by the threat of losing office the head of government was prepared to back down from this treaty. If the Communist party had withdrawn from the coalition re-elections would be called and there was no guarantee for Congress that they will regain power. So, Manmohan Singh declared that he would not risk a general election for the sake of the treaty.[4] Eventually the Communist party agreed to re-submitting the treaty but that is a different issue. The point I would like to bring forward from this example is that the head of government of India was prepared to sacrifice a very important foreign policy for domestic politics. So it can be concluded that the head of government tries to satisfy domestic pressures even at the cost of international developments.

## **Strategic decision making in a Political Context**

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Strategic Perspective is a theoretical approach that views individuals as choosing their actions by taking into account the anticipated actions and responses of others with the intention of maximizing their own welfare. Domestic politics plays an important role when taking strategic foreign policy decisions because the threats anticipated or already executed are to do with national security issues. Considering the case of United States, it was seen that the event of 9/11 changed the perceptions of security threats at home and as a result the following foreign policy decisions. President Bush targeted Taliban regime in Afghanistan and Saddam Hussein in Iraq as a direct result of the Al Qaeda attacks. In October 2001 Bush launched Operation Enduring Freedom with allies such as France, Germany and the United Kingdom to punish those responsible for the 9/11 attack.[5] But not only retaliatory, anticipatory action was taken by the head of government at that time with view of protecting the world against terrorism. In the light of recent terrorist attacks this kind of foreign policy was not met with political opposition. The head of the government had support of its office and thus could execute the attacks on Iraq on the basis of threats posed by Iraq developing weapons of mass destruction as well as aiding terrorist activities. This example demonstrates how implication on domestic politics can be viewed from a strategic perspective to take strategic foreign policy decisions.

## **The United States foreign policy in political context**

When talking about foreign policy and international society the United States is a country mentioned almost everywhere and every time. The United States holds great economic, political, and military influence on the entire world. The domestic political system of the United States is that of a constitutional republic and representative democracy, "in which majority rule is tempered by minority rights protected by law." [6] The government is regulated by a system of checks and balances defined by the U.S. Constitution. The head of government cannot take foreign policy decisions without at least two third support of the Senate. The president is allowed to enter into treaties with foreign states through executive agreement without the senate's approval but such agreements are rarely long standing. It is the Congress that has the power to conduct commercial activities with other states as well as go to war.

The president is the commander in chief and the head of the government and despite relying on consensus of the senate he has significant control over policies. The degree of control over the senate depends on the individual leader, his leadership style and personal charisma. The president holds the title of commander-in-chief of the nation's armed forces and appoints its leaders, the secretary of defence and the Joint Chiefs of Staff.[7] Bureaucratic organizations within the US government include Office of the President, National Security Council, State Department, Defence Department, Central Intelligence Agency, Joint Chiefs of Staff, Embassies, Consulates, Federal Reserve, Treasury Department, etc.

Foreign Policies of the United States are greatly influenced by the domestic political environment, the economic implications and the president's standing in the polls in lieu of policies taken by him. In case of wars, it is even more sensitive. War requires resources such as money, troops, and equipment and in a democracy, resources require continued public support. The people's representatives in Congress control public spending. If a majority of lawmakers vote against the war, it will be defunded. If a military plan is not supported by majority of lawmakers it will be called off or at best be changed. However, it is the Presidents job to convince the Congress of the validity of any decisions, which must incorporate domestic political agendas. For example, in World War II, U.S. Army Chief of Staff Gen. George C. Marshall recommended that the right military strategy was to focus on Germany first, merely holding the line against Japan until the bigger threat was defeated in Europe and only after Germany was out of the way should the country move forces east and deal with the Japanese. President Franklin D. Roosevelt opted instead for parallel offensives against both Germany and Japan at the same time. According to his policy the United States actually attacked Japan before it began its first attacks on Germany. A crucial motivating factor behind this decision was that Roosevelt was worried that he would lose domestic political support for the war if he ignored the country that attacked the United States at Pearl Harbour, fighting Germans instead. Most people today think the U.S. strategy in World War II was pretty successful but instead of solely basing it on military advice the head of government at that time considered the issue of domestic politics. Actually the United States strategy in World War II was greatly influenced by the president's need to maintain popular support at home.<sup>[8]</sup>

## **The Foreign policy of China in a political context**

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The People's Republic of China is a socialist republic governed through the Communist Party of China, the Central People's Government and their provincial and local counterparts. The leadership of the Communist Party is stated in the Constitution of the People's Republic of China. Under the dual leadership system, each local bureau or office is under the theoretically coequal authority of the local leader and the leader of the corresponding office, bureau or ministry at the next higher level. People's Congress members at the county level are elected by voters.[9]

The President of the People's Republic of China, officially appointed by the National People's Congress, is an office under the National People's Congress and it is the head of state. The National People's Congress is the highest authority of state power in China. It meets every two weeks to review domestic and foreign policy matters. The State Council also has a significant role on policy designs.

The post of President alone holds a merely ceremonial position with no real power. Before the 1990s, presidents did not have any administrative power and the position was that of a powerless figurehead. Without veto he had to execute the decisions of National People's Congress. However, since 1993 the President also serves as the General Secretary of the Communist Party of China. This not only gives him the position but also power and makes him responsible for establishing policy and direction for the state as well as foreign policy decisions.

China officially states it "unswervingly pursues an independent foreign policy of peace. The fundamental goals of this policy are to preserve China's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, create a favourable international environment for China's reform and opening up and modernization construction, maintain world peace and propel common development.[10]

China's foreign policy is implemented by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. However, the Foreign Affairs Ministry is subordinate to the Foreign Affairs Leading Small Group of the Communist Party of China, which decides on policy-making. Much of Chinese foreign policy is designed in think tanks which are formally outside the government. These think tanks are however sponsored and supervised by the government. Discussions in the think tanks are unofficial and are generally less restricted.

Chinese foreign policy is perceived by the world to be of somewhat realist nature. National interest and agenda is given precedence instead of pursuing optimal solution for benefit of international society. In such conservative situation domestic politics plays an even greater role than described earlier in the case of United States. Here the head of government is less worried about acceptability and more concentrated on achieving domestic agendas.

The Chinese government has recently greatly opposed the awarding of Nobel Peace Prize to Liu Xiaobo. Liu Xiaobo was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2010 for his long and non-violent struggle for fundamental human rights in China. For over two decades, Liu Xiaobo has been a strong spokesman for the application of fundamental human rights in China. He took part in the Tiananmen protests in 1989 and was a leading author behind Charter 08, the manifesto of such rights in China which was published on the 60th anniversary of the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the 10th of December 2008.[11] However he was arrested and sentenced for eleven years of imprisonment by the Chinese authorities for subversive activities against Chinese government. The Chinese government expressed dismay on the award and called the Norwegian ambassador in Beijing to officially express his disagreement and protest. Following the announcement on October 8 2010, the Chinese government ordered the deletion of all print and broadcast stories on the topic. China protested to Norway, saying that the relations between the two countries were damaged because of this incident. However, before the Chinese government could make an official complaint the Norwegian foreign minister, Jonas Gahr Støre said that a Chinese complaint to the Norwegian government would be vain, as the committee was independent from the Norwegian government, although it was appointed by the Parliament of Norway.[12] [13]

China's disapproval of the Nobel Prize and insistence of keeping Liu Xiaobo imprisoned has been criticized by intellectuals and diplomats all over the world. However China is still maintaining that Liu Xiaobo has behaved in rebellious manner against the state and it is wrong to award him the Peace Prize for doing so. The Chinese head of government here is not worried about maintaining popularity in the international society. Neither is he allowing this news to be spread domestically and let Xiaobo gain domestic public sympathy. China is concentrating on national

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interest and letting domestic politics over rule foreign policy affairs.

## **The Foreign policy of Jordan in political context**

Jordan is a constitutional monarchy. Politics of Jordan takes place in a framework of a parliamentary monarchy, whereby the Prime Minister of Jordan is head of government, and of a multi-party system. The king holds the highest power in the government and signs and executes all laws. However his veto power may be overridden by a two-thirds vote of both houses of the National Assembly. He appoints and may dismiss all judges by decree, approves amendments to the constitution, declares war, and commands the armed forces.

The Kingdom of Jordan is a small one in the Middle East but holds an important role in the international society. Although a developing country with limited resources and weak economy it is surrounded by powerful neighbours such as Israel and Saudi Arabia. Due to its strategic position and geopolitical importance to regional and global powers Jordan plays an important role in international politics. Throughout history Jordan has been subject to international, regional and domestic wars and revolutions and to protect themselves maintained international allies and domestic military prowess.[14]

In the argument for political systems influencing foreign policy we can look at Jordan's decision in the 1990 intervention of Iraq by USA. At that time, unlike other Middle Eastern neighbours such as Syria and Egypt, Jordan kept out of the war urging for the improbable peaceful solution. King Hussein, the head of government did not support Iraq either and called for Iraqi withdrawal. Public opinion in Jordan was mixed. Some wanted to defend Iraq against USA and its allied forces but Jordan armed forces remained neutral. The regimes cautious stance kept King Hussein's domestic popularity intact but Jordan suffered severe economic repercussions. The US, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia stopped all foreign aid to Jordan. Exports to and from Arab countries declined significantly as well. Many Jordanians working in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait were sent back.[15] Despite all this repercussions the King chose to maintain domestic popularity. Even though Jordan follows a system of Monarchy it is a democratic one, whereby public opinion is important for the King to remain in power. Thus because of the nature of the political system the King in this situation choice to maintain domestic popularity and thus it can be concluded his decision may not have been an optimal foreign policy one, but rather was influenced by domestic political environment.

## **The head of government as a Rational Actor**

Moving away from political system as the main focus I will now look at the head of government as a rational actor. The Rational Actor Decision Making Model assumes that all foreign policy decision-makers are same in nature, each state's decision making process involves a single unitary actor making all the decisions and most importantly that each unitary actor makes rational choices. This approach draws somewhat from the realist school of thought that believes that In international politics states are only distinguishable by the relative power they hold, and not by their internal characteristics.[16] To make a Rational Decision the head of government has to have perfect problem recognition and definition, he must be able to evaluate all possible policy options and then select the best one to achieve the desired goal. It is difficult to pinpoint a policy to be completely rational. Some may argue President Bill Clinton's choice to intervene in Kosovo in 1999 was a rational decision. On 29 March 1999, after five days of NATO bombing, then-U.S. President Bill Clinton offered the following rationale for U.S. participation: "Make no mistake, if we and our allies do not have the will to act, there will be more massacres. In dealing with aggressors, hesitation is a license to kill. But action and resolve can stop armies and save lives."<sup>[17]</sup> His actions may be deemed as the best solution considered after exhausting all other possible policies. However it is unlikely he was the unitary actor in this foreign policy decision.

It is important to bring up political system even here as the rationality of the head of government is subject to influence of political context. The political environment where the head of government is operating forms the basis of rationality for the leader. It can be said Hitler was being rational because he knew what he wanted and he chose the best alternative to achieve that. Depending on the situation and environment the rationality of decisions can be interpreted. Also in many political systems of today's time there is no singular actor making and executing all decisions. Government systems are complex bureaucracies. For example, In the United States, the U.S. President

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shares decision-making with the National Security Council, Defence Department, State Department, Central Intelligence Agency, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and depends on the senate's vote for approval of those decisions.

However, it is important to mention absolute rationality is hardly achievable even if the political system allows it. It is highly unlikely to know all information regarding an issue and exhaust all possible solutions to select the one that will surely achieve the desired objective. The biggest drawback to Rational Decision Making is Bounded rationality[18]. Humans are prone to errors and they most certainly do not know everything. The government is usually overloaded with policy agendas. The head of the government has to handle many issues at the same time and cannot spend enough time on any one of these issues. The pressures of circumstance limit the ability to choose. In the end he may have to make satisficing decisions rather than optimizing ones. And as already mentioned domestic politics plays a crucial role in the process. Sometimes for domestic agendas foreign ones may have to be compromised as we have already seen in the case of India – USA Nuclear Treaty of 2005.

## The head of government as an Individual

The head of the government in most cases is not an individual actor. Foreign Policy decisions are collective or influenced by others in the political system. He is subject to group think (a type of thought within a deeply cohesive in-group whose members try to minimize conflict and reach consensus without critically testing, analyzing, and evaluating ideas[19]). However, when assuming that the he is taking decisions solely, personality and cognition are extremely important factors.

A cognitive approach assumes a complex, and realistic, psychology about human reasoning and decision making. It does not assume individual awareness, open-mindedness, and adaptability relative to an “objective” environment, but assumes individuals are likely to view their environment differently and operate within their own “psychological environment”[20] From the definition of cognitive decision making we get the word environment, which includes political environment. Even for an individual decision maker his cognition is likely to be influenced by the political environment he is operating in.

Analyzing the head of government as an individual requires looking into the personality traits approach as well. The Personality Traits Approach[21] takes into consideration the totality of qualities and traits, as of character or behaviour that are unique to a specific person. It is similar to the cognitive model in taking the leaders personal views as the most important. However it specifically points out what the personality traits an individual may possess to understand decisions made by him. The personality traits can be listed as

- The need for power
- The need for affiliation
- The level of cognitive complexity
- Degree of trust in others
- Nationalism
- Belief that someone has control over events
- Task orientation

Different Political leaders have different personalities and thus different takes on situations. In 1991, President George Bush Senior called Saddam Hussein ‘another Hitler’, with little attention to what was different either about the two men or about Iraq in 1990 and Germany in 1938. Fitting Saddam into an existing frame through use of analogical reasoning gave the president a readily accessible script about how to respond to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait.<sup>[22]</sup> Maybe a different leader of the same country would have different view point of the situation. Regardless of the opinion the President's decision had to be based on many other factors. The US did not go to war with Iraq in 1991 only because of the Presidents dislike of the Iraqi ruler. So personality approach gives more of a insight into a Leaders opinions rather than an explanation of his actions.

## External factors

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To some extent the influence of political systems may be compromised by Interest Groups within the state and Non-State Actors as well. Interest groups [23] include political lobbyists, the military, and the corporate sector. Besides the political system, political lobbyists and the military can be considered part of the broader political environment of a country. Outside the domestic political environment, non state actors such as International Non-governmental Organization and Global Public Policy Network can influence the head of government in his foreign policy decisions.

Another important influence outside the political environment for the head of government is the media of the country and opinion of general public. There is a complex relationship between the head of government, policy makers, the opposition party, media and the general public[24]. When a foreign policy problem arises policy makers, under the governance of the head of government present the problem and its solution. Sometimes the media can beat the government to it and present their own framework. The issue may be presented in such a manner as to influence the public opinion. However the response depends of the similarity of the solution with the existing political culture of the country. I will again draw on the 9/11 situation in USA. The government presented that 9/11 issue as a terrorist attack on USA where innocent civilians were killed. So, public opinion wholly supported any kind of retaliatory foreign policy against terrorism. Sometimes the framework presented the government may be contested by opposition party and become an issue of argument in domestic politics.

## **Domestic Politics VS International Organisations**

The impact of International Organizations[25] is significant because of the increasing power of international society and international law. International organizations such as the World Trade Organization have the power to urge states to reconsider their foreign policy decisions. WTO intervention was crucial during the US and EU “banana wars” incident. However Intergovernmental organizations such as the United Nations are representatives of the member states and cannot be called a non-state influence. The domestic politics of the representative states are very much in play when they take decisions on such forums. But, policy decisions may not always be favourable to every member state in domestic or international context as there is a majority vote and complex decision making process.

International Organizations no doubt have influence on international society but a nation-state may ignore decisions by such organizations to achieve domestic agendas. As mentioned earlier post 9/11 decisions were taken by the US government in light of threats on United States. Drawing from the same example we can say that President Bush and allies decided to attack Iraq in 2003 because domestic politics demanded so at the time, despite the disapproval of the United Nations. In March 2003, the US government announced they will use military force to get rid of Saddam Hussein as well as weapons of mass destruction being produced in Iraq. Prior to this decision, there had been much diplomacy and debate between the member states of the United Nations Security Council on how to deal with the situation but a majority consensus had not been reached to approve the military attack. The Secretary General of United Nations at that time, Kofi Annan said in an interview to BBC the decision to take action in Iraq should have been made by the Security Council, not unilaterally. In response to Annan’s opinion, Randy Scheunemann, a former advisor to US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld said “I think it is outrageous for the Secretary-General, who ultimately works for the member states, to try and supplant his judgement for the judgement of the member states.”[26] This shows that although international organizations have a influence over foreign affairs of member states sometimes domestic agendas take precedence. The head of such Organizations sometimes are nothing but mediators between head of governments. Foreign policy decisions are ultimately taken by the head of governments with consideration to both domestic and international agendas.

## **Conclusion**

Foreign Policy is made and conducted in complex domestic and international environments. Decisions made the head of government are a result of complex interactions. There are no definite answers on why leader’s take the decision they do. In this paper I have merely attempted to highlight some motivating factors for foreign policy decision making especially bringing out the impact of political environment. The reason why I have chosen political system as the foundation for decision making by the head of government is because, regardless of the kind of system the head of government’s ultimate goal is to remain in power. He is to some extent first and foremost obligated to fulfil domestic expectations before making any foreign policy decisions. Even a completely Monarchic leader has the fear



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of being overthrown. Acceptability in domestic politics is therefore crucial to the head of government.

As mentioned earlier, foreign policy is made and conducted in complex domestic and international environments. Domestic politics influences foreign policy decisions and if a policy is not accepted at home it is unlikely to succeed in the international context. Foreign Policy analysis needs to be multilevel and multifaceted in order to understand the complicated motivational factors and nature of foreign policy. Sometimes, leaders may have to resort to suboptimal foreign policy due to domestic political demands. In an earlier cited example we can see that the head of government in India, Manmohan Singh, was willing to sacrifice a very legitimate foreign policy agreement which would have been beneficial for the country itself also, to safeguard his position in office. Also in the cases cited I have highlighted how in different political systems the head of government is influenced by the domestic politics. In the United States we have seen that, it being a democracy, acceptability and consensus of the senate is a prime concern for the head of government. On the other hand China is not afraid to adopt stringent foreign policies because rather than acceptability and popularity, achieving domestic agendas holds greater importance. In Jordan we see that despite being a Monarch where decisions solely lie on the head of government, the decisions taken by him were to maintain domestic popularity. It was King Hussein who had the authority to take decisions as he pleases but he chose to maintain a good face at home rather than pursue a foreign policy that was urged by great powers such as the US and Saudi Arabia.

I have also touched upon other factors that may influence the head of government in foreign policy decision making such as rationality and individual cognition. The role of International Organizations and media was also mentioned in the later part of the paper. However from all the examples cited I can conclude in most cases, domestic politics forms the basis of any decision making for the head of government. After that many other factors come into play and may steer his decisions in different directions.

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