

Chapter - VI

CONCLUSION

Chapter - VICONCLUSIONS

Foreign policy decision-making is not always a conscious and deliberate act, nor is it always confined to identifiable actors or a well-defined process in specialised institutions. Individuals, Bureaucracy, Legislature and Press all play a significant role in different contexts.

In Western societies where political institutions and social institutions have gradually evolved, individuals and institutions have crystallised, well-defined roles. The processes are discernible easily and the primary task of a foreign-policy analyst is to explore the inter-relationships and trying to assess the relative significance to be attached to Individual, Bureaucracy, Legislature and the Press in the context of a specific foreign policy decision - a crisis being managed or an option being chosen from amongst them. This is particularly interesting in the context of post-war foreign-policy decision-making in the U.S.A.. Changing nuances, subtle shifts in emphasis, attitude and stance, maybe even rejection of the existing approach and selection of an alternative one provide useful opportunities for securing insights into the nature of foreign-policy decision making. In the history of the cold war, through the course of the long-drawn conflict in Vietnam and negotiating the limitations on strategic arms- these are just a

few among the many illustrations of the dynamic and complex interplay between individuals, Bureaucracy, Legislature and Press. It is easy to fall prey to the misconception that a similar exercise of unravelling the foreign-policy decision making process can be easily and fruitfully undertaken in the case of countries in the Third World.

It is not that these nation-states are closed inaccessible systems - although this is true in many cases. geo-strategic situation and the historical experience, socio-cultural legacy, economic-resource base are constraints which circumscribe the potential for foreign policy exercises. The key concept in the domain of foreign-policy is that of 'national interest'. This, once again, is perceived and interpreted by the elites (including the Bureaucracy and those represented in the Legislature). Contending interpretations are articulated in the Legislature and the Press, and offer an opportunity to analyse evolution and change in public opinion which is bound to be reflected, ultimately in foreign-policy decision making- both in its formulation and implementation. It, however, needs to be adequately appreciated that in a non-democratic polity/tradition-bound society, the Legislature and the Press play a different, more limited role than Western scholars assign to these. Also, the categories of elite and higher echelons of Bureaucracy are not always easy to distinguish. One has also to keep in mind the impact of a charismatic, visionary personality

or an exceptionally dynamic dominating individual. (Ironically, in the modern-day world no monarch can claim to be an undisputed master of all he surveys and has to depend on lieutenants to translate his ambitions/visions into national goals and objectives).

India after attaining independence evolved as an exceptionally democratic state and has remained accessible to scholars. However, in this case, the task of foreign-policy decision making is not easy because the dividing lines between the individual and the Bureaucracy are blurred and the distinction is seldom made between the contributions of the legislators and the Press. Members of a limited elite - most of them cast in a colonial mould keep circulating from bureaucracy to academia and journalism articulating at different places the same point of view or presenting the same argument. A towering, charismatic personality like Jawaharlal Nehru serves inevitably and perhaps unfortunately to erode the authority of institutions and renders impotent even extraordinarily talented persons and useful offices. There is little delegation of power and responsibility in such a situation and only distortion can result if the scholar rigidly adheres to a text-book like approach while analysing foreign-policy decision making. In the cases taken up for study during the period under review, the validity of this proposition is adequately demonstrated.

In Pakistan, the dominant foreign policy elites have been

the top military officers, the higher rungs of the Civil Service and large landholders and extremely rich persons. A majority of these share the same social background. Experience from the past shows that family connections and influence bind together different sections of this elite. This group, in its conduct, has always reflected a great susceptibility to the preferences of the Chief Executive and his style. This is perhaps understandable, as in Martial Law, decision-making is extremely centralised and personalised. However, it would be useful to remember that even civilian regimes in Pakistan - whether headed by Jinnah or Bhutto have conformed to this pattern.

If usurpation of political power by the military and domination by officers of all important seats of decision-making in Pakistan has resulted in excluding other elites and subverting, checking and balancing of decision-making, Nepal seems to cherish its prolonged isolation from the world and the countries dogged adherence to monarchical ways is the most remarkable feature of its polity. In the aftermath of Indian independence, it is true, representative institutions were introduced in Nepal, but progress on the democratic way was very slow and party politics was rendered irrelevant at the earliest opportunity by a strong willed ruler. Today, even the trappings of democracy remain conspicuous by their absence. The power of state in Nepal continues to be personified in the King, whose ministers and advisors hold office entirely during his pleasure.

Obviously, in such a 'system' the task of decision-making hinges crucially on the skills and attributes of an individual. One could even suggest that the personalization and centralization is even more acute than in Pakistan.

This is accentuated further by the absence of a sophisticated, broad-based Bureaucracy and by the low level of literacy of the population. It is not difficult to identify individuals or bureaucrats who have been entrusted with the responsibility of the task of managing Nepal's foreign relations. But it is difficult to positively assert the identification of a person as a journalist, bureaucrat or a legislator. Some members of the traditional elite have easily slipped into these new roles and exercised considerable influence not due to any secular status in a definite hierarchy, but due to their proximity to the throne.

Both in Pakistan and in Nepal it would be pointless to strive to examine the role played by the Press and the Legislature in foreign-policy making. In spite of the facade, the rulers are not responsible to the populace and do not have to be responsive to the aspirations, expectations of the people. Criticism is often dealt with severely in a primitive manner. The conception is the prerogative of the supreme leader and it is only an exception when the ritual of routine diplomacy is entrusted to loyal courtiers or a small coterie of fellow officers with whom power has to be shared. This implementation of policy should not

be confused with foreign policy decision making.

Another important conclusion arrived at is that in most of these countries, the foreign policy is based on popular consensus. In the domestic arena, various groups, party and sections may contend for accommodation of their conflicting interests but solidarity is forged when external relations are involved.

There are few if any restraints to fetter the free play of a despotic unenlightened ruler's idiosyncracies in the Nepalese model. The King is the undisputed key figure in decision making. He is at the same time a "power seeker", "innovator", "communicator" and "moderator" in the sphere of foreign policy. It is not surprising that the individual's personality traits are projected in a country's external relations. Forceful, even harsh assertion of Nepalese independence, a stance away from India - laboriously adopted - and diversification of foreign aid provide illustrations of this.

The Ceylonese case is quite different - the elite there appears superficially more Westernized and the political system more democratic. It would, however, be unwise to conclude hastily from this that foreign policy decision making in Sri Lanka is more broad-based than in Pakistan or Nepal. Peering behind the facade one cannot fail to notice that the island has throughout been governed by a small oligarchical band of persons cutting across political, religious, ethnic and caste divisions.

Recent events have violently upset this. Ethnic division has become the crucial factor, but, for the period reviewed in the present study, the foregoing observations remain valid.

It is not as if the Press in Sri Lanka is muzzled, or that the legislators are muted. But the oligarchy in power representing the vital interests of the Sinhala majority in a plural society seems to be deciding issues without any reference to the journalistic, bureaucratic or legislative inputs. One may even suggest that the bureaucratic options being put forward by even the most talented Sinhala officers dare not hold a cruel, candid mirror to the political masters. To play the Parliamentary game, political leaders may have divided themselves into sides labelled democratic, socialist, etc. But these divisions were outweighed by one unifying factor - Western oriented education and a shared way of life. It can be stated with some justification that despite almost four decades of electoral politics there was no significant broadening of the base of power in the island.

It is important to note that this limited elite shows remarkable variations within the group. Members may be classified according to their inclusion in the governing and non-governing categories. The first includes officials, the progeny of traditional elites as well as the new rich. The second category comprises leaders of Opposition political parties, members of awareness-building institutions and groups, and



communicational elites - journalists and academicians. Independence brought in its wake a Sinhalese-speaking intelligentsia. These rural notables functioned as intermediaries between the rural and urban populace.

It must also be emphasised that in Sri Lanka, the tradition has been of the head of the Government contributing most to foreign policy decision making. President Jayewardene has only consolidated this tradition. Once again, like in Pakistan and Nepal, in the final analysis, it is an individual ( who may not necessarily be a typical representative of the dominant elite) who lends form and substance to the country's foreign policy concerns. Personal references, initiatives, interests and skill assume great importance. The contrast in orientation which may result can be appreciated by juxtaposing Kotelawala's strident anti-communism with Bandarnaike's eloquent rhetorical non-alignment echoing Nehru. From Senanayake's elder statesman-like wisdom to the manipulative political pragmatism of Sirimavo-the whole range has been run in the context of Sri Lanka's foreign policy decision making. It would not be wrong to conclude from the foregoing that an individual seems to have mattered more than the elite as a group in foreign policy decisions.

Bureaucracy in Pakistan has shown a remarkable capacity to survive and retain some power to formulate foreign policy. It may even be argued that ever since the imposition of martial law in 1958, the General's dependence on these 'civilian' advisors

has increased. Only during the short Bhutto interregnum has this role been restricted. Although they were used as sources of information/opinion, final decision-making seldom rested with them.

Nepalese Bureaucracy or to label it more aptly - the administrators in Nepal - trace back their history to two centuries. There are well-recognised hierarchies and in the absence of party politics have long been the principal support for the monarchy. At the same time, membership of a large part has been confined to conglomerates of traditional elites. Elaborate provisions for status and privilege have not always ensured efficient specialization for proper discharge of responsibilities. These distinct features continue to dominate the system and influence foreign policy decision making accordingly. The Palace Secretariat, not unnaturally, has the most significant contribution to make in this sphere, the Central Secretariat being utilised only as the policy implementation centre. It would be a justifiable conclusion that the king issues orders more on the advise of a very select group of trusted faithfuls (courtiers) than those holding a particular office.

In Pakistan, one may suggest that the civilian bureaucracy has lost its will to govern the country as it is well aware that real power can only be exercised by men in uniform. This implicit but definite subordination has slowly but surely sapped

initiative and stilted original thought. Without these ingredients supplemented with a strong dose of constant self-criticism, foreign policy decision making can at best remain an esoteric game. As far as the Army officers are concerned, the dividends are richer in politics and domestic affairs. These officers too, have found it expedient to leave the task of conceptualization to the supreme leader.

In Nepal, like in many other similar cases, careers are not necessarily open to talent. Those who enter the bureaucratic apparatus at the junior level seldom occupy the topmost echelons, particularly in sensitive ministries like Foreign Affairs. Even lateral entrants from the academic world or the professionals are accommodated to be rewarded more for their silence than for actual contributions. This may not be true of everyone, but by and large, the number of time-servers is not small. Many trusted lieutenants have had long innings, but it is difficult to mark them for performance.

The Ceylonese Bureaucracy, in comparison, reflects the world of its British counterparts. Inheritor to the imperial tradition, it had no difficulty in adjusting itself to the new environment after independence. The Ceylonese civil service, although forming a small minority and often criticized for displaying colonial features and practices, has by and large enjoyed special privileges and status. It has undoubtedly been the most influential pressure group in the domain of foreign

policy formulation. It may be concluded without exaggeration that till recently the conduct of foreign policy has remained, in Sri Lanka, the prerogative of professionals.

However, in all the three cases reviewed in this study there has been a steady and accelerated erosion in the role of the Bureaucracy. The reforms and re-organisations of different foreign offices have more to do with administration than policy formulation, decision-making or even exposition. Foreign offices here, like in most other comparable Third World countries, have come to be increasingly preoccupied with representing ceremonial aspects of diplomacy. Substantial aspects of policy, evaluation of option shifts with subtle nuances and critical negotiations are considered the prerogatives of the monarchs, President or the Chief Martial Law Administrator or his deputies.

Foreign policy is (it is often and not unreasonably concluded) a subject under the jurisdiction of the Executive, and the Legislature has only a limited role to play. In Pakistan and Nepal, as a result of peculiar circumstances this has largely been the case. Foreign policy formulation has indeed been the exclusive domain of the Chief Executive and a narrow circle of advisors, traversed only occasionally by the Legislatures when in existence. Even in such cases, this participation has been confined to comments and reviews of decisions taken. It would be difficult to infer that Legislatures in these countries have played a meaningful, significant role. These institutions have

hardly 'assisted' the Executive in making rational, optimum decisions. One can state without any hesitation that these have only served to 'legitimise' the decisions already taken. 'Question-hour' and debates have only illustrated the incorporation of the rituals of the Parliamentary process and not its essence - a formality which has to be complied with and not as an instrument for effective functioning.

In the United States, the Constitution explicitly provides for an effective separation of powers and checks and balances for the smooth functioning of the system. Advice and consent of the Senate are essential before any major foreign-policy campaign can be embarked upon. Some recent examples do, however, suggest that the President can have his way if he is stubbornly determined to circumvent/bypass the established procedure for decision making. These remain exceptions which are not received well by the voters. In the United Kingdom too, conventions have granted great authority to the House which it zealously guards. Again, it needs to be reiterated that a skillful Prime Minister can go against the grain of majority in opposition to the policies proposed or adopted. Perhaps it is inherent in the nature of things that despite statutory provisions, the Executive (Bureaucracy) is better placed than the Legislature to influence and control foreign policy decision making. This is even more true of the countries being studied here who have adopted this institution (Legislature) from the erstwhile colonial masters.

Traditions have yet to emerge and procedure to find ready acceptance after proving its worth. Most of the time, the Legislatures do not more than act as a sounding board. They are merely confined to an advisory role.

The suggestion could validly be made that Legislatures in Pakistan and Nepal have not even performed this advisory role satisfactorily in recent years. Nor is the situation likely to change in the near future. In Sri Lanka too, the Parliament has at best mirrored public opinion, seldom using the alternatives of exercising effective control or providing direction.

As we turn to the role of the Press and public opinion, it becomes clear that the public in all the countries studied are more concerned with domestic policy than with foreign policy except in times of war. Moreover, due to economic, technological and social backwardness, popular awareness of foreign policy issues is low. Public opinion can and has been manipulated by the governments in power to flow in desired streams. In most of the Third World countries, the Press is not entirely free. The legacy of colonialism continues and most of the newspapers play it safe by taking the cue from the official spokesman.

The lack of literacy in Nepal, the existence of strict censorial control of publications in Pakistan and diffusive heterogeneity in Sri Lanka have enfeebled public opinion. In Sri Lanka, the constraints of literacy and strict censorship have not been there, but monopolistic control of the media has greatly

diminished its independence. The Press at best has been an articulate lobbyist for vested interests.

The final conclusion that emerges from this study is that in most of the smaller countries in South Asia, the formulation of foreign policy is not undertaken in a 'systematic, scientific' way. The models suggested by many Western scholars are not perhaps very relevant or applicable here.

In all the cases studied - Nepal, Pakistan and Ceylon - policy making in the domain of external relations has, over the years, come to be recognised as the prerogative of the supreme leader and the close 'coterie' of his advisors, who for the most part have succeeded in excluding the professionals/specialists (career diplomats and other foreign office personnel) from this task. The Legislature and the Press too seem to have played only a subsidiary, subordinate role. From the evidence reviewed during the course of the present study, it does not seem that the process of policy formulation is likely to be modified or changed significantly or substantially in the near future.