

## CHAPTER III

### **FOREIGN POLICY MAKING IN SRI LANKA:** **INSTITUTIONS AND PROCESSES**

#### I

The foreign policy of a state is formulated and managed generally by the persons who are responsible for it. Other individuals and social groups who are knowledgeable on international relations or whose socio-economic interests are related to the external relations of the state try to influence the foreign policy making process. The citizens are not directly involved in the making of foreign policy. They are not concerned with foreign policy except when situations in the international arena affect their civil liberties or their religious, linguistic and cultural sentiments. However, such occasions of mass involvement in foreign policy affairs is seldom. Only in extreme situations do the mass get involved in foreign policy making process.<sup>1</sup> Even on these occasions it is the socio-political elites who mobilize the masses. Usually the foreign policy makers take note of popular sentiments and interests in the making and execution of foreign policy and thereby foreclose mass involvement.

The term foreign policy elite is used to describe the official as well as non-official individuals and groups involved in the making and implementation of foreign policy. While the official elites formulate the foreign policy, the non-official elites influence the foreign policy making process. Thus, foreign policy of a state emerges from the interactions among its foreign policy elites. Therefore, it is essential for acquiring a better understanding of the foreign policy making of state to know not only the formal organization of foreign policy making and implementation but also to identify the individuals and groups who play important roles in the making of foreign policy and analyze the loci of their interests and activities.

There are very few theoretically oriented studies on the foreign policy making organizations and processes in small states. Of these studies, the works of East and Reid are of special theoretical salience. It will be appropriate to discuss briefly the main contentions of these scholars before analyzing Sri Lanka's foreign policy making organization and interactions.

East has put-forth three inter-related propositions on the organization of foreign policy making in small states. Firstly, small states are bound to have a small organization for foreign policy making and implementation because of their limited economic resources. Secondly, they will maintain diplomatic relations, i.e. missions abroad, in a limited number of countries because of limited resources and also because of their limited range of foreign policy interests. Finally few people will be involved in the making and implementation of foreign policy in small states.<sup>2</sup> Stretching East's contention further Reid has argued that foreign policy making in small states will be highly personalized, left mainly to the head of government because of the lack of interest on foreign affairs by other leaders or elites, and also because of the smallness of the organization of foreign policy making and implementation.<sup>3</sup>

The observations made by East and Reid appear to be valid but not entirely without reservations. While small states lack in resources which would preclude them from having a relatively large foreign office and diplomatic missions in a large number of countries, the desire of the leadership of small states to promote their international identity and independence as well as defence of their countries will impel them to maintain diplomatic missions in a large number countries and also in international organizations. Furthermore, their economic imperatives will, on a constant basis, pressurize them for the expansion of sources for aid and assistance as well as for the diversification of markets for their exports in order to yield better returns. Consequently, small states will experience gradual growth of their foreign policy machinery that is, foreign office and missions abroad. Likewise there will be increase in the number of people involved in the making of foreign policy and the personalized style of formulating the foreign policy will tend to decrease with the growth of foreign policy traditions and the institutionalization of foreign policy machinery.

## II

### **Background**

When Sri Lanka gained independence from British colonial rule on February 4, 1948, it did not inherit any foreign policy institution and tradition. The colonial administration did not maintain diplomatic relations with any country or in international organization except having an office in New Delhi to look after the problems of the Indian Tamil immigrant labour force in Sri Lanka. Also Sri Lankan leaders belonging to the UNP, the dominant political party, had not evinced much interest on international relations during the colonial period as they were preoccupied with domestic issues. Consequently, when Sri Lanka attained independence it did not inherit a foreign policy making organization or tradition; neither its bureaucrats nor its leaders were experienced in diplomacy and international affairs.<sup>4</sup>

This situation was much different from that of India. The British India Administration had direct diplomatic relations with several countries and representations in many international organizations. Also the British India Administration had long experience of dealing with the Indian princely states who for all practical purposes were autonomous political entities. More importantly, the Indian nationalist leaders belonging to the Congress Party which had led the Indian freedom movement had considerable exposure to international affairs from the beginning of the century. They had developed clear positions on most international problems, issues and events then in vogue. As a result, India had the benefit of inheriting from the colonial administration some sort of an organization which formed the base for building its foreign policy-making edifice and also leaders and bureaucrats with experience in and exposure to international affairs.<sup>5</sup>

Unlike the Indian leadership, the prominent leaders of Sri Lankan freedom movement had not shown much interest in the international affairs of the period. They had acceptably left this area to the British Colonial Government, and generally expressed approval or support for British stands on world affairs. Only towards the end of the colonial rule did Sri Lankan leaders

petition for devolution of power in the sphere of external affairs, but the request was not made with vigour and strength and also the colonial administration was not inclined to concede to their request. However, the nationalist leaders had clearly articulated position on the Indian Tamil Labour Force in Sri Lanka whom they considered as ‘birds of passage,’ with no genuine stake in the socio-economic development of Sri Lanka and consequently wanted their repatriation to India.

While the mainstream leadership was ill-equipped in the area of diplomacy and foreign affairs,<sup>6</sup> the leadership of the Communist and Trotskyite parties, which were politically dominant in the urban areas, had well defined positions on many international issues.<sup>7</sup> They were opposed to the phenomena of imperialism, colonialism and capitalism. Consequently they were not favourably disposed towards the capitalist states including Britain. However, they did not have the privilege of conducting the foreign policy.<sup>8</sup>

The responsibility of establishing the foreign policy machinery and conducting the foreign policy fell upon the Sri Lankan leadership who acquired power from Britain. D.S. Senanayake, the first Prime Minister of independent Sri Lanka organized the Ministry of External Affairs which was a very rudimentary level organization co-existing with the Ministry of Defence and established diplomatic missions in a few countries – mostly Commonwealth States and the US. Since then the Foreign Office has grown into an elaborate organization and in 1972 it became an independent and separate ministry. Also there has been significant expansion in the number of diplomatic missions abroad. The growth and innovation in foreign office and missions have occurred gradually over the past forty years.

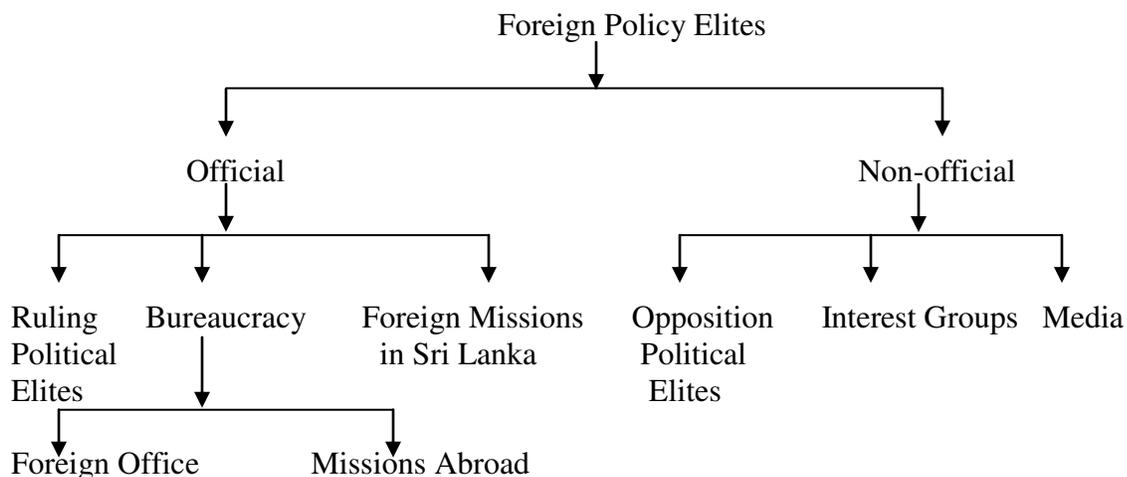
Besides, the political leaders in power and officials of the foreign office, several non-official groups and individuals have been significant actors in foreign policy making in Sri Lanka. The most important non-government source of foreign policy have been the leaders of political parties sitting in the opposition benches in Parliament.<sup>9</sup> During the early days of independence, foreign embassies in Sri Lanka, especially those of UK, USA, and India also made important inputs in the making of Sri Lanka’s foreign policy. As Nissanka remarks based

on his interview with Sir John Kotelawala. “...Foreign Affairs Division was poorly equipped... For important matters like the Bandung Conference (1955) Sir John had to turn to a number of persons outside his Foreign Office for consultation and guidance.”<sup>10</sup> Mostly he consulted foreign diplomats posted to Sri Lanka. While various economic and cultural interest groups have tried to influence foreign policy making. The Sri Lankan media has been a noteworthy actor in this context.

A broad diagrammatic delineation of foreign policy elites in Sri Lanka is as follows:

**Table 1**

**Foreign Policy Elites**



While the non-official political elites have been influential in foreign policy making, it is the official elites formally responsible for foreign policy who play the most important role in its formulation and implementation. During the days of parliamentary democracy which was in vogue from 1948 to 1977 the Prime Minister had been the most important actor in the making and implementation of foreign policy. The pre-eminence of the Prime Minister had occurred because of the Soulbury Constitution which was in vogue from 1948-1972 as well as the overall nature of Sri Lanka's polity. This tradition was passed over in 1978 to the Presidential system of

government with President becoming the key player in the making of Sri Lanka's foreign policy, although he does not formally head the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

### III

## The Structure of the Foreign Policy Machinery

### The Head of Government

The Head of Government has been the most powerful and the most important functionary in the foreign policy making process. For a period of nearly thirty years, that is from 1948 to 1977, the Prime Minister headed the foreign policy machinery. Article 46(4) of the Soulbury Constitution stipulated that the portfolios of Defence and External Affairs should be under the Prime Minister. The Soulbury Constitution had no provisions for parliamentary approval of foreign policy except on allocation of finance. But parliament has had very little say on this matter. The allocation to the Ministry of External Affairs has increased with successive governments.<sup>11</sup> The increase has been an easy affair as the Prime Minister heads the ministry. Furthermore, the Prime Minister exercised unrestrained authority in foreign policy process by virtue of the constitutional provision and also by virtue of the freedom from parliamentary encumbrances.

The rationale for the inclusion of Article 46(4) in the independent constitution can be found in the nature of transfer of power in Sri Lanka. The Colonial Government transferred power to the liberal elites who were loyal to Britain. The inclusion of Article 46(4) was meant to protect British interests in the island by strengthening the hands of D.S. Senanayake whose assumption of power was a foregone conclusion. It is also a fact that D.S. Senanayake had requested for such an arrangement to enable him to have firm control over Defence and External Affairs whereby he would be in a strong position to contain the communists within Sri Lanka. D.S. Senanayake also signed External Affairs and Defence Agreements (November, 1947) with

Britain which enabled the latter to guide Sri Lanka in the management of her external relations including the use of British foreign missions to represent the interests of Sri Lanka in countries where Sri Lanka did not have diplomatic representation. These agreements were also meant to provide defence to the island from any possible threats from India which had attained independence in August 1947, and from any threats from the communist countries. Thus, the inclusion of Article 46(4) and the External Affairs and Defence agreements arose from the union of the interests of the imperial authority and their local faithfuls.<sup>12</sup>

The power of the Prime Minister in the sphere of foreign policy was further enhanced by the lack of the custom of the Cabinet review of this subject and the absence of the system of cabinet subcommittees on foreign policy. This situation arose because most ministers, barring one or two had little or no interest in foreign policy. Sir John Kotelawala had gone on record that there were only two ministers in his cabinet who were interested in foreign affairs. Further, according to Sir John the situation was true even during the times of his predecessors.<sup>13</sup> Only during the United Front Government (1970-77) could one see a sizable number of prominent ministers who were very knowledgeable on international relations, showing interest in foreign affairs.<sup>14</sup> But this did not continue in the succeeding UNP government.

The Republican Constitution which replaced the Soulbury Constitution in 1972 did not have the provision of Article 46(4). It formally abandoned it thereby making it possible to separate Defence and External Affairs from Prime Ministership. However, Sirimavo Bandaranaike who headed the United Front government retained the two portfolios under her charge. It was only when the UNP came to power in 1977 Prime Minister J.R. Jayewardene retained Defence portfolio but appointed A.C.S. Hameed as the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Although Hameed played an important role in foreign policy process, J.R. Jayewardene had the decisive voice.

The role of the Prime Minister in foreign policy making has varied from individual to individual. D.S. Senanayake was low profile in foreign policy matters. He opted for strengthening relations with Commonwealth countries and the U.S. He did not embark on a

foreign policy which was meant to project and promote the international status and image of Sri Lanka. This was also true of his successor, his son Dudley Senanayake. It was only when Sir John Kotelawala assumed charge of prime ministership that foreign policy gained prominence. He was keen on playing a prominent role in international relations be it the Commonwealth or the Afro-Asian movement. The situation changed after the ascendance of Mr. Bandaranaike to power. He dropped all foreign policy advisors of the previous government and began with much self-confidence to guide foreign policy matters himself. It is stated that he occasionally consulted Nehru, the Prime Minister of India. During the terms of his wife Sirimavo Bandaranaike foreign policy remained the preoccupation of the Prime Minister. Although Mrs. Bandaranaike had advisors like Felix R. Dias Bandaranaike, Sunethra Rupa Singhe, and Tissa Wijeyeratne (who were all related her) all these advisors have admitted that Mrs. Bandaranaike was thoroughly knowledgeable on world problems and trends in international relations. Though she consulted her advisors, in the final instance she usually made her own decision on foreign policy matters.<sup>15</sup>

In 1978, the UNP adopted a Presidential form of government in place of the Westminster model. J.R. Jayewardene became the first executive President of Sri Lanka. Jayewardene, a seasoned hand at international relations having served as an advisor on foreign policy matters to successive UNP governments beginning from 1948, as the Head of State as well as the Head of Government he continued to hold the reins on foreign policy. He gave directives on all important foreign policy issues although he had a Minister for Foreign Affairs who looked after the routine foreign policy matters. Thus, there has been no change in the tradition of the Head of Government being the most important actor in foreign policy making process even after the adoption of the presidential form of government.<sup>16</sup>

Although the political leadership exercises the formal authority as well as the actual influence in the making and implementation of foreign policy, this does not give them the freedom to give vent to their idiosyncrasies which are not in harmony with the ideology of the ruling party and also with the national interest of the country. For example, Sir John Kotelawala wanted Sri Lanka to become a member of the SEATO, but he failed in the task because of the opposition from his own party, the UNP, as well as the opposition parties. Likewise, Dudley Senanayake though he was an anti-communist concluded the Rubber-Rice Barter Agreement

with China in 1952 because of economic and political compulsions. Similarly W. Dahanayake who assumed power after the assassination of S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike had to quit the government and the SLFP for pursuing a pro-west foreign policy which was contrary to the foreign policy orientation of the SLFP. Thus, it will be wrong to assume that Sri Lanka's foreign policy is exclusively the handiwork of the Prime Minister or now the Executive President, though the person holding this post is the most important actor in foreign policy making sphere. He is guided by the ideology and political imperatives of his party as well as the challenges to the legitimacy of the government and the compulsions of the economy and the polity.

### **Parliamentary Secretary/Deputy Minister**

To cope with overburdening of functions of cabinet ministers, the Soulbury Constitution provided for the post of Parliamentary Secretary to assist the ministers in discharging their duties. Article 47 of the Soulbury Constitution stated that the Governor General may appoint parliament secretaries to assist the ministers in their parliamentary and departmental duties. The 1972 Republican Constitution replaced the term Parliamentary Secretary with the term Deputy Minister.

Although Deputy Ministers/Parliamentary Secretaries did not have well-specified authority and functions, they have exercised significant influence in the foreign policy making processes by virtue of their intellectual, administrative and political competence and acumen. In the sphere of foreign policy, very competent persons had occupied the position of Parliamentary Secretary, for example, R.G. Senanayake (1947-1952), T.B. Subasinghe (1952-1956), Felix R. Dias Bandaranaike (1960-1965), J.R. Jayewardene (1965-70), Lakshman Jayakkody (1970-77). It may also be highlighted that persons like J.R. Jayewardene and Felix R. Dias Bandaranaike in addition to deputizing in the Ministry of Defence and External Affairs had independent charge of cabinet portfolios. They were extremely articulate spokespersons on foreign policy of their respective governments.

### **Permanent Secretary/Secretary**

The bureaucratic set up of the foreign policy machinery is headed by the Secretary who prior to the 1972 Republican Constitution was designated as the Permanent Secretary. The Secretary is responsible for administering the foreign affairs department as well as coordinating the activities of the missions abroad. He has to attend to other formal duties such as accompanying the President, Prime Minister and Foreign Minister on foreign tours, attending receptions hosted by foreign missions in Sri Lanka, managing the visits of foreign dignitaries, managing international conferences hosted by Sri Lanka and preparing foreign policy statements and briefs. In addition to foreign affairs, the Secretary till 1972 had to look after Defence Department too.

At its inception senior civil servants belonging to the Ceylon Civil Service (CCS) had been appointed to this post. But with the passage of time persons belonging to the career diplomatic service namely the Sri Lankan Overseas Service (SLOS) have attained the seniority to occupy this post. The first Permanent Secretary Kanthiah Vaithianathan (1948-54), an impressive and powerful personality, had been given a free hand by D.S. Senanayake to organize and establish the Department of External Affairs. Vaithianathan had also played important role in the establishment of, and recruitment to the Sri Lankan Overseas Service. His advices were heeded to by D.S. Senanayake. Gunasena de Soyza (1954-59) who succeeded Vaithianathan was less flamboyant and assertive and usually preferred the role of policy execution and implementation than policy initiation. This was quite natural of him as he served under two assertive Prime Ministers – that is, Sir John Kotelawala and S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike. The period of his successor M.F. de S. Jayaratne was short (1959-60) but he attempted to eradicate many unhappy practices in the department. It must be noted that during his tenure as Permanent Secretary, Sri Lanka did not have a dominant and stable Prime Minister. The period of the fourth Permanent Secretary, N.Q. Dias (1961-65) was marked by his efforts to Sinhalyze the foreign office set up. Dias was succeeded by G.V.P. Samarsinghe (1965-7) who was the Permanent Secretary of Immigration and Emigration Department before coming to the Ministry of Defence and External Affairs. His successor was A.R. Ratnavale (1970-72) who served for a brief period

after which he was posted as an ambassador. W.T. Jayasinghe succeeded him as the Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

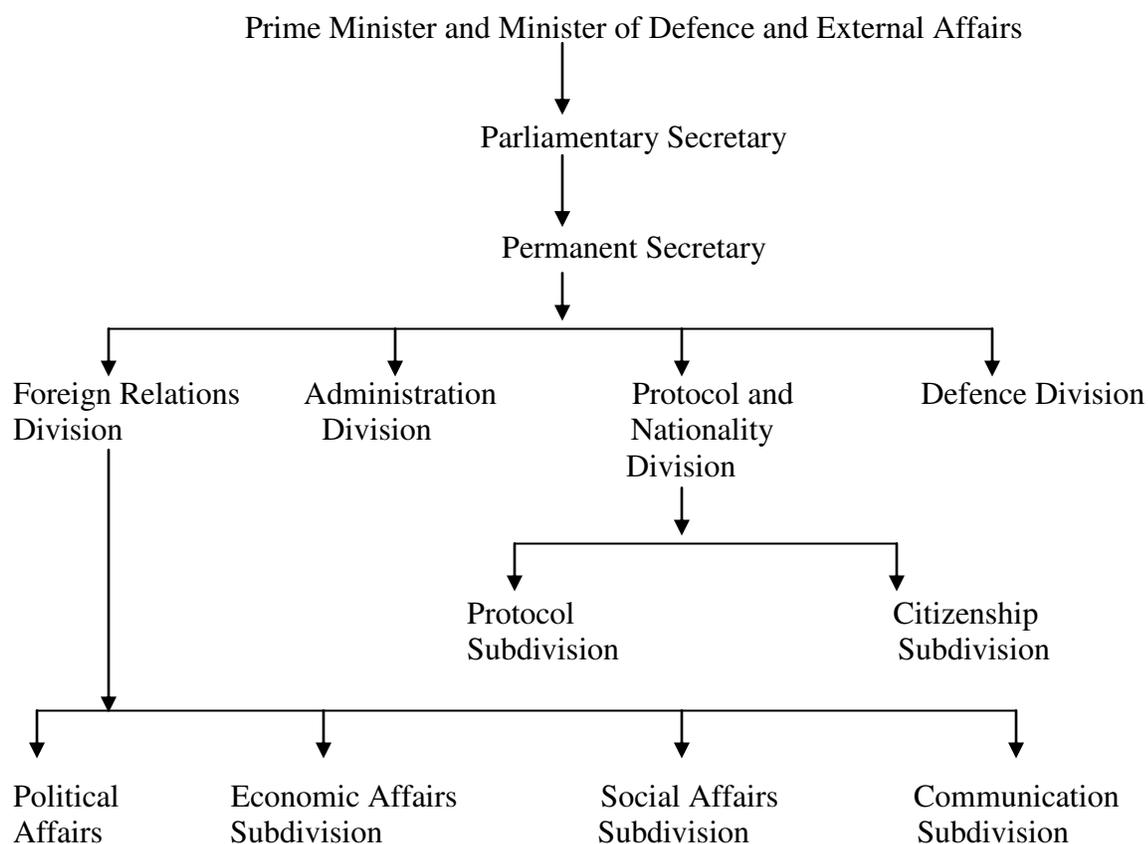
The 1972 Republican Constitution changed the nomenclature of the foreign policy organization from External Affairs to Foreign Affairs. Also in the 1970s the ministry had a new post of Additional Secretary who was given equal powers with that of the Secretary in all matters pertaining to the management of foreign affairs of the country. In May, 1974, Tissa Wijeyeratne – an attorney by training and a non-career diplomat who was a political appointee as the Ambassador of Sri Lanka to France – was appointed as the Additional Secretary by special orders of Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike to improve the functioning of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Wijeyeratne attempted to introduce measures which were meant to improve the coordination between the foreign office and the missions abroad. Among his several measures to improve the functioning of the foreign office he implemented a system of daily meetings with the directors of foreign affairs. As soon as the directors came to office in the morning, they were requested to study the information sent by the missions abroad, analyze the problems that have cropped up and recommend solutions to the Additional Secretary as well as bring to the notice of the Additional Secretary any other matters which might affect Sri Lanka's interests abroad. He was also instrumental in the formulation of the policy which allowed aspirants to the Sri Lankan Overseas Service to appear at the recruitment examination in Sinhala or Tamil in addition to English. However, Wijeyeratne stay at the Foreign office was short-lived. He resigned from the government in 1976 because of differences of opinion with senior officers of the Sri Lanka Overseas Service Cadre.<sup>17</sup>

In addition to Wijeyeratne, Gamini Corea the then Secretary of Planning and Economic Affairs and an eminent economist exercised much influence on Mrs. Bandaranaike. But Corea too did not stay in the services of government for long as he moved to New York on a United Nations assignment.

## **Foreign Office Organization**

The Foreign Office has been enlarged and its internal structure differentiated with the passage of time. In 1949, the Ministry had four divisions only three of which dealt with foreign affairs. The three divisions each headed by an Assistant Secretary were Foreign Relations, Protocol and Nationality, and Administration. The Foreign Relations Division was further subdivided into four subdivisions and assigned specific duties. The fourth division pertained to Defence which included Police, Army, Air Force and Navy. The combination of External Affairs and Defence was detrimental to the former as the Prime Minister and the Permanent Secretary had to devote much time to the Defence Division (see Table 2). Nissanka has aptly commented on this issue “Both the Prime Minister and the Permanent Secretary had to devote most of their time to internal affairs as security forces such as Police, Army, Navy and Air Force were directly under them. Prime Ministers were usually compelled by necessity to devote more time to internal affairs of the country because their position rested on the political power built by them. The Foreign Relations and Protocol Divisions were given very little space in the premises which housed the Ministry of Defence and External Affairs.”<sup>18</sup>

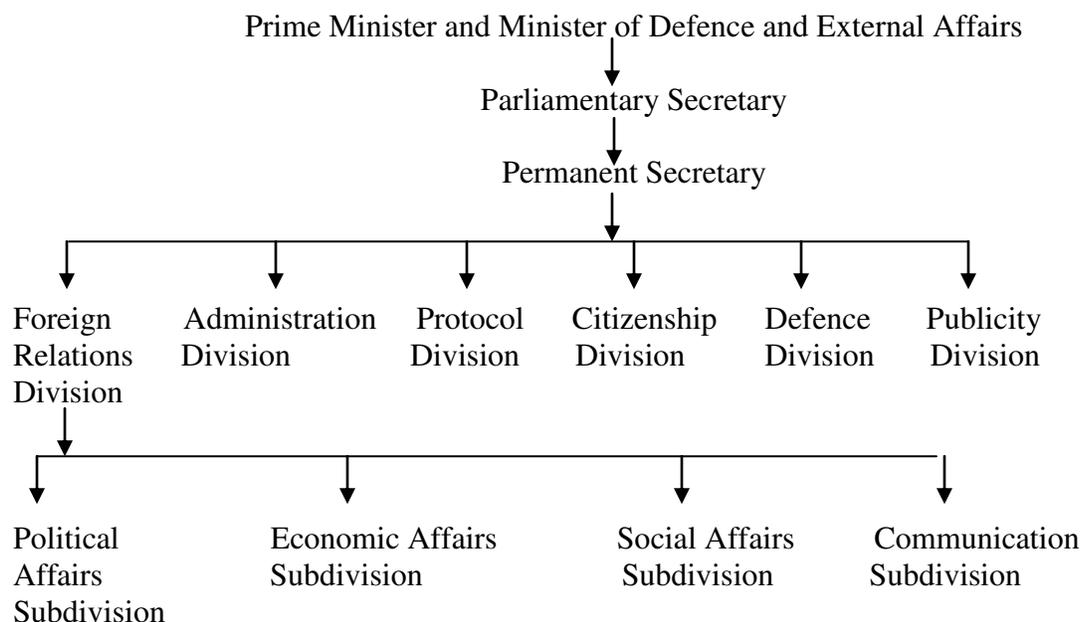
Table 2

**The Structure of the Ministry of Defence and External Affairs (1949)**

Source: Appathurai, no. 4.

Some time during the mid-fifties the ministry was reorganized with the Protocol and Nationality Division being bifurcated into separate divisions and the Publicity Division also made into a separate unit (see Table 3).

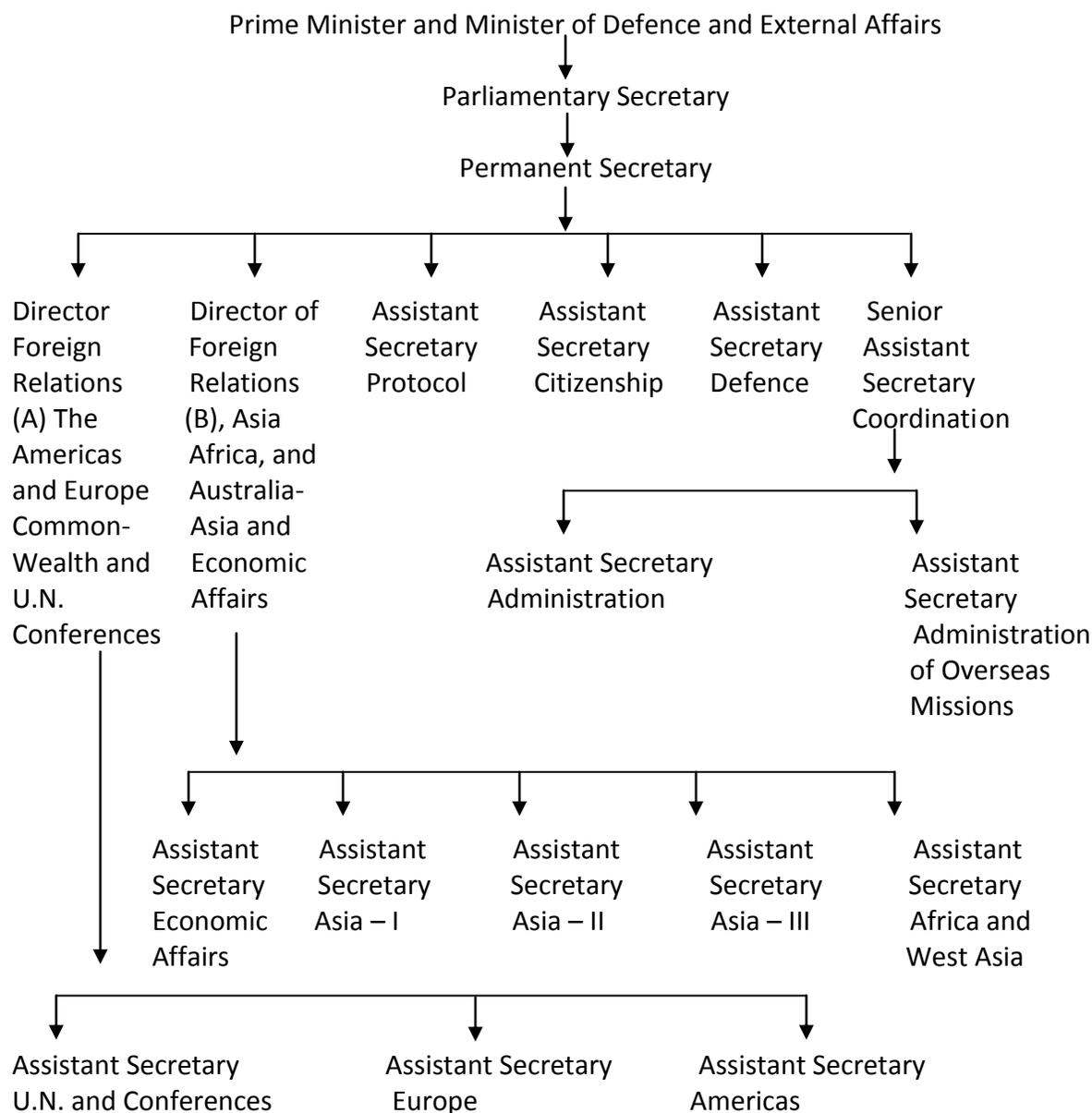
Table 3

**The Structure of the Ministry of Defence and External Affairs (1956)**

Source: Appathurai, no. 4.

In the early sixties the ministry was reorganized on area-desk system, moreover major expansions were undertaken in the form of the establishment of new divisions. Furthermore, a new post of Director General was created to coordinate the activities of the divisions and relieve the Permanent Secretary of the excess burden. G.S. Peiris who was originally a senior member of the Ceylon Civil Service and had opted for the Ceylon Overseas Service after independence was appointed to the post of Director General. However, after holding charge of this post for two years, he was appointed as Sri Lanka's Ambassador to Federal Republic of Germany. After Peiris, no person with required seniority to become Director General could be found within Ceylon Overseas Service, and other ministries did not agree to depute a senior officer from the Ceylon Civil Service cadre for the post. Consequently the post of Director General was abolished and in its place two new posts of Director were created to coordinate diplomatic activities between the Foreign Office and missions abroad (see Table 4).

Table 4

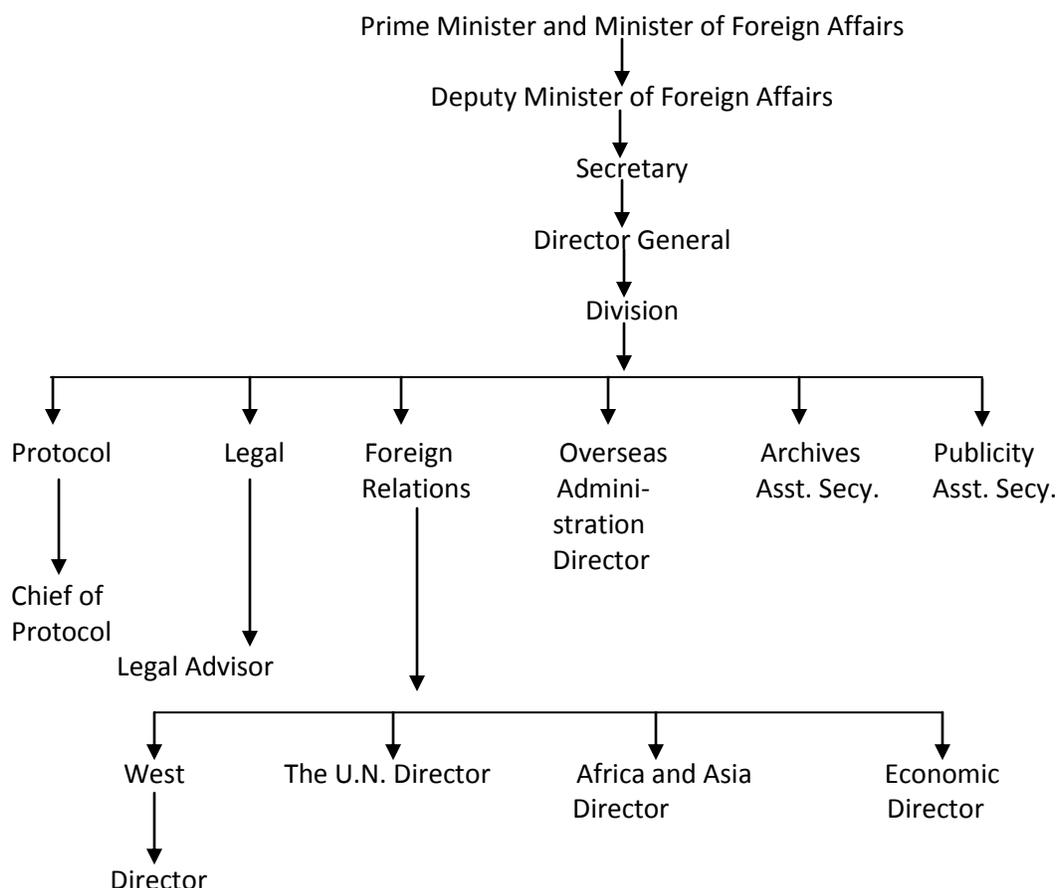
**The Structure of the Ministry of Defence and External Affairs (1966)**

Source: Appathurai, no. 4.

Again in the early 1970s the Foreign Office was reorganized on the following lines (see Table 5). The Foreign Office and Defence were separated into two separate ministries. The post of Director General was reintroduced and Foreign Relations was divided into four divisions each of which was headed by a Director. The Directors were assisted by Assistant Directors or Assistant Secretaries. Furthermore, the nomenclature of External Affairs Ministry was changed to Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The posts of Parliamentary Secretary and Permanent Secretary were re-designated as Deputy Minister and Secretary respectively. New designations were introduced such as Legal Advisor to indicate that the post was not an Sri Lankan Overseas Service cadre appointment. There was no separate directorate for nonaligned conference and Asia and Africa divisions were merged together and managed by a single Director.

Table 5

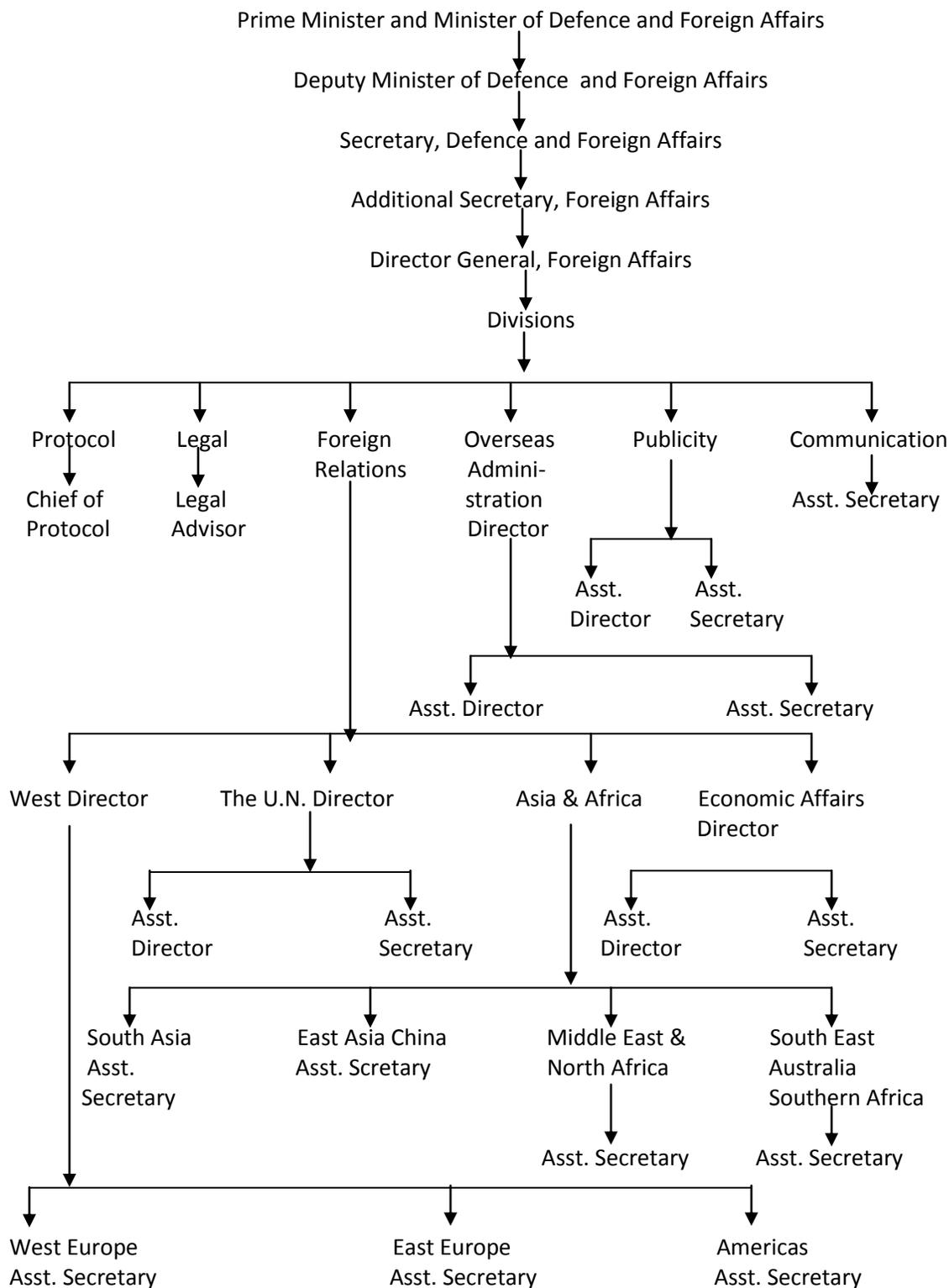
**The Structure of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (1972)**



Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Sri Lanka

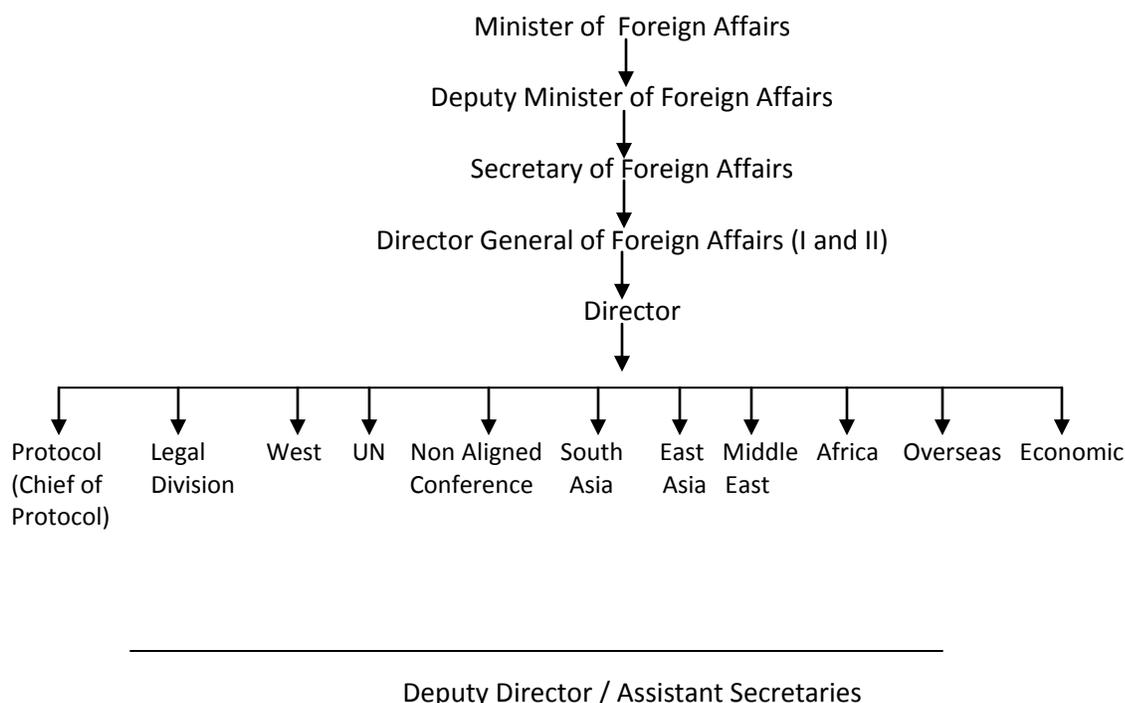
In 1974, changes were introduced in the Ministry. Most importantly a new post of Additional Secretary was created to which Tissa Wijeyeratne was appointed. The ministry had five directors who headed the departments of Overseas Administration, Asia and Africa, West, Economic Affairs and UN Conferences. But after the resignation of Tissa Wijeyeratne from the post, the post was abolished (see Table 6). Between 1974 and 1981 more divisions were upgraded to the status of directorates. In 1981 a second Director General was appointed and 14 Directors to head the Divisions of UN and Conferences, Non-aligned Conferences, West South Asia, East Asia, Middle East, Africa, Publicity (three Directors), Economic Affairs and Overseas Administration while the Protocol Division is led by the Chief of Protocol and the Legal Division by the Legal Advisor. The Directors are assisted by Deputy/Assistant Directors and Assistant Secretaries as the case may be (see Table 7).<sup>19</sup>

TABLE 6

**The Structure of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (1974)**

Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Sri Lanka

Table 7

**The Structure of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (1981)**

Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Sri Lanka

The expansion and restructuring in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has been in response to the growth in Sri Lanka's external involvement and its growing interests in world politics. For instance, the non-aligned division was upgraded to the status of directorate because of the important role the country assigned to itself in the nonaligned movement. Likewise the Middle East was upgraded to the status of directorate because the region employs large number of Sri Lankan nationals who make huge remittance to the country. The same logic also applies to the other directorates. However, role of these directorates have been mainly administrative in nature such as preparing briefs and background papers for the political leadership who continue to retain the initiative in the formulation of foreign policy. This situation has led Kodikara to remark, "...it would be true to say that the ministry today functions in much the same way as it did in the fifties and that important initiatives in foreign policy decision-making are still politically inspired."<sup>20</sup>

### **The Overseas Missions**

Like the Foreign Office, Sri Lanka's missions abroad have increased in numbers over the past forty years. The increase in number of missions has been motivated by political and economic considerations. The limited economic resources and paucity of trained personnel have compelled Sri Lanka to adopt the practice of concurrent accreditation, that is several of its missions have been asked to look after contiguous states.<sup>21</sup> The Heads of missions were earlier allowed three visits per year for supervising the accredited missions under them. But owing to financial difficulties, these visits were reduced to one annual visit. This has adversely affected Sri Lanka's diplomacy.<sup>22</sup> Also due to economic constraints Sri Lanka had closed down its embassies in two instances namely in Ghana and Brazil during the 1960s. Of course, the island state had very little interactions with these two states. But in 1977, it established four missions in the Middle East where a large number of Sri Lankans are working whereby the region has become a major source of foreign exchange remittance to the island.

When Sri Lanka gained independence it established diplomatic missions in a few countries mostly belonging to the British Commonwealth. These countries were the UK, Australia, Canada, India and Pakistan and also in the US. Subsequently, it established missions in Myanmar and Italy. This was perhaps done to appeal to the sentiments of the Buddhist and Roman Catholic population. Britain looked after the interests of Sri Lanka in countries where it did not have missions but with whom it had diplomatic relations. In 1955, Sri Lanka had diplomatic missions in only nine countries together with concurrent accreditation with twelve other countries.

In 1956, Sri Lanka established missions in three socialist states, i.e. the former Soviet Union, China and Yugoslavia and also set up a mission in New York following its admission to the United Nations in 1955. In 1980s Sri Lanka maintained diplomatic relations with nearly 25 countries with concurrent accreditation to further 38 countries. Presently, Sri Lanka has its

missions in all the major cities of the world like London, Washington, New York, Moscow, Beijing, Paris, New Delhi, and Tokyo.

The ambassadorial level appointments rested within the jurisdiction of the Prime Minister during the era of the Westminster model of government and now with the President. During the tenure of the UNP governments (1948-56) many of the ambassadorial appointments were made from the rank of the party faithfuls – either defeated politicians or cabinet ministers were appointed as ambassadors. R.S.S. Gunewardene was appointed to Rome in 1952 after being defeated in the general elections. Similarly, C.W.W. Kanangara who went to Indonesia as a Consul General was too a defeated politician. Among the cabinet members who were given diplomatic appointments were T.B. Jayah (Labour Minister) who went to Pakistan as High Commissioner and also Sir Claude Corea, Sir Oliver Goonetilleke and Sir Edwin Wijeratne who all went to London as High Commissioner during different points of time.

The opposition in Parliament often criticized the government for appointing individuals who were defeated at the polls. But the criticisms were strongly refuted by D.S. Senanayake and his successors. For instance, D.S. Senanayake has gone on record in Parliament saying: “...one thing I wish to mention is that when we send representatives, we must send representatives who will represent the views of the existing government, not the views of any other party. Today we are the government and people who represent our views will be sent.”<sup>23</sup>

The general characteristics of the ambassadorial appointees were that most of them were western educated and economically sound with long political experience. They were personally pleasant, culturally sophisticated, and politically sagacious. They had socially elegant and beautiful wives who could interact and entertain at high society level.<sup>24</sup> Besides during this period religious affiliation seemed also to play some part in the appointments. Jayah, a Muslim, went to Pakistan, Susantha de Fonseka, a Buddhist, was sent to Myanmar and Sir Claude Corea, Sir Oliver Goonetilleke and Sir Edwin Wijeratne who were posted to London at different points of time, were Christians.

During the regimes of the two Bandaranaikes, the appointments to high level diplomatic posts were more broad-based. Alongside party faithfuls, they appointed certain defeated UNP members, retired civil servants and university dons to high ambassadorial positions. S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike appointed Professor G.P. Malalasekara as Ambassador to the Soviet Union and Sir Richard Aluwilare, a retired senior civil servant who lost at the polls on the UNP ticket was appointed as the High Commissioner to India because as a former Permanent Secretary of Immigration and Emigration and also as a Kandyan he was well versed with the problem of Indian Tamils which was then being discussed between the two governments. Besides Aluwilare, some other retired Permanent Secretaries too were appointed as ambassadors. The practice set by S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike was followed by his wife, Sirimavo who succeed him after a brief interruption.

Both the Bandaranaikes had expressed desire to have professionally trained ambassadors from the country's diplomatic service, though they did not wish to lay down any hard and fast rule to exclude politicians for diplomatic appointments.<sup>25</sup> However, their desire had to wait till 1963 when for the first time a officer of the Ceylon Overseas Service (COS) cadre was appointed as an ambassador. This was G.S. Peiris. In due course, several officers of COS cadre have been appointed as ambassador. For instance by 1970s the following COS men too got such promotions: W.L.B. Mendis, H.O. Wijegoonewardne, A. Basanayake, B. Fonseka, Rex Koolmeyer. All these officers belonged to the first batch of COS selected in 1949.

The tradition laid down by the two Bandaranaikes has guided the subsequent UNP governments in making appointments to ambassadorial rank positions. Now appointments to the headship of missions in countries important to Sri Lanka have become broad-based, comprising of career diplomats as well as non-career persons.

In 1973, the functions to be performed by the mission abroad were clearly spelt out in the Report of the Director General of Foreign Affairs. The functions were as follows:

1. Study political situations in the host country and report with special reference to its bearing and impact on relations with Sri Lanka;
2. Promotion of trade and economic contacts and the study of economic trends with particular reference to relations bearing on Sri Lanka;
3. Advising the home government on policy towards the country of accreditation in the light of developments in the latter. Promoting good relations and good-will between the home country and the host country;
4. Promoting an understanding in the host country of the policies and personalities of the home country;
5. Dissemination of information regarding the home country and projection of the correct national image;
6. Looking after the interests of the Sri Lankan community in the host country; and
7. Promoting mutually beneficial cooperation between the two countries.<sup>26</sup>

These are some of the tasks that Sri Lankan missions abroad have to perform. The tasks have become arduous because of the feature of concurrent accreditation, and the reduction to only one visit by the ambassador per year to the concurrent accredited country. Further, the performance of the functions required that Sri Lankan missions are manned by sophisticated and experienced diplomats and their responsibilities and performance are sophisticatedly supervised by the foreign office at home.

### **Ceylon Overseas Service / Sri Lankan Overseas Service**

The newly created Ministry of External Affairs faced problems of finding suitably trained personnel to manage diplomatic work and man the foreign office. There was a lack of personnel exposed to international affairs. To meet the immediate requirement, the government deputed officers belonging to the Ceylon Civil Service (CCS) cadre to the new ministry. However in

1949, the government created a separate service for manning the Ministry of External Affairs and Missions abroad. The name which Sri Lanka gave to her career diplomatic service was carefully chosen. While other countries referred to their career diplomatic service as Foreign Service or Diplomatic Service, Sri Lanka named its service the Ceylon Overseas Service (COS). The reasons for Sri Lanka's choice was explained in the Report of the Salaries and Cadres Commission:

“The term ‘Overseas Service’ was used in preference to ‘Foreign Service’ because this class (diplomatic) of officers had to serve in Commonwealth countries as well and the use of the word ‘foreign’ in relation to a Commonwealth country was considered inappropriate.”<sup>27</sup>

Following Sri Lanka becoming a republic in 1972, the service changed its name to Sri Lanka Overseas Service (SLOS).

The recruitment of personnel for the SLOS was based upon public examination conducted by the Public Service Commission. For recruitment to the SLOS, candidates were required to appear for all the papers prescribed for the Sri Lankan Civil Service (SLCS). In addition they were required to appear in an additional paper on World Affairs as well as face additional viva voce examination. Over the years various experiments have been made to induct talented personnel with aptitude for diplomatic work. While some of the experiments have been temporary, others have been of permanent nature.<sup>28</sup>

Between 1957 and 1959, S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike took special interest in the selection of SLOS recruits as he felt the previous scheme did not select suitable talent. But his innovations did not yield the desired result and had to be given up.<sup>29</sup> When Mrs. Bandaranaike returned to power in 1970, her government revised the recruitment rules to allow candidates to appear at the examination in Sinhala or Tamil medium, in addition to English. The efforts of both the Bandaranaiques' had been geared to recruiting nationalist Sri Lankans into foreign service.

Sri Lanka, in the initial years, faced the problem of developing suitable training programme for the SLOS recruits. While training in administrative procedures and practices was

provided within the ministry, adequate training arrangements for exposing the recruits to international affairs and diplomacy proved difficult to organize. The government requested the then Vice Chancellor of Ceylon University, Sir Ivor Jennings, to organize a course on international relations for the SLOS recruits, but he declined to undertake the responsibility because the university did not have adequate expertise in the field of international relations.<sup>30</sup> This problem was overcome by making arrangements for training of the recruits in countries like the UK, the USA and Australia. But this practice was later given up because of two reasons: first, they did not expose the recruits to the problems faced by post-colonial countries like Sri Lanka, and second the arrangement of training recruits in the developed countries proved very expensive.<sup>31</sup> In 1959 an institute known as the Ceylon Council of World Affairs was established to disseminate knowledge on international relations, and to generate knowledge on Sri Lanka's problems in the international system. The new recruits were sent to this institute for exposure to international relations. Besides, the ministry developed its own training programme for the recruits.

In the early phase of the foreign policy organizations, there were some friction between those who had come from the SLCS to the SLOS and the SLCS seconded personnel. Further there were problems of cadre seniority. For instance a SLOS man may hold the post of Third Secretary in one embassy but on transfer to another may become a First Secretary. All such problems were inevitable in the formative stage of the foreign office and were subsequently sorted out as the organization gained maturity and stability. The SLOS has developed from its infancy to become a well-developed and well-entrenched cadre concerned exclusively with the foreign policy of the country. However, the role of the SLOS has not been very significant in the sphere of policy initiatives. It has largely been a policy implementing organization, leaving policy initiative role to the political leadership.

It is worth noting that the SLOS is not an integrated service; so it does not represent all aspects of the external relations of the country. It does not deal in a major way with trade and commercial matters which are handled by Trade Commissioners who are personnel of the Commerce Ministry on secondment to the Ministry of External Affairs. Similarly the personnel of the Ceylon Overseas Information Service (COIS) used to look after publicity and related

matters. However, the COIS has now been disbanded and its personnel have been absorbed within the SLOS.

Sri Lanka Overseas Service has three grades such as,

Grade I - Officers

Grade II - Officers

Grade III - Officers

Based on their duty they may hold one of the following positions:<sup>32</sup>

A: At the Ministry of Foreign Affairs	B: At an Diplomatic Mission,
(i) Secretary to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Grade I)	(i) Ambassador/High Commissioner /Permanent Representative in UN (Grade I)
(ii) Additional Secretary (Grade I)	(ii) Deputy Chief of Mission / Deputy High Commissioner (Grade II)
(iii) Director General (Grade I)	(iii) Minister (Grade II)
(iv) Director (Grade II / Grade III)	(iv) Counselor (Grade II)
(v) Deputy Director (Grade III)	(v) First Secretary (Grade III)
(vi) Assistant Secretary (Grade III – entry level).	(vi) Second Secretary (Grade III – on confirmation of service)
	Third Secretary (Grade III – entry level on probation)

## **Other Ministries**

In addition to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministries of Finance and Commerce have had significant role in the sphere of foreign policy. Likewise after the eruption of ethnic violence between the Sinhalese and the Tamils, the Ministry of National Security became an important actor in the making of foreign policy. However, the roles of these ministries in foreign policy sphere have not received any scholarly attention. There is no published or unpublished research work in this sphere. Even there is no newspaper articles dealing with the roles of these ministries. Thus, it is not possible to analyze in depth the roles these ministries have played in foreign policy making and implementation, inspite of the fact that these ministries have played a role in foreign policy process in recent years.

## **Foreign Missions in Sri Lanka**

During early days of independence, when Sri Lanka's foreign office did not have adequate expertise, the government depended upon the British High Commission in Colombo for information and guidance. Very often, the Prime Minister and also the Permanent Secretary did not rely on the reports submitted by their ambassadors, but consulted the British High Commission. D.S. Senanayake was known for relying on the British High Commission for guidance on foreign policy matters.<sup>33</sup> Sir John Kotelawala has been reported to have often acted directly on the opinions and views received from ambassadors of the UK, the US and India without taking care to consult his foreign office. Among the foreign ambassadors, Sir John held C.C. Desai the High Commissioner of India in high esteem, who was known to have guided Sir John in handling foreign policy.<sup>34</sup> But subsequent leaders have displayed increasingly less dependence on foreign embassies as Sri Lanka's own foreign office and diplomats abroad acquired adequate expertise with the passage of time.

It is worth nothing that the SLOS elites have had limited role in the formulation of the foreign policy for various other reasons. The tradition of civil service neutrality is the dominant

culture of Sri Lankan bureaucracy. The bureaucrats are socialized to implement rather than initiate policies. Furthermore, the bureaucrats have found it convenient to nurture and perpetuate this tradition because of the island's two dominant party system of governance; initiative roles on their part entailed the possibility of them getting identified with one of the two parties and thereby making them unacceptable to the other. There have been some glaring examples in this regard. N.Q. Dias in pursuit of his initiative and innovative roles got identified with the SLFP and invited criticisms and disapproval from the UNP and the same was the case with Tissa Wijeyeratne. Consequently the bureaucracy, with a few individual exceptions, as an institution has preferred to rest content with the role of policy implementation rather than seeking gratification in playing prominent roles in the conceptualization and formulation of foreign policy.

#### IV

#### **Non-Governmental Foreign Policy Elites**

Thus far we have discussed the structure of the foreign policy machinery and the roles of different official functionaries in the making of Sri Lanka's foreign policy. Now we will analyze the roles the non-governmental elites play or have played in the formulation and conduct of the island's foreign policy. What roles the non-governmental elites play or have played in the formulation and conduct of the island's foreign policy? What is their role in this complex process? Who are more influential among the non-governmental elites? etc.

#### **Opposition Political Elites**

Amongst the non-governmental elites, the role of the opposition leaders in Parliament appear to be the most significant influence. Although foreign policy of Sri Lanka does not require sanction from Parliament, nevertheless it is discussed there during debates on

appropriation bill for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and also during the debates on the address of the President to the Parliament. Besides, the members of Parliament seek information on foreign policy matters from the government during the course of debate on the conduct of the foreign policy.

The leaders of the parties in the opposition benches have never spared the opportunity to debate and criticize the foreign policy of the ruling party. In this context, there are certain names which stand out for their contribution to the discussion on foreign policy in the two houses of Parliament (now Sri Lanka has one house – the State Assembly). Peter Keuneman, the leader of the Communist Party (Moscow Wing) was one of the strongest critics and watchdogs on foreign policy. Likewise, the Trotskyite leaders Colin De Silva, N.M. Perera and Doric De Souza never missed an opportunity to express their party's strong opposition to colonialism, imperialism and the Cold War.<sup>35</sup> The UNP leaders like J.R. Jayewardene and Dudley Senanayake were watchful of the SLFP led coalition's foreign policy as much as the SLFP leaders were on guard when the UNP held the reigns of power. S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike was a forceful critic of the UNP government's foreign policy during 1951 to 1955.<sup>36</sup> Later on Sirimavo Bandaranaike and her nephew Felix R. Dias Bandaranaike assumed the watchdog role for the SLFP. The presence of the alert watchdogs in the opposition benches has imposed considerable checks on the government in the conduct of the foreign policy. Governments have been cautious not to act in such a manner whereby they may give scope to the opposition to launch virulent criticisms against them as well as encash their shortcomings on foreign policy at the polls. In this respect the desire of Prime Minister Sir John Kotelawala to make Sri Lanka a member of the SEATO stands out. However, the then opposition leaders like S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, Peter Keuneman, Colin De Silva, and N.M. Perera exploited this issue in Parliament and outside to tarnish the image of the UNP government. The scathing criticism by the opposition leaders also prevailed upon other UNP leaders who too admonished Sir John for trying to drag Sri Lanka into the Cold War and forced the Prime Minister to give up the idea.<sup>37</sup> In the subsequent years the governments have become extremely careful not to envisage such actions which would be unpopular with the public and thereby give scope to the opposition leaders to exploit the action to further their electoral prospects. Thus, opposition leaders have played and still play a critical role in the conduct of the foreign policy by articulating the popular opinions and aspirations.

## **Interest Groups**

Various interest groups have articulated their views on important foreign policy issues. But the actual influence they have had has largely depended upon the response of the government to their opinions and also on the relationship their sectional interests had with the overall interest of the state. The sectional interests articulated by the interest groups do not have much influence on the conduct of foreign policy if they clash with the major foreign policy goals such as security and economic development. For instance, Sinhala Buddhist monks and laity were critical of the occupation of Tibet by Chinese military in 1958 and wanted the Sri Lankan government to take up the cause of Tibetan people who are predominantly Buddhists. However, the Sri Lankan government did not heed to their demands as it would have jeopardized Sri Lanka's politico-economic relations with China, especially the Rubber-Rice Barter Agreement.<sup>38</sup> On the other hand, when no adverse repercussions are foreseen the government has heeded to the interests of the interest groups. For instance, the government opened embassies in Muslim-dominated countries to appease the local Muslim population. Also, in 1965 the government positively responded to the demand of the Sinhala Buddhist monks on the Vietnam issue by sending a fact-finding mission to Vietnam to assess the damage caused to the population, who are predominantly Buddhist, by the massive bombing by the U.S. But in this instance, the demand of Sinhala Buddhists was in complete harmony with the nonaligned policy of the government which was further strengthened by the international outcry against American bombing of civilian sites in Vietnam.<sup>39</sup> In short, it can be said that socio-cultural interest groups have had very limited direct influence on the conduct of foreign policy.

## **Media**

The press has exercised much influence in the making of foreign policy. During the early days of independence, the UNP leaders consulted the editors of the Lake House groups of

newspapers – especially the Ceylon Daily News and the Ceylon Observer. The Lake House proprietors and editors were relatives of the Senanayakes and their ideological orientation were akin to that of the UNP. In fact, the Lake House group served as the mouth piece of the UNP. In this context, it is worth mentioning that Sir John Kotelawala had appointed the Managing Director of the Ceylon Daily News as a Special Ambassador to lobby for Sri Lanka’s admission to the United Nations, despite the fact that Sri Lanka had a regular ambassador in Washington in the person of R.S.S. Gunawardene. While the UNP leadership found the Lake House group an important and effective instrument for mobilization and aggregation of public opinion, the SLFP governments experienced continued embarrassment at the hands of the Lake House papers and thus tried to curtail the power and influence of this group of newspapers. In the 1970s, the SLFP led United Front government finally nationalized this monopolist group. However, the nationalization of the Lake House group has not curtailed the influence of the press on foreign policy making.<sup>40</sup> Although there no longer exists the direct nexus between the UNP and the press, still pressmen continue to influence the government through news reporting, news analysis and special commentaries. There are no comprehensive studies in the role of the media in the making of Sri Lanka’s foreign policy. The growing coverage of foreign affairs in the media indicates that there is increasing interest among the public on international relations a fact which demonstrates its continued role in foreign policy making. For instance, as Nissanka has aptly remarked, “Five leading journalists – Ninal Karunatileke and Janadasa Peiris (upto 1977) of the Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation, Mervyn de Silva, editor of the Lanka Guardian, Rex de Silva, editor of the Sun and S.P. Amerasingham, editor of the Tribune – seem to be greatly responsible for making foreign policy a subject of greater public interest in Sri Lanka.”<sup>41</sup> Thus, Sri Lanka’s international behaviour is now being watched by the media, as a result of which freedom of the executive in the making of foreign policy has been curtailed.

Besides, the press, in the early days of independence, D.S. Senanayake used to consult Sir Ivor Jennings, the then Vice Chancellor of University of Ceylon on foreign policy issues. Sir Ivor Jennings was of pro-western predilection and vibed well with D.S. Senanayake.<sup>42</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Thus the major actors in foreign policy making are the official political elites, the Prime Minister during the era of the Westminster model of governance and subsequently the President under the second republican constitution. The bureaucratic elites have played the role of policy implementers, although in the early days of independence, Sir Vaithianathan, the then Permanent Secretary enjoyed certain amount of freedom and initiative because of the inexperience of the political elites on foreign affairs and also because of the similarities in the world views of D.S. Senanayake and himself, i.e. a pro-western outlook. Besides Vaithianathan, foreign embassies too had influence on foreign policy making in the early years of independence. So also Sir Ivor Jennings, the then Vice Chancellor had influence over D.S. Senanayake. The role of the non-official elites has depended upon their ability to aggregate political power through proper articulation and mobilization of public opinion. This applies to the opposition political elites, interest groups and the media too. However, under normal circumstances the ruling political elites assign little scope for the non-official elites to influence the decision-making process. It is only when the non-official elites mobilize public opinion which threatens the legitimacy of the ruling elites that they are taken into account in the decision-making process.

## **NOTES**

1. For example the conscription programme in the United States during its involvement in the Vietnam war adversely affected the civil liberties of the American citizens who in large numbers had articulated the demand for American disengagement from the Vietnam conflict. Likewise, the Sri Lankan military action in Jaffna Peninsula which has caused much loss of life and imperiled peace in the region has evoked protests from their co-brethrens in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu, who have tried to pressurize the Indian government to prevail upon the Sri Lanka government to seek language a political solution to the Sri Lankan ethnic confront.
2. Maurice A. East, "Size and Foreign Policy Behaviour : A Test of Two Models," *World Politics*, Vol. 25, no. 4, 1973, pp. 551-77.
3. George L. Reid, "The Impact of Very Small Size on International Behaviour of Micro States," *Sage Professional Papers in International Studies*, (Beverly Hills and London, Sage, 1974), p. 19. He opines that foreign policy making and implementation is predominantly centred on a single individual.
4. These aspects have been very comprehensively discussed in E.R. Appathurai, *The Making of Foreign Policy in Ceylon : A Study in Public Administration*, (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Toronto, 1968) especially see pp.1-59. Also this point has been ably discussed in H.S.S. Nissanka, *Sri Lanka's Foreign Policy : A Study of Non-alignment*, (New Delhi: Vikas, 1974), pp.83-84.
5. For detail discussion see Bimal Prasad, *The Origins of Indian Foreign Policy*, (Calcutta: K.L. Mukhopadhyay, 1960).
6. See Appathurai, no.4.
7. For details see Nissanka no.4.
8. G.J. Lerski, *Origins of Trotskyism in Ceylon*, (Standford: Hoover Institution, 1968).
9. Nissanka, no.4, pp.91-92.
10. Ibid., p.88.
11. Ibid., p.98.

12. Discussed in subsequent chapters. Also refer Appathurai, no.4, pp. 61-62 and Lucy Jacob, *Sri Lanka : From Dominion to Republic*, (Delhi, National, 1973), pp. 21-57.
13. Nissanka, no.4, p. 88.
14. Cabinet members who were keen on foreign affairs were Felix R. Dias Bandaranaike, Lakshman Jayakody, Colvin R de Silva and N.M. Perera to name a few.
15. Nissanka, no. 4, pp.88-94.
16. Ibid., pp. 344-345.
17. Ibid., p. 104.
18. Ibid., p. 86.
19. For detail see S.U. Kodikara, *Foreign Policy of Sri Lanka : A Third World Perspective*, (Delhi: Chanakya, 1982), pp.8-9.
20. Ibid., p. 10.
21. For example the embassy in Moscow looked after the erstwhile GDR, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary and Rumania and similarly the embassy in Beijing look after Cambodia, North Korea, North Vietnam and Mongolia.
22. Nissanka, no. 4, p. 107.
23. Hansard, H.R. Vol. 44, 1948, col. 145.
24. Nissanka, no.4. He remarks, "A former Prime Minister (at an interview given to the writer) confessed that one weighty point of consideration for appointments to high ambassadorial posts was whether the person in question had an elegant wife who could entertain at high society level," p.89.
25. Nissanka, no. 4, p. 89.
26. Cited by Nissanka, no. 4, pp.107-8.
27. Cited by Appathurai, no.4, p.102.
28. Ibid., pp.151-56.

29. Ibid.
30. Ibid., pp. 17-71.
31. Ibid., pp.178-82.
32. [http: www.govt.com/node/](http://www.govt.com/node/)
33. Appathurai, no. 4, pp. 59-64.
34. Nissanka, no. 4, pp. 88-93.
35. Ibid., no.4, pp.83-84.
36. Ibid.
37. Ibid., pp. 99-100.
38. Kodikara, no. 19, p. 72.
39. Ibid., pp. 126-128.
40. Nissanka, no. 4, p. 101.
41. Ibid., p. 346.
42. Ibid., p. 93.