

DETERMINANTS OF SRI LANKAN FOREIGN POLICY: AN IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS

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Abstract

Foreign policy serves as a vital tool in securing the national interest of a country while determining the nature of inter-state relations among the nations. The foreign policy of Sri Lanka can be analyzed through the number of determinants that vary according to the situation. Thus, the main objective of this paper is to explore the key determinants and challenges of Sri Lankan foreign policy. Secondary sources such as e-books, newspapers, government reports, articles, books, and relevant authorities' websites were mainly used to collect data to address the research problem. Based on the key findings, key determinants of Sri Lankan foreign policy could be divided into two groups: internal and external factors. Most significantly, two-level game theory was utilized in theoretical perspectives to analyze the interconnection of those two determinants in framing Sri Lankan foreign policy. Thus, on the one hand, this paper will contribute to bridging the existing literature gap on determinants of Sri Lankan foreign policy and its challenges. On the other hand, this case study would encourage future researchers to conduct more relevant studies.

Keywords: Challenges, Determinants, External, Internal, Sri Lankan Foreign Policy

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Introduction

"Foreign policy is the hinge of domestic and international politics" (Yitan, 2008).

International relations deal with the interaction of nations (Dura, 2014). Foreign policy plays a key role in shaping a nation's interactions with the global community, reflecting its values, interests, and aspirations in the international system. As the world becomes gradually globalized, interconnected, and interdependent, comprehensive knowledge about the country's foreign policy significantly strengthens international relations. As foreign policy is the most important factor of political development (Khara, 2018), it is only possible to understand inter-state relations by understanding their foreign policies. Thus, the foreign policy of a nation serves as a key tool in securing the national interest of a country while determining the nature of inter-state relations among the countries. According to George Modelski, "Foreign Policy is the system of activities evolved by communities for changing the behavior of other states and adjusting their activities to the international environment..." Thus, with regard to Modelski's ideology on foreign policy, Sri Lankan foreign policy can be studied under two major factors such as external and internal determinants. Accordingly, challenges in Sri Lanka foreign policy can also be explored.

Literature Review

Foreign policy is a course of action and input that a nation makes to influence the behaviour of other states and to pursue its goals of national interest. It helps countries engage politically, socially, economically, and militarily (Khara, 2018). Accordingly, the foreign policy of a country is also an instrument of its 'National Interest' (Wijenayake, 2021). Generally, governments or regimes representing states articulate and coordinate their attitudes and strategies in relation to other states through a comprehensive foreign policy. Thus, as Wijenayake (2021) emphasises, based on the various definitions put forward by eminent scholars, foreign policy is a strategy devised by the government for its actions in the international field. In this manner, the theme of foreign policy has long been a scholarly discourse in international relations, especially in the arena of the components, objectives, and determinants of foreign policy.

Moreover, as cited by (Adamczyk & Baraniuk, 2019; Khara, 2018), there are two criteria of determinants of foreign policy such as objective and subjective and determinants and internal and external determinants. Further, the author explored that it is expected to see the links between internal and external factors in a state regarding the conditions of foreign policy. Thus, in his findings, the author has identified five types of determinants of foreign policy: geographical environment, demographic potential, economic, scientific and technical potential, and military potential.

Similarly, Wanjohi (2011) has specified in his paper three determinants of foreign policies in any given state power, objectives, and leadership. These have both domestic and international influence. Furthermore, in the sight of Rizwan (2009), internal determinants of foreign policy consist of territory, geographical factors, culture and history, economic factors, technology, national capability, social structure, public mood, political party system, leadership, political accountability, bureau of press and bureaucracy. In contrast, the external determinants of foreign policy include international organizations and institutions, perception of other countries, standing at an international level, public opinion at the international level, and groupings.

Problem Statement

According to the literature, distinct types of determinants of foreign policy can be identified under different socio-cultural backdrops. Nevertheless, as there is a shortage of academic studies mainly based

on the kinds of determinants and challenges associated with theoretical perspectives of Sri Lanka, this paper contributes to the existing gap in the literature.

Significance of the research

Studying the determinants of foreign policy is paramount in understanding a country's behavior on the global stage. It offers valuable insights into the motivations and decision-making processes that shape a nation's interactions with other countries. The following can be brought out as the critical points of the significance of studying these determinants:

Indeed, Analyzing the determinants of foreign policy bolsters uncovering a country's strategic objectives and priorities. This knowledge is crucial for predicting a nation's actions and responses in various international scenarios. Furthermore, understanding a country's foreign policy determinants can lead to identifying the root causes of conflict and instability. Accordingly, by addressing those root causes and underlying motivations, policymakers can work toward conflict prevention and resolution.

Studying these determinants provides insights into a country's preferred partners and allies. This knowledge aids diplomats in building effective alliances, fostering cooperation, and negotiating agreements that align with a nation's interests.

Economic factors often play a pivotal role in foreign policy decisions. Examining these determinants helps comprehend the impact of trade, investment, and economic growth on a nation's international engagements. On the other hand, foreign policy determinants shed light on a country's national identity, cultural values, and historical experiences. This understanding is vital for comprehending why certain foreign policy choices are made, even when they might not seem rational from an outside perspective.

In terms of global influence, the determinants of foreign policy assist in studying the impact of a nation's potential to influence global affairs. By assessing a country's strengths and weaknesses, policymakers can strategize how to project their influence effectively. Thus, Foreign policy determinants also play a role in regional dynamics and power struggles. Analysts can better anticipate how a nation's actions might impact its neighbors and regional stability by studying these factors.

Moreover, foreign policy decisions are not entirely pragmatic; they often carry ethical and human rights considerations. Understanding the determinants helps assess a nation's commitment to these principles and its approach to international norms. Most significantly, public sentiment and domestic political relations can influence foreign policy choices significantly. Examining these determinants provides insight into how a government's actions align with its citizens' values and expectations. Also, studying foreign policy determinants over time allows observing shifts in a nation's priorities and strategies. This knowledge is essential for anticipating changes in global dynamics. In conclusion, delving into the determinants of foreign policy provides a comprehensive understanding of a country's motivations, objectives, and behaviors in the international arena. It aids in predicting actions, promoting diplomacy, preventing conflicts, and fostering better cooperation among nations.

Objectives

- The main objective of this paper is to identify the key determinants of Sri Lankan foreign policy.

Specific objectives

- To identify the challenges of Sri Lankan foreign policy

- To make aware the policymakers of the country on the significance of identifying the determinants of Sri Lankan foreign policy.

Theoretical Framework

The "Two-Level Game" can be utilized to underscore the interconnectedness of internal and international realms in shaping the decisions of foreign policy. The "Two-Level Game" is a theoretical framework in international relations and political science that Robert Putnam introduced in the 1980s. This framework explains how political leaders navigate and make decisions by simultaneously considering domestic and international factors. Putnam's metaphorical analogy likens the decision-making process to a game played on two levels: the domestic level (Level I) and the international level (Level II)

Research Methods

This study is qualitative research based on the Foreign Policy of Sri Lanka, the secondary data was gathered from e-books, Newspapers, government reports, articles, books, and websites of relevant authorities that were used to develop the paper. The implementation of this research was conducted using the descriptive analysis method.

Discussions

Based on the findings, determinants of Sri Lanka's foreign policy can be mainly categorized as internal and external factors. Thus, geopolitical conditions, historical and cultural values, national capacity, public opinions, national interest, and the social and political structure can be identified as the primary internal determiners, while world organization, world public opinion, and foreign policies of other states and holds a significant impact on Sri Lankan foreign policy as external determinants.

Geopolitical features of the country play a vital role as a determinant that influences a nation's foreign policy. The Geopolitics of Sri Lanka refers to the country's strategic location, size, population, topography, climate, natural resources, etc. A country's size can be defined as the entire landmass occupied by the state. According to the literature, it directly affects the psychological and the orientational backdrop of the policymakers and the public response. Moreover, the geostrategic location of the state, compared to the other land masses, plays a vital role during foreign policy formulation, other than the size or population of a state. Paying attention to a state's climatic conditions is also essential to determine the state's foreign policy. On the other hand, topographical features such as rainfall, temperature, types of soil, and the presence of mountains, rivers, valleys, etc., also have similar implications on foreign policy decisions. Most significantly, as with geopolitical conditions, a state's natural resources also affect foreign policy decisions.

Thus, being a small nation of approximately twenty-one million, Sri Lanka's strategic geographic location in the Indian Ocean has occupied an immense role in shaping its foreign policy decisions and interactions with the international system. "Positioned at the crossroads of major maritime routes connecting the East with the West, Sri Lanka's geopolitical significance as a maritime hub has profound implications for its foreign policy. Sri Lanka is in a desirable location. The busiest east-west shipping route is only 6 to 10 nautical miles from the island of Sri Lanka. Every year, over 60,000 ships, 2/3 of the world's oil, and 50% of all containers pass through this route.

Along with Sri Lanka, India's market is also gaining momentum." (Area Studies South Asia,2017). In the words of Ramkishan et al. (2021), Sri Lanka is like a beacon of unique significance in the world's sea lines of communication. Crude oil, which travels from the Arab world to almost all countries by

sea, passes through the seas of Sri Lanka. Moreover, "apart from gemstones, Sri Lanka has a wealth of other minerals such as graphite, calcite, and limestone. The graphite obtained from Sri Lankan mines is highly valued worldwide due to its high quality" (World Atlas, n.d). Therefore, as aforementioned, it is visible that the geopolitical value of Sri Lanka has an incredibly significant contribution to formulating foreign policy.

Secondly, the history of a nation also has a crucial influence on its foreign policymaking. Indeed, the political tradition of a country originated based on its historical and cultural values. The primary foreign policy objectives are significantly driven by the historical and cultural traditions of the state. Also, in external relations, a nation follows an action highly influenced by the tradition and culture the nation has adopted since the past. Thus, based on the influence of Buddhism in Sri Lankan history, Sri Lanka has adopted the non-alignment policy that flourished with the principles of Panchsheel. Most significantly, Buddhism has had a significant effect in shaping Sinhalese culture, literature, and identity. Similarly, it influenced the former prime minister S.W.R.D Bandaranayake (1956-1959) to pursue the middle path policy in his governance tenure. Furthermore, the popular speech by former President J.R Jayawardene on behalf of the freedom of Japan in 1951 at San Francisco peace treaty also indicates the significance of cultural values for the formation of foreign policy.

The San Francisco Peace Treaty was signed in September 1951, and Japan was reintroduced into the international community after World War II. Even though several countries argued for stringent conditions and sanctions against Japan for its involvement in the war, the delegation from Ceylon, led by the then Finance Minister J.R. Jayewardene, stood for Japan's independence and rejected war reparations.

"While stressing peace, nonviolence and compassion and referring to the Buddha's teachings in the Dhammapada, Jayewardene stated, "We do not intend to seek reparations (for damages caused to cultivations in Ceylon during WWII) for we believe in the words of the Great Teacher whose message has ennobled the lives of countless millions in Asia, that hatred ceases not by hatred but by love" (Somaratna, 2021).

National capacity is another strong internal determinant of a nation's foreign policy. It combines the nation's military strength, economic development, and technological progress. The economic status of a nation in terms of gross net product (GNP) enables a nation to understand its potential to utilize its own natural and human resources and strengthens a country in its choice of foreign policy.

Sri Lanka's military capacity, composed of its armed forces and defense capabilities, is crucial in compiling its foreign policy decisions. A strong military presence contributes to peacekeeping attempts and stability in the Indian Ocean region. Given Sri Lanka's past experiences with terrorism, its foreign policy considerations are often embedded with national strategies to cooperate with international partners in counterterrorism initiatives. On the other hand, Sri Lanka's GNP influences its capacity to negotiate mutually beneficial agreements with other major powers like China and the United States. Similarly, technological capabilities such as advancements in sectors like IT can enhance Sri Lanka's image and influence the global stage.

Public opinion is another important internal factor that is not possible for the government of a state to ignore or discard for long. As a constitutionally enshrined democratic state, the Sri Lankan government cannot dare ignore the importance of public opinion in domestic and foreign policies. Due to the robust growth of information technology, mass media, the internet, and telecommunications, public opinion has occupied an immense significance in the world. In the case of foreign policy, public opinion sets

limitations on policy choices and constraints in policy executions, too. The MCC (Millennium Challenge Corporation) agreement in Sri Lanka in 2019 illustrates how public opinion of Sri Lankans can influence foreign policy. The MCC is a U.S. government agency that provides development assistance to countries that meet specific criteria related to governance, economic freedom, and investment in people. But, in the case of the MCC agreement in Sri Lanka, public opposition, fueled by concerns about sovereignty and national interests, played a significant role in the government's decision-making process. The strong public sentiment against the agreement led to political pressure, and eventually, the government decided to reassess and withdraw the agreement's signing.

Moreover, the strength of a country's foreign policy depends more on the nature of the political system and the ruling elite. For example, "according to the regime change, the national interest of a state change, and changing a state's leader would also directly impact its national interest. In contrast, it is the leader's responsibility to change the national interest according to the situation in the country" (Baskaran, 2021, as cited in Wijenayake, 2021). "From 1948 to 1956, under the UNP government, leaders followed pro-western policies and were reluctant to establish a relationship with communist countries... SLFP government differs from the UNP government, though country policies should not change according to the changing regime. The SLFP government gained much international recognition due to the induction of non-alignment policy" (Wijenayake, 2021).

Similarly, political structure and social factors are equally crucial for formulating foreign policy. A peaceful, strong society provides for a stronger foreign policy than a society established with political instability. Thus, cooperation is also essential in shaping the foreign policy of a state.

Another major determining factor of foreign policy is the attitude of the decision-makers and policymakers. Foreign policy is based significantly on leadership qualities as it determines the strength and direction of a state's foreign policy. Foreign policy is strongly related to the personality and predisposition of the leaders. In the formulation of foreign policy, the ruling elite and the decision-makers play a key role, acting in accordance with their perception of reality. Policymakers note the relevant values and sectors of the environment and determine the objectives of foreign policy. The decision-makers interpret the national interest and perceive the external environment while formulating foreign policy. The impact of the views and personalities of the ruling elites on foreign policy formulation is quite natural. Foreign policy is, however, not only the output of the role plays of politicians but also the interplay of other various determinants and bureaucracy. Most significantly, national interest is the key determining factor of Sri Lankan foreign policy, the same as any state. In this manner, the behavior of states in the international field is guided by national interest to a great extent.

Like the internal determinants, the external environment also holds significant implications when compiling a state's foreign policy. International laws, treaties, agreements, pacts, and global and regional organizations influence states' foreign policies considerably. External factors such as world organization, world public opinion, and foreign policies of other states, which help maintain world peace and order and International Law, profoundly influence the foreign policy formulation of states. Thus, those external powers profoundly impact various issues such as human rights, environment, war, peace, etc. No nation can dare to go against the world's public opinion or challenge it. For example, during the UN session on war crimes in Sri Lanka, the Sri Lankan government had to encounter much pressure from the international community, abending or isolating in international forums such as the UN Human Rights Assembly. Thus, "Sri Lanka's foreign policy is based on 'friendship with all and enmity toward none,' Hence, its area of influence goes beyond her territorial and is further amplified by the country's geographic location" (Wijenayake, 2021).

Challenges of Sri Lanka's foreign policy

Sri Lanka encounters several challenges in its foreign policy due to internal and external factors. These challenges can impact the country's potential to achieve national interests and maintain close international relationships with global platforms.

Based on the key findings, the longstanding ethnic and political divisions between the Sinhalese majority and the Tamil minority have caused the failure of certain political leaders' foreign policy of the country. Thus, as a small nation in the region, ensuring regional stability and preventing external interference in these sensitive issues can be challenging in compiling Sri Lanka's foreign policy.

Similarly, the influence of external powers also plays a key challenge in Sri Lanka's foreign policy. For example, Sri Lanka's human rights record, particularly regarding the aftermath of the civil war and allegations of war crimes, has led to international criticism. Addressing these concerns while maintaining sovereignty is a visible challenge. Furthermore, managing and balancing power among the geopolitical dynamics without compromising national interests is a real challenge. Similarly, regarding maritime security, the Indian Ocean's growing importance in global trade and security places Sri Lanka in a region prone to naval disputes and security challenges. Safeguarding its maritime borders while maintaining regional cooperation is complex.

Moreover, Climate change and environmental issues, such as rising sea levels, can significantly impact Sri Lanka's coastal areas and economy. Navigating international agreements and partnerships to address these challenges is essential. In the economic aspect, promoting economic development and trade relations while addressing disparities between different regions remains a challenge. Ensuring that economic policies benefit all citizens is crucial.

Most significantly, beyond the countries' victory against the civil war against LTTE terrorists (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) in 2009, the risk of radicalization and terrorist threats remains in terms of national security. Therefore, coordinating and addressing counterterrorism efforts at the international level is vital.

On one hand, public sentiment and domestic political considerations can influence foreign policy decisions. Balancing public expectations with long-term national interests is a challenge. On the other hand, adapting to evolving international norms, particularly in areas such as human rights and environmental protection, while maintaining the country's identity and values can be complex. Thus, Sri Lanka's foreign policy challenges require a careful and nuanced approach considering domestic and international factors. Striking a balance between maintaining sovereignty, promoting economic development, safeguarding security, and engaging in productive international relationships is essential for addressing these challenges effectively.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the internal and external determinants of Sri Lanka's foreign policy intricately weave together a complex tapestry of strategic geopolitical considerations, historical legacies, economic imperatives, and global aspirations. Most significantly, the nation's strategic location in the Indian Ocean has propelled it into a pivotal role in regional and global dynamics, compelling Sri Lanka to maintain a delicate balance between significant powers while securing its sovereignty and identity. Thus, it indicates that the interplay between historical affiliations, regional security concerns, economic priorities, and diplomatic objectives forms the foundation upon which Sri Lanka formulates its foreign policy decisions.

However, those determinants are not immune to challenges, often impeding Sri Lanka's pursuit of its foreign policy objectives. The country's history of ethnic and political divisions poses a continuous challenge, necessitating careful diplomatic maneuvers to promote reconciliation while upholding national unity. The rise of geopolitical competition, environmental threats, economic crisis, and terrorism risks further evaluate the nation's diplomatic resilience.

Overcoming these challenges requires smart leadership, visionary policymaking, and a prudent understanding of global trends. Sri Lanka's foreign policy landscape has intricate complexities and ever-evolving dynamics, demanding proactive engagement, thoughtful adaptation, and a commitment to safeguarding national interests. By addressing these challenges and leveraging its determinants effectively, Sri Lanka would steer up its foreign policy toward a path of stability, cooperation, and sustainable growth on the international stage.

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