

ELITES' INTERACTION: A CONCEPTUAL POLICY FRAMEWORK

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In the contemporary sense, the world today is attributed to a “global system”; and the galaxies of states, being a part of the whole, are politically organized state systems identified by their individuality and self-aspirations. As a political system, each state is comprised of objects specifically designed and systematically interlinked. Their role-orientations are authoritatively laid down in the constitutional law of the state in order to assign them a legitimately disciplined pattern of interaction both inwardly within the state’s territorial orbit and outwardly with other states in the world at large¹.

Inward interaction of state-objects presents a domestic infra-structure composed predominantly of the political elites and their institutions, e.g., the legislature, the executive, the political parties, the media and the vocal public having assertive opinion-making capability. Besides them, there is also a large segment of non-political elites and their institutions, such as the civil and military bureaucracies and the economic elites, involved on most of their part as pressure groups in the state’s day-to-day functioning. Whereas the outwardly ultra-structure interaction is between two or more states when, in pursuance of their respective self-interests, they give response to one another favorably or otherwise².

From this standard, state is a *National Actor* on the world forum. It acts through its functionaries made of elites-in-government

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¹ G.A. Almond, in, H.V. Wiseman, *Political System: Some Sociological Approaches*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966), p. 24

² See, G.A. Almond, quoted in, *ibid.*, pp. 23-24. For Infra-Ultra Structures, see, G.A. Almond and G.B. Powell, *Comparative Politics: A Developmental Approach*, (Boston: Little Brown & Co., 1966), pp. 25-27

and elites-in-opposition³, interacting mutually as centripetal and centrifugal forces on the conceptual fulcrum of policy-making. They exchange responses and give feedback both in the domestic and foreign policy-making jurisdictions. Since a viable contemporary political system runs by democratic mass participation, the idealistically inherent objective, jointly of both the competing elites of government and opposition, should by all means be to give adequate and positive response in favor of the vital national interests expressed in public opinion⁴. (The difference however is of democratization and attitudes presented in contrast by the highly developed and developing state systems.)

In other words, in this age of science-technology and industrialization, states are no more isolated sovereign entities as they used to be in the past when they were ruled by autocrats with unlimited powers to keep the masses suppressed and subjugated. The states of today, in contrast, are democratically enlightened and public representative. Mostly on that account, the states in their mutual interplay keep their self-vital interests on the top of their preferences while working on the crucial questions of “what to do, when to do and how to persuade and coerce other national actors” who are equally sovereign and do possess a legitimate authority to insist on their own vital interests.

In states’ mutual interaction, therefore, national interests are aggregated into demands. They are people’s aspirations and can be attributed to their national outlook about foreign policy objectives. In normal practice, sovereign state ‘A’ making demand is on the input end. It communicates through its elites at the helm with the sovereign state ‘B’ on the output end. However, a conflict may arise in the process of amicable solution when two self-interests do not coincide or cannot be synthesized.

³ See for example: Actors and Environments, in, Andrew M. Scott, *The Functioning of International Political Systems*, (N.Y.: Macmillan, 1967), pp. 37-46; and, International Actors, in, Abdul Aziz Saeed, Charles O. Lerche, *Concepts of International Politics in Global Perspective*, (N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1969), pp. 110-112

⁴ This Observation is based on the concept of Political System, in G. A. Almond and G. B. Powell, *op.cit.*, pp. 25-27

In order to comprehend this mode of inter-state responses, one needs to concentrate more on the concept of *Interests* in foreign policy. In a broader perspective, there are in the main two variable modalities of *National Interests* and *State Interests*. They all synthesize from the public opinion, and so carry popular consensus. Yet, out of the two, the most strategic and of utmost importance are the state-related vital interests. They get priority over the general public sentiments when the elites at the helm deal with the most crucial issues of state survival⁵.

Viewed as such, national interests are *subjective* (or value-oriented) found in the infra-structure of public opinion; and the state interests are *objective* (or goal-oriented) designed and formulated in policies by the governmental agencies responding to the public opinion. Hence, states in their foreign policy toss between the values and the goals which can be attributed to a pull between idealism of the people and realism of the bitter realities in the given situation. Literally, idealism is indigenous, representing public whims and sentiments. It stems from the grass-root and aggregates into value-based demands supported by the agencies like political parties. From this standpoint, popular demands are the initial stress upon the policy-maker as they are in the main synthesized public aspirations⁶.

Whereas state interests, though not apart from national interests, are precisely either vital or secondary in classifications. Leaving aside the secondary interests, such as inter-state trade and immigration which are rather more conveniently negotiated through the diplomatic channels, the vital state interests are essentially of utmost significance and thus demand a rational policy-making. It is assumed that all states do have apparently identical self-interest of defense, for instance, but no two states share this interest (not even

⁵ See: Thomas W. Robinson, "National Interest", in , J.N.Rosenau, (ed.), *International Politics and Foreign Policy: A Study in Research Theory*, (New York: Free Press, 1969), pp.182-190; "Constraints on Foreign Policy", in, Parkash Chander and Prem Arora, *International Relations*, (New Delhi: Bookhives, 1995), pp. 35-48; and, Fredric S. Pearson and J. Martin Rochester, *International Relations*, (New York: McGraw Hill Co., 1998), pp. 177-214

⁶ *Ibid.*

in treaty-making) because it is fundamentally and strategically related to a state's self-survival; nor can it be bargained out, surrendered or negotiated⁷. This rigidity of vital state interests enables the policy-maker to draw a line of distinction between national interests and state interests.

To illustrate, we take the elites in-government and in-opposition as the two main parliamentary groups taking care of all sorts of public interests. The elite-in-power (specifically the president or the prime minister) is the real national actor holding sublime responsibilities of designing and accomplishing the state policies. The interests when aggregated are the demands to be converted into policy designs by the legislators --- the activity known as conversion process. Usually this conversion takes place when there is a hot exchange of discussion and criticism between the elite-groups in government and in opposition⁸.

In this elites' interaction for and against a policy issue, the chief policy-maker at the helm plays multiple roles as per the issue at stake. He inevitably confronts two adverse environments⁹: a) domestically, his own people, who representing national interests insert input-pressure mainly through the elites-in-opposition; and b) externally, the world at large and especially the sovereign state (or states) with which the issue is confronted. Not surprisingly, both these environments, domestic and foreign, are seldom consistently favorable. The reason quite often is the divergences of interests and lack of consensus. The policy-maker, though legitimately installed to power as a symbol of state sovereignty, is vulnerably exposed both to the indigenous demand-makers as well as to the external world pressure (or even rebuttals) because of counter-interests of

⁷ See for example, Khalid Javed Makhdoom, "The Fulcrum of Foreign Policy-Making", in *Strategic Studies*, Vol.II, no, 4, (Summer 1979), pp.13-16

⁸ "National Actor & Decision Making" in Andrew M. Scott, in *The Functioning of International Political System*, (New York: MacMillan, 1967), pp. 80-102. For International Actors, see, Abdul Aziz Saeed, Charles O. Lerche & Charles O. Lerche II, *Concept of International Politics in Global Perspective*, (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1969), pp.110-112

⁹ See, Actors and Environment, in , Andrew M.Scott, *Ibid.*, pp. 37-46

the alien sovereign states¹⁰. Consequently, in the wake of adverse feedback, both at home and abroad, the policy-maker quite often tends to be rigidly pragmatic and demonstrates self-calculations based mostly upon his own perceptions about the events influencing his policy endeavors (“*Pragmatic-Bargaining Approach*”)¹¹.

Hence, in the case of developed or developing state alike, the policy-maker (though representing a sovereign state) is not as much independent in his policy pursuits as he appears to be. In response to the adverse environmental pressures, he plays a tactical game by employing his own maneuvering capabilities. His purpose might not be to escape adversaries, but indeed to steer his way out of the complexities rather more honorable and by making scores to his advantage in the political game of pay-off matrix¹². He, thus, by virtue of his tactics, is identified as a strategist, whose policies are the “action-framework” and methodologies are provided by a variety of options open for his “priority-fixation”¹³.

However, the gauge to measure the capability of a policy-maker of being a strategist is provided by at least three variables of modern age leadership: a) legitimacy of the policy-maker in terms of authority and political ascendancy; b) the image he projects; and, c) the quantum of positive response he receives from the given environments both at home and abroad¹⁴.

¹⁰ A variable rigidity in the Policy-maker’s calculated attitude vis-à-vis Perception, Robert Jervis, in J.N. Rosenau, *op cit.*, pp. 239-254; and about Strategies of Inquiry and Decision-Making, Robert A. Dhal, *Modern Political Analysis*, (N.J.: Prentice Hall Inc., 1991), pp.136-143

¹¹ Robert Jervis, in, *Ibid.*; and Almond & Powell, *op. cit.*, pp. 100-104 and 108-109. Feedback devotes a “communication network that produces action in the new information by which it modifies its subsequent behavior” , David Easton, quoted in , G.A. Almond & G.B. Powell, *Comparative Politics: System Process and policy*, (Boston: Little Brown & Co. , 1987), pp. 354-355

¹² See for instance, Robert Jervis, *op cit.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Almond & Powell, 1987, *op cit.*, pp. 30-32

In the norms of Western democracy, in particular, the legitimacy of the policy-maker can be more conveniently measured on the scale of popular consensus. He, in the whole process of state action, is assisted by a wide range of political and non-political elite groups including, in the first place, his democratically elected cabinet and the legislature. Beyond that, he also seeks coordination with a much larger number of non-political pressure groups like the top ranking civil-military bureaucracies and the economic elites. These influential non-political groups do have their own stakes in state politics, for which they may assert pressure even contrary to the official stand of the policy-maker. He, thus, is not a solitary figure pursuing policy matters all alone. He is rather assisted in consultation and resisted in opposition to work out a synthesized and amicable policy framework within his own sphere of action.

However, another discernible aspect is that when we look at the domestic and external pressures together, the adversities in responses may again lead the policy-maker to adopt flexibility (rather than rigidity) about interests, events and sublime goal objectives. In this posture, the policy-maker claims his self-perception as in consonance with the overall general perception projected in the public opinion, and may attempt to synchronize the general perception and his self-perception by adopting *cost-risk calculations*.

Whereas the policy-maker of an authoritarian (non-democratic) state in the Third World, in contrast, preferably confines himself in a relatively 'close' environment. His policy design may invariably be a '*one-man's show*'¹⁵--- devoid of accurate predictions and extensive consultations --- lacking in public support and thus worth disapproval by the other elites at home and abroad.

Viewed from this angle, the image of policy-maker is determined by his stature as well as his responses in the given environments. If he has a strong charismatic personality, both physical and mental, as is often the case in authoritarian systems, he may appear to be dominating by dint of his overall appearances. But if he allows coordination tactfully to win support of others in a

¹⁵ See the explanation in, Robert Jervis, *op. cit.*, pp. 239-241

democratic way, the image he projects will be enlightened. He, on account of his sincere efforts and acknowledgements, will come out to be more *domineering* than *dominating* – which is an essential attribute of the modern age civilized leadership¹⁶.

Therefore, it is more suggestible that, when he acts, the policy-maker must try to predict how others will react. An adverse and spontaneous reaction can damage his policy. To escape such an adversary, he should forecast the image of others and their perceivable intentions in a most accurate manner. But if he adopts a rigidly adamant attitude, taking for granted that others' disagreement would not block his way, he might then get his own image distorted¹⁷.

However, the remedy for eradication of this negative tendency in policy-making process is essentially provided by the modern age complex *signals* the policy-maker transmits, receives and interprets¹⁸. Signaling as a mechanism determines the images of both the policy-maker himself as well as of the reactionaries in opposition. Likewise, specifically in the case of two sovereign states contesting divergent self-interests in competition, international signaling can make or distort their images. Not surprisingly, therefore, signaling may either be accurate or inaccurate, presenting a syndrome of perceptions and misperceptions in international relations. This role, in the main, is performed by the most scientifically developed and outstanding electronic media which ascertains world public opinion about the state policies and their implications¹⁹. The elite image is, thus, the spontaneous picture which we receive in the given situation; whereas the elite perception is the net-total of all the images of the past and the present indebted to the complex signals which flow to and from the environments²⁰.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Andrew M. Scott, *op. cit.*

¹⁹ Robert Jervis *op.cit.*, for mass media and elite-image, Almond & Powell, 1966 *op.cit.*, pp.164-176

²⁰ Andrew M. Scott, *op. cit.*,

Similarly, unlike the developed polities, where communication channels are scientifically advanced and more accurate, in the developing states, on the contrary, the signaling process is much less mature and stratified. Consequently, in such states of the Third World, the image formation is relatively persuasive or blurred --- presenting the competing elites, both in government and opposition, as authoritarian and stubborn. The governments in such cases do not appear to be adequately public representative, a factor which increases the gap of “us” and “they” between the demand-makers and the policy-makers to a high magnitude²¹.

In other words, a positive image can be allowed to groom if the policy-maker perceives the incoming demand-stress more rationally and analytically. Otherwise the same image will be distorted to depict him as traditionally too wedded to the established norms and too “closed” or non-responsive to the new information circulating in the changed environment²².

Accuracy of the elite image is, therefore, of utmost importance. If the signaling through the communication system is weak, as is the case quite often with the developing states, the same image received or transmitted by the policy-maker may not be real but imaginary, superfluous or short-lived. He should not be on that account identified as a charismatic leader, because his image may be based on his own self-perception authoritatively launched through a propaganda campaign for his political exaltation²³. This is a factor which cannot just distort his political personality but even make his endeavors non-productive in terms of policy outcome. He for such apprehensions, should indeed not be a passive recipient of the

²¹ *Ibid.* and also, p. 51. For a general study of the policy makers and the identity, J.N.Rosenau, *National Leadership and Foreign Policy: A Case Study in Mobilization of Public Support*, (New York: Princeton University Press, 1963), chapter I, pp. 3-41

²² If the policy maker avoids new information, he is “closed” to the environment, Robert Jervis, *op. cit.*, pp. 239-254

²³ *Ibid.*

signals, rather a vigilant participant who acts positively before the others react in the given arena of interaction²⁴.

Likewise, it is also witnessed in such odd environments that the images and realities may not necessarily coincide. Adjudged in this perspective, a gap between the existing image and the spontaneous change of course in events may also pose a serious challenge. It may require a re-focusing of the image the policy-maker receives or transmits. This contention gains strength when we assume that images, signals and corresponding events are co-related and thus integrated in an “image system”²⁵. If there is a gap (or clash) between the image and the event, it may force the policy-maker to change or re-adjust the image already perceived.

This kind of gap quite often comes up in both the domestic and foreign policy frameworks of many developing polities, in particular. An inconsistency in a policy design, or inaccuracy of the desired strategic move, provides the policy-maker the options either to yield to demand-stress of the unpredicted adversity or to adjudge a revised self-perception nearer to the bitter reality. In the capacity of a capable strategist, the policy-maker in such a situation is supposed to maneuver out alternate priorities. Instead of yielding to the changed environmental pressures, he will be bold enough to overcome the crucial challenges of ‘what to do and what not to do’ in his new priority-fixation. However, in this maneuvering, he should neither deviate from his vital national interests nor let others damage his self-image²⁶.

An illustration of this aspect becomes more evident when we look into the concepts of “state-power” and “geo-strategic compulsions”. We noted elsewhere that, because of rigidity in vital state interests, the policy-maker can play the tactics of priority-fixation from the options available in a given situation. In the same context it is equally discernible to note that states acquire power not necessarily to aggress but essentially to ensure sustainable self-

²⁴ See, *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*, and Kenneth E. Boulding, “National Image and Political System”, J. N. Rosenau, 1969, *op. cit.*, pp. 422-431

²⁶ Robert Jervis, *op. cit.*

survival²⁷. This is more evident especially in the case of the developing states of post-1945 period which, on account of their meager indigenous resources and capabilities, depended much on the great powers in the Cold War scenario. Hence, specifically in the modern age of competition and development, acquisition of power is nevertheless inevitable, particularly for the weaker states. For them, the option was either to seek weapons from the great powers for self-defense preferably through the military alliances (e.g.: Pakistan in 1954), or to adopt non-alignment and self-reliance (e.g.: Pakistan in 1979)²⁸.

However, the concept of 'power' relates to the strength or capacity a sovereign state either attains or boastfully claims to have attained to achieve its vital policy goals in a specific span of time. Leaving the sources of state-power which include geographical / demographic and economic potentials as well, more noteworthy point here is that in their normal practice states do not employ their material power on all occasions and with full quantum of force. Rather, their policy-makers, in an endeavor to work out a synthesis of idealism of public opinion and rationalism of state interests, quite often give priority to a number of peaceful methodologies, like: modes of negotiated settlement through diplomatic channels; bilateral or multilateral treaties; or relatively more harsh persuasions, such as: arms displays and offensive propaganda including threat of war²⁹.

⁷ K.J. Holsti, *International Politics: A Framework for Analysis*, (New Delhi: Prentice-Hall of India, 1992). Chapter V on: "Foreign Policy Actions: Power, Capabilities and Influence", pp. 116-131; see in addition, Karl W. Deutsch, *The Analysis of International Relations*, (New Delhi: Prentice-Hall of India, 1989). Chapter on: "State Power Concept".

²⁸For Pakistan's Priority-Fixation, see for example, Manzoor Ahmad and Khalida Ghaus, (eds.), *Pakistan: Prospects and Perspectives*, (Karachi: Royal Book Co., 1999). Chapter on: "50 Years of Pakistan's Defence".

²⁹ See, Andrew Scott, *op. cit.*

Actual war, therefore, may be the last option in the policy-fixation of a rational policy-maker of today, and even that strictly suggestible in self-defense under the UN Charter. In other words, the use of state-power is relative to the urgency in strategic policy-making. On that account, the policy-maker will distinguish between the “conscious” and “unconscious” application of state-power. To him, conscious application of power would denote actual war, whereas unconscious application would stand for tactical *pressure-game*. Hence, the contention of state-power is not solely associated with the military power alone. States, while accumulating their arsenals especially nuclear, design tactical defense policies based on methodologies either to deter or supersede their potential rivals in self-interest³⁰.

To conclude, what we can infer from the foregoing is that policy-making in a contemporary state is a complex phenomenon. It is not a static activity but indeed a variable action-framework designed in the given adverse environmental pressures and in response to the up-coming demand-stress. It can also be equated with a see-saw interaction of competing elites on a conceptual fulcrum. The one end of the fulcrum is held fast by the policy-maker who leads the elite group in government (the output-end) and in foreign policy gives priority to a *rational approach* in favor of the state’s vital and strategic interests. Whereas, the other end of the conceptual fulcrum is occupied by the elites-in-opposition (the input-end) who, claiming mass popular support, counter-act the governmental policies by adopting rather a more *idealistic approach* in favor of popular sentimentalism³¹.

Viewed as such, policy-making is a tactical game between two elite groups in government and opposition. Each group supporting the perceptions of rationalism and idealism, respectively, do attempt to prevail in politics by capturing and retaining political power in the government echelons³². This is more perceivable in

³⁰ “Military and Economic Resources as Bargaining Tools”, in, Fredric S. Pearson and J. Martin Rochester, *op. cit.*, pp. 277-282

³¹ Andrew M. Scott, *op. cit.*, p. 55

³² For a discussion on Rationalism and Idealism in Policy Making, see, for example, Khalid Javed Makhdoom, *op. cit.*

democracies of the present age, where policy formulation is subject to popular mandate. Likewise, the projection of the stakes of these competing elites depends to a great degree on the geo-strategic environments as well as on the mass media signaling messages both domestically and worldwide. A highly developed media, therefore, plays the role of a catalyst, synchronizing elite-images on one side and enabling the policy-maker on the other to synthesize priorities in the light of the state capabilities and elites' competitive interaction. This pragmatic-bargaining approach of a strategist in decision finalization is known as "policy-maximization"³³.

³³ Andrew M. Scott, *op. cit.*, p. 51

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