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Lecture-5



LECTURE 5 NATIONAL INTEREST

National Interest' is a key concept in International Relations. All the nations are always engaged in the process of fulfilling or securing the goals of their national interests. The foreign policy of each nation is formulated on the basis of its national interest and it is always at work for securing its goals. It is a universally accepted right of each state to secure its national interests. A state always tries to justify its actions on the basis of its national interest. The behaviour of a state is always conditioned and governed by its national interests. Hence it is essential for us to know the meaning and content of National Interest.

"The meaning of national interest is survival—the protection of physical, political and cultural identity against encroachments by other nation-states"—Morgenthau.

Meaning of National Interest

National Interest is a vague and ambiguous term that carries a meaning according to the context in which it is used. Statesmen and policy-makers have always used it in ways suitable to them and to their objective of justifying the actions of their states. Hitler justified expansionist policies in the name of "German national interests."

The US presidents have always justified their decisions to go in for the development of more and more destructive weapons in the interest of "US national interest." To build up a strong nuclear base at Diego Garcia was justified by the USA in the name of meeting the challenge posed by erstwhile USSR as well as for protecting the US interests in the Indian Ocean. During 1979-89, (erstwhile) USSR justified its intervention in Afghanistan in the name of "Soviet national interests".

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China justified its border disputes with India and the Soviet Union in the name of attempts to secure the national interests of China. Now the P-5 countries talk of Non-proliferation and arms control in terms of the national interests of all the nations. All these and many more examples can be quoted to stress the ambiguity that surrounds the concept of National Interest. This ambiguity hinders the process of formulating a universally accepted definition of National Interest. However, several scholars have tried to define National Interest.

Definition of National Interest:

(1) National Interest means: "The general, long term and continuing purpose which the state, the nation, and the government all see themselves as serving." —Charles Lerche and Abdul

(2) National Interest is: "What a nation feels to be necessary to its security and well being ... National interest reflects the general and continuing ends for which a nation acts." —Brookings Institution

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(3) "National Interest is, that which states seek to protect or achieve in relation to each other. It means desires on the part of sovereign states." —Vernon Von Dyke

(4) "The meaning of national interest is survival—the protection of physical, political and cultural identity against encroachments by other nation-states". —Morgenthau

(5) National Interest means: "The values, desires and interests which states seek to protect or achieve in relation to each other" "desires on the part of sovereign states". —

V.V. Dyke

National Interests can as defined as the claims, objectives, goals, demands and interests which a nation always tries to preserve, protect, defend and secure in relations with other nations.

Components of National Interest:

In describing the national interests that nations seek to secure a two-fold classification is generally made:

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(A) Necessary or Vital Components of National Interest and

(B) Variable or Non-vital Components of National Interests.

(A) Necessary or Vital Components:

According to Morgenthau, the vital components of the national interests that a foreign policy seeks to secure are survival or identity. He sub-divides identity into three parts: Physical identity. Political identity and Cultural identity.

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Physical identity includes territorial identity. Political identity means politico- economic system and Cultural identity stands for historical values that are upheld by a nation as part of its cultural heritage. These are called vital components because these are essential for the survival of the nation and can be easily identified and examined. A nation even decides to go to war for securing or protecting her vital interests.

A nation always formulates its foreign policy decisions with a view to secure and strengthens its security. The attempts to secure international peace and security, that nations are currently making, are being made because today the security of each state stands inseparably linked up with international peace and security. Security is, thus, a vital component of national interest. Each nation always tries to secure its vital interests even by means of war.

(B) Non-vital or Variable Components of National Interest:

The non-vital components are those parts of national interest which are determined either by circumstances or by the necessity of securing the vital components. These are determined by a host of factors—the decision-makers, public opinion, party politics, sectional or group interests and political and moral folkways.

“These variable interests are those desires of individual states which they would, no doubt, like to see fulfilled but for which they will not go to war. Whereas the vital interests may be taken as goals, the secondary interests may be termed as objectives of foreign policy.”

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These objectives have been listed by V.V. Dyke and his list includes: Prosperity, Peace, Ideology, Justice, Prestige, Aggrandisement and Power. Though each state defines these objectives in a manner which suits its interests in changing circumstances, yet these objectives can be described as common to almost all states. Thus, national interest which a nation seeks to secure can be generally categorized into these two parts.

Classification of National Interests:

In order to be more precise in examining the interest which a nation seeks to secure, Thomas W. Robinson presents a six fold classification of interests which nations try to secure.

1. The Primary Interests:

These are those interests in respect of which no nation can compromise. It includes the preservation of physical, political and cultural identity against possible encroachments by other states. A state has to defend these at all costs.

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2. Secondary Interests:

These are less important than the primary interests. Secondary Interests are quite vital for the existence of the state. This includes the protection of the citizens abroad and ensuring of diplomatic immunities for the diplomatic staff.

3. Permanent Interests:

These refer to the relatively constant long-term interests of the state. These are subject to very slow changes. The US interest to preserve its spheres of influence and to maintain freedom of navigation in all the oceans is the examples of such interests.

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4. Variable Interests:

Such interests are those interests of a nation which are considered vital for national good in a given set of circumstances. In this sense these can diverge from both primary and permanent interests. The variable interests are largely determined by “the cross currents of personalities, public opinion, sectional interests, partisan politics and political and moral folkways.”

5. The General Interests:

General interests of a nation refer to those positive conditions which apply to a large number of nations or in several specified fields such as economic, trade, diplomatic relations etc. To maintain international peace is a general interest of all the nations. Similar is the case of disarmament and arms control.

6. Specific Interests:

These are the logical outgrowths of the general interests and these are defined in terms of time and space. To secure the economic rights of the Third World countries through the securing of a New International Economic Order is a specific interest of India and other developing countries.

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International Interests:

Besides these six categories of national interest, T.W. Robinson also refers to three international interests—identical interests, complementary interests and conflicting interests.

The first category includes those interests which are common to a large number of states; the second category refers to those interests, which though not identical, can form the basis of agreement on some specific issues; and the third category includes those interests which are neither complementary nor identical.

However, this classification is neither absolute nor complete. The complementary interests can, with the passage of time, become identical interests and conflicting interests can become complementary interests. The study of national interest of a nation involves an examination of all these vital and non-vital components of national interest. The six fold classificatory scheme offered by T. W. Robinson can be of great help to us for analyzing the national interests of all nations. Such a study can help us to examine the behaviour of nations in international relations.

Methods for the Securing of National Interest:

To secure the goals and objectives of her national interest is the paramount right and duty of every nation. Nations are always at work to secure their national interests and in doing so they adopt a number of methods.

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The following are the five popular methods or instruments which are usually employed by a nation for securing her national interests in international relations:

1. Diplomacy as a Means of National Interests:

Diplomacy is a universally accepted means for securing national interests. It is through diplomacy that the foreign policy of a nation travels to other nations. It seeks to secure the goals of national interests. Diplomats establish contacts with the decision-makers and diplomats of other nations and conduct negotiations for achieving the desired goals and objectives of national interests of their nation.

The art of diplomacy involves the presentation of the goals and objectives of national interest in such a way as can persuade others to accept these as just and rightful demands of the nation. Diplomats use persuasion and threats, rewards and threats of denial of rewards as the means for exercising power and securing goals of national interest as defined by foreign policy of their nation.

Diplomatic negotiations constitute the most effective means of conflict-resolution and for reconciling the divergent interests of the state. Through mutual give and take, accommodation and reconciliation, diplomacy tries to secure the desired goals and objectives of national interest.

As an instrument of securing national interest, diplomacy is a universally recognized and most frequently used means. Morgenthau regards diplomacy as the most primary means. However, all the objectives and goals of national interest cannot be secured through diplomacy.

2. Propaganda:

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The second important method for securing national interest is propaganda. Propaganda is the art of salesmanship. It is the art of convincing others about the justness of the goals and objectives or ends which are desired to be secured. It consists of the attempt to impress upon nations the necessity of securing the goals which a nation wishes to achieve.

“Propaganda is a systematic attempt to affect the minds, emotions and actions of a given group for a specific public purpose.” —Frankel

It is directly addressed to the people of other states and its aim is always to secure the self-interests—interests which are governed exclusively by the national interests of the propagandist.

The revolutionary development of the means of communications (Internet) in the recent times has increased the scope of propaganda as a means for securing support for goals of national interest.

3. Economic Means:

The rich and developed nations use economic aid and loans as the means for securing their interests in international relations. The existence of a very wide gap between the rich and poor countries provides a big opportunity to the rich nations for promoting their interests vis-a-vis the poor nations.

The dependence of the poor and lowly- developed nations upon the rich and developed nations for the import of industrial goods, technological know-how, foreign aid, armaments and for selling raw materials, has been responsible for strengthening the role of economic instruments of foreign policy. In this era of Globalisation conduct of international economic relation has emerged as a key means of national interests.

4. Alliances and Treaties:

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Alliances and Treaties are concluded by two or more states for securing their common interests. This device is mostly used for securing identical and complementary interests. However, even conflictual interests may lead to alliances and treaties with like-minded states against the common rivals or opponents.

Alliances and treaties make it a legal obligation for the members of the alliances or

signatories of the treaties to work for the promotion of agreed common interests. The alliances may be concluded for serving a particular specific interest or for securing a number of common interests. The nature of an alliance depends upon the nature of interest which is sought to be secured.

Accordingly, the alliances are either military or economic in nature. The need for securing the security of capitalist democratic states against the expanding 'communist menace' led to the creation of military alliances like NATO, SEATO, CENTO, ANZUS etc. Likewise, the need to meet the threat to socialism led to the conclusion of Warsaw Pact among the communist countries.

The need for the economic reconstruction of Europe after the Second World War led to the establishment of European Common Market (Now European Union) and several other economic agencies. The needs of Indian national interests in 1971 led to the conclusion of the Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation with the (erstwhile) Soviet Union. Alliances and Treaties are thus popular means for securing national interests.

5. Coercive Means:

The role of power in international relations is a recognized fact. It is an unwritten law of international intercourse that nations can use force for securing their national interests. International Law also recognizes coercive means short of war as the methods that can be used by states for fulfilling their desired goals and objectives. Intervention, Non-intercourse, embargoes, boycotts, reprisals, retortion, retaliation, severance of relations and pacific biocides are the popular coercive means which can be used by a nation to force others to accept a particular course of behaviour or to refrain from a course which is considered harmful by the nation using coercive means.

War and Aggression have been declared illegal means, yet these continue to be used by the states in actual course of international relations. Today, nations fully realize the importance of peaceful means of conflict-resolution like negotiations, and diplomacy as the ideal methods for promoting their national interests. Yet at the same time these continue to use coercive means, whenever they find it expedient and necessary. Military power is still regarded as a major part of national power and is often used by a nation for securing its desired goals and objectives.

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The use of military power against international terrorism now stands universally accepted as a natural and just means for fighting the menace. Today world public opinion accepts the use of war and other forcible means for the elimination of international terrorism.

All these means are used by all the nations for securing their national interests. Nations have the right and duty to secure their national interests and they have the freedom to choose the requisite means for this purpose. They can use peaceful or coercive means as and when they may desire or deem essential.

However, in the interest of international peace, security and prosperity, nations are expected to refrain from using coercive means particular war and aggression. These are expected to depend upon peaceful means for the settlement of disputes and for securing their interests.

While formulating the goals and objectives of national interest, all the nations must make honest attempts to make these compatible with the international interests of Peace, Security environmental protection, protection of human rights and Sustainable Development.

Peaceful coexistence, peaceful conflict-resolution and purposeful mutual cooperation for development are the common and shared interests of all the nations. As such, along with the promotion of their national interests, the nations must try to protect and promote

common interests in the larger interest of the whole international community.

All this makes it essential for every nation to formulate its foreign policy and to conduct its relations with other nations on the basis of its national interests, as interpreted and defined in harmony with the common interests of the humankind. The aim of foreign policy is to secure the defined goals of national interest by the use of the national power.