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Print ISSN: [3006-2497](#) Online ISSN: [3006-2500](#)Platform & Workflow by: [Open Journal Systems](#)**Foreign Policy: Concept, Determinants and Contemporary Challenges****Hafiz Muhammad Javed**

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khanahsan882@gmail.com**Abstract**

Foreign policy is one of the central areas of International Relations because it provides a framework through which states pursue their national interests and interact with other states and international actors. It encompasses the principles, objectives, strategies, decisions, and actions adopted by a state in dealing with the international environment. Although national interest and national security remain fundamental objectives of foreign policy, its formulation is influenced by a complex interaction of domestic and international factors, including political institutions, leadership, economic conditions, military capabilities, public opinion, national identity, geography, ideology, international alliances, and the distribution of power in the international system. The contemporary international environment has significantly transformed the nature of foreign policy. Globalization, economic interdependence, technological advancement, cyber security, terrorism, climate change, migration, energy security, economic sanctions, and great-power competition have expanded the traditional foreign-policy agenda. Moreover, international organizations, multinational corporations, non-governmental organizations, media networks, and other non-state actors increasingly influence international affairs. Consequently, modern states require flexible and multidimensional foreign policies that combine diplomatic, economic, political, technological, and strategic instruments. This study examines the concept, significance, determinants, decision-making process, and contemporary challenges of foreign policy. It adopts an interpretivist research philosophy and a qualitative research approach. The study relies on secondary data obtained from scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles, academic publications, and relevant institutional sources. Documentary analysis and thematic analysis are employed to identify recurring themes related to national interest, power, security, domestic politics, leadership, globalization, and emerging international challenges. The study finds that foreign policy is a dynamic process shaped by the interaction between domestic and international environments. It concludes that effective foreign policy requires a balance between national interests, international obligations, strategic capabilities, diplomatic engagement, economic strength, and adaptation to changing global circumstances.

Keywords: Foreign Policy, International Relations, National Interest, Diplomacy, National Security, Foreign Policy Analysis, Globalization, International System, Power, Decision-Making

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Foreign policy is one of the most important instruments through which a sovereign state interacts with the international community and pursues its interests beyond its territorial boundaries. It represents a systematic pattern of principles, decisions, strategies, and actions adopted by a state in dealing with other states, international organizations, and non-state actors. Through foreign policy, states seek to protect their sovereignty, territorial integrity, national security, economic interests, political stability, and international standing. Foreign policy therefore serves as a bridge between domestic priorities and the broader international system (Hudson, 2007). The concept of foreign policy has traditionally been associated with war and peace, military alliances, diplomacy, territorial disputes, and national security. Classical realist scholars placed particular emphasis on power and national interest. Morgenthau (1948), for example, considered national interest defined in terms of power as a central principle for understanding international politics. From this perspective, states operate in an international environment characterized by uncertainty and the absence of a central authority capable of guaranteeing their security. However, foreign policy cannot be understood exclusively through military power. The development of international institutions, economic interdependence, globalization, technological advancement, and transnational problems has significantly expanded its scope. Contemporary states must address issues including international trade, energy security, climate change, migration, terrorism, cyber security, global health, food security, technological competition, and economic sanctions. Foreign policy is also influenced by domestic political conditions. Political leaders, bureaucratic institutions, legislatures, military establishments, political parties, public opinion, media, economic groups, and civil society may all influence the formulation and implementation of foreign policy. Snyder, Bruck, and Sapin (1962) emphasized the importance of decision-making processes and the actors involved in formulating foreign-policy choices. Similarly, Allison (1971) demonstrated that government decisions may emerge from organizational routines and bureaucratic bargaining rather than from a single rational decision maker. The contemporary international system has further complicated foreign-policy choices. The distribution of global power is changing, while competition among major powers increasingly affects smaller and middle powers. States are required to manage relationships with competing powers while protecting their own economic and strategic interests. This has increased the importance of strategic autonomy, economic diplomacy, multilateralism, and flexible foreign-policy strategies.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Foreign policy has become increasingly complex because states operate simultaneously under domestic political pressures and international constraints. Traditional approaches that focus primarily on military power and interstate rivalry are insufficient to explain contemporary foreign-policy behavior. Globalization has increased economic interdependence, while technological advancement has created new forms of competition. Cyber attacks, disinformation, artificial intelligence, economic sanctions, energy insecurity, climate change, terrorism, and transnational migration have created challenges that cannot be addressed through conventional diplomacy alone. The central problem addressed by this research is therefore to understand how foreign policy is formulated and transformed

under the influence of domestic factors, national interests, international structures, and contemporary global challenges.

1.3 Research Objectives

The study aims to:

1. Examine the concept and significance of foreign policy.
2. Analyze the major determinants of foreign policy.
3. Examine the role of national interest and power in foreign-policy formulation.
4. Analyze the influence of domestic and international factors on foreign-policy decisions.
5. Examine major theoretical approaches to foreign policy.
6. Analyze contemporary challenges affecting foreign-policy formulation.
7. Identify major trends shaping foreign policy in the twenty-first century.

1.4 Research Questions

1. What is foreign policy and why is it important in International Relations?
2. What are the major determinants of foreign policy?
3. How do national interest and power influence foreign-policy formulation?
4. How do domestic political factors influence foreign-policy decisions?
5. What theoretical approaches explain foreign-policy behavior?
6. What are the major contemporary challenges confronting foreign policy?
7. How has globalization transformed foreign policy in the twenty-first century?

1.5 Significance of the Study

The study is significant for students and researchers of Political Science and International Relations because foreign policy is essential to understanding state behavior in the international system. The research provides a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between national interest, power, domestic politics, leadership, international structures, and foreign-policy decisions. It also contributes to understanding how traditional foreign-policy concepts have changed in response to globalization and emerging international challenges. The study is particularly relevant for understanding the foreign-policy choices of small and middle powers that must navigate an international environment dominated by competition among major powers.

1.6 Scope of the Study

The research focuses on the general concept and analysis of foreign policy rather than examining the foreign policy of one particular country. It covers theoretical approaches, determinants, decision-making, contemporary challenges, and emerging trends. The study primarily examines foreign policy from the perspective of Political Science and International Relations and relies on secondary academic literature.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

Literature review provides the intellectual foundation of a research study. It examines existing scholarship, identifies major theoretical debates, and establishes the conceptual framework through which the research problem can be analyzed. Foreign policy has been studied through several theoretical traditions, including realism, liberalism, constructivism, foreign policy analysis, neoclassical realism, and decision-making approaches.

2.2 Realist Perspective

Realism is one of the most influential approaches to understanding foreign policy. Classical realism emphasizes power, national interest, security, and survival. Morgenthau (1948) argued that international politics is fundamentally characterized by the struggle for power. From a realist perspective, states seek to protect their national interests in an international system where no central authority guarantees their survival. The realist approach therefore explains foreign policy primarily in terms of national security and power. Military capabilities, strategic alliances, deterrence, and balance-of-power calculations become important instruments through which states protect themselves. However, realism may not adequately explain foreign-policy behavior driven by economic cooperation, international institutions, identity, or norms.

2.3 Structural Realism

Waltz (1979) developed structural realism by shifting the focus from human nature and individual leaders toward the structure of the international system. According to Waltz, the international system is anarchic and states must rely primarily on their own capabilities for survival. The distribution of capabilities among states influences their strategic behavior. Structural realism therefore suggests that changes in the distribution of global power can produce changes in foreign-policy behavior.

2.4 Liberal Perspective

Liberalism presents an alternative to realism by emphasizing cooperation, international institutions, economic interdependence, democracy, and international law.

Keohane and Nye (2012) demonstrated that states can become highly interdependent through economic, political, and institutional relationships. Such interdependence can create incentives for cooperation and reduce the exclusive importance of military power. From a liberal perspective, foreign policy is therefore not simply a struggle for power. States may pursue common interests through international organizations, diplomacy, trade, and multilateral agreements.

2.5 Constructivist Perspective

Constructivism emphasizes the importance of ideas, identity, norms, beliefs, and social interaction. Wendt (1992) argued that international political structures are socially constructed through interactions among states. States therefore do not respond only to material capabilities; their perceptions of themselves and others also influence their behavior. Constructivism is useful for understanding why states may interpret similar international circumstances differently. Historical experiences, national identity, ideology, and social norms can shape foreign-policy preferences.

2.6 Foreign Policy Analysis

Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) focuses specifically on how foreign-policy decisions are made. Hudson (2007) argues that foreign policy should be analyzed at the level of decision makers and institutions rather than treating states as completely unified actors. The approach considers leadership, perceptions, beliefs, bureaucratic institutions, domestic politics, and decision-making processes. This perspective is important because two states facing similar international circumstances may adopt different foreign policies due to differences in leadership, political institutions, historical experiences, or domestic pressures.

2.7 Decision-Making Approach

Snyder et al. (1962) emphasized that foreign policy should be studied as a decision-making process. Foreign-policy choices involve identifying problems, interpreting information, considering alternatives, and selecting policies.

Jervis (1976) further demonstrated that perceptions and misperceptions can influence foreign-policy decisions. Decision makers do not always possess complete information and may interpret international events through existing beliefs and expectations.

2.8 Bureaucratic Politics

Allison (1971) demonstrated that foreign-policy decisions may result from bargaining among bureaucratic organizations. Different government institutions may possess different interests, information, and organizational priorities. Consequently, foreign policy may emerge from institutional competition rather than from a single coherent national calculation. This approach is particularly useful for understanding complex decision-making systems in modern states.

2.9 Neoclassical Realism

Neoclassical realism attempts to combine systemic pressures with domestic-level factors. Lobell, Ripsman, and Taliaferro (2009) argue that international power structures influence states, but domestic political institutions and leaders mediate the way systemic pressures are translated into foreign-policy decisions. This approach is particularly relevant to this study because it connects international power with domestic political variables.

2.10 Conceptual Framework

Based on the reviewed literature, foreign policy can be understood as the outcome of interaction among four major dimensions:

International Environment → Domestic Factors → Decision-Making Process → Foreign-Policy Outcomes

International factors include:

- Distribution of power
- Alliances
- International institutions
- Regional conflicts
- Global economic conditions

Domestic factors include:

- Political institutions
- Leadership
- Military institutions
- Public opinion
- Economic conditions
- National identity

The decision-making process connects these factors and produces foreign-policy outcomes.

2.11 Research Gap

Existing literature provides extensive theoretical explanations of foreign policy. Realist approaches explain the importance of power and security, liberal theories emphasize cooperation and institutions,

while constructivist approaches highlight identity and norms. However, there remains a need for an integrated understanding that combines international structural pressures with domestic political factors and emerging non-traditional challenges. This study addresses this gap by examining foreign policy through a multidimensional framework that incorporates power, national interest, domestic politics, decision-making, globalization, technology, and contemporary security challenges.

RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

Research methodology provides the systematic framework through which research questions are investigated. Since this study seeks to understand the meaning, determinants, processes, and changing nature of foreign policy, a qualitative research methodology is considered appropriate.

3.2 Research Philosophy

The study adopts an **interpretivist research philosophy**.

Interpretivism emphasizes the importance of understanding social and political phenomena through meanings, perceptions, interpretations, and contextual factors. Foreign policy is not simply a measurable phenomenon because decisions are influenced by perceptions, identities, historical experiences, political beliefs, and interpretations of international events. For example, two states may face a similar security environment but perceive threats differently because of differences in historical experiences and national identities. Therefore, understanding foreign policy requires interpretation of political behavior and decision-making. The interpretivist approach is consistent with the purpose of this research because the study seeks to understand how different factors shape foreign-policy choices rather than testing a mathematical causal relationship.

3.3 Research Approach

The study employs a **qualitative research approach**. Qualitative research is appropriate because the study analyzes concepts, theories, scholarly arguments, political processes, and historical developments rather than numerical variables. The research examines existing academic literature to identify recurring themes concerning:

- National interest
- Power
- Security
- Leadership
- Domestic politics
- International institutions
- Globalization
- Technology
- Non-state actors

3.4 Research Design

The research follows an exploratory and descriptive research design. The exploratory component investigates different theoretical explanations of foreign policy, while the descriptive component examines its major determinants and contemporary challenges. The study does not attempt to establish a statistical causal relationship. Instead, it seeks to develop a comprehensive conceptual understanding based on existing scholarship.

3.5 Data Sources

The research relies entirely on **secondary data**.

Data have been obtained from:

1. Academic books.
2. Peer-reviewed journal articles.
3. Scholarly research publications.
4. Academic databases and institutional publications.
5. Relevant reports produced by recognized international institutions.

Major theoretical works by Morgenthau, Waltz, Wendt, Allison, Snyder, Hudson, Nye, Keohane, and other scholars provide the theoretical foundation.

3.6 Data Collection Method

Data were collected through systematic review of relevant academic literature concerning foreign policy and International Relations.

The researcher identified literature dealing with:

- Foreign policy theory
- National interest
- Realism
- Liberalism
- Constructivism
- Decision-making
- Bureaucratic politics
- Globalization
- Contemporary security challenges

Relevant arguments and findings were then organized according to major themes.

3.7 Sampling Technique

The study uses purposive selection of academic sources. Sources were selected because of their relevance to the research questions and their contribution to foreign-policy scholarship. Foundational theoretical works and widely recognized academic studies were prioritized.

3.8 Data Analysis Technique

The research employs thematic analysis. Thematic analysis involves identifying recurring concepts and organizing them into meaningful themes.

The collected literature was analyzed under the following major themes:

1. National interest and security.
2. Power and international structure.
3. Domestic politics and leadership.
4. Foreign-policy decision-making.
5. International institutions and cooperation.
6. Globalization and economic interdependence.
7. Emerging security challenges.
8. Technology and non-state actors.

These themes were compared across different theoretical perspectives to identify similarities, differences, and broader patterns.

3.9 Reliability and Validity

To improve the reliability of the study, the research relies on established academic literature and recognized scholarly works. Theoretical arguments were compared across multiple sources rather than relying on a single author. This process of comparison strengthens the credibility of the findings. The study also distinguishes between theoretical arguments and the researcher's interpretation of those arguments.

3.10 Ethical Considerations

The study does not involve human participants, interviews, surveys, or personal data. Therefore, risks related to participant confidentiality are not applicable. Academic integrity was maintained through proper acknowledgment of the ideas and arguments of other scholars using in-text citations and a reference list.

3.11 Limitations of the Methodology

The study has several limitations. First, it relies primarily on secondary sources and therefore does not provide original interview or survey data. Second, foreign-policy literature is extensive and constantly evolving, meaning that it is difficult to incorporate every relevant publication. Third, qualitative interpretation may involve a degree of researcher judgment. Nevertheless, systematic selection and thematic analysis of scholarly literature provide an appropriate methodological foundation for the objectives of this study.

DATA ANALYSIS, DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the analysis of the secondary data collected from academic literature. Thematic analysis produced several major themes that explain the formulation and transformation of foreign policy.

4.2 Theme One: National Interest as the Core of Foreign Policy

The analysis demonstrates that national interest remains the central objective of foreign policy. Realist scholars particularly emphasize national interest as the foundation of state behavior. Morgenthau (1948) associated national interest with power and security, while Waltz (1979) emphasized survival within an anarchic international system. However, the meaning of national interest has expanded beyond military security. Contemporary national interests increasingly include economic growth, energy security, technological development, international trade, environmental security, and diplomatic influence. The analysis therefore indicates that national interest remains constant as a principle, but its content changes according to the circumstances of individual states.

4.3 Theme Two: Power and International Structure

The literature demonstrates that power remains a major determinant of foreign policy. Military capabilities influence deterrence and strategic behavior, while economic capabilities provide resources for diplomacy, development, and international influence. Waltz (1979) demonstrates that the distribution of capabilities within the international system affects state behavior. States continuously assess the relative capabilities of other states and adjust their foreign policies accordingly. However, contemporary power is not exclusively military. Nye (2004) emphasizes the importance of soft power,

through which states influence others through attraction, values, culture, institutions, and international legitimacy. The analysis therefore suggests that national power should be understood as a combination of hard power and soft power.

4.4 Theme Three: Domestic Politics and Leadership

The literature shows that domestic political factors significantly influence foreign policy. Hudson (2007) argues that foreign policy should be examined through the individuals and institutions involved in decision-making. Political leaders interpret international events according to their beliefs and perceptions. Public opinion, political parties, legislatures, economic groups, and military institutions may also constrain or influence foreign-policy choices. Therefore, foreign policy cannot be explained solely by international structural pressures.

4.5 Theme Four: Decision-Making and Perception

Foreign-policy decisions are influenced by the way leaders perceive international events.

Jervis (1976) demonstrates that misperceptions can result in incorrect assessments of threats and intentions. Decision makers may interpret the behavior of other states through historical experiences or pre-existing beliefs. The analysis indicates that foreign policy is therefore not always the result of perfect rationality. Information limitations, cognitive biases, organizational interests, and political pressures can influence decisions.

4.6 Theme Five: Bureaucratic and Institutional Influence

Allison (1971) demonstrates that foreign-policy decisions can result from bargaining among government organizations. Different institutions may have different priorities. Military organizations may emphasize security, economic institutions may prioritize trade, and diplomatic institutions may emphasize international cooperation. Foreign policy can therefore represent a compromise among competing institutional interests.

4.7 Theme Six: Globalization and Economic Interdependence

The analysis indicates that globalization has transformed foreign policy by increasing economic and political interdependence. Keohane and Nye (2012) demonstrate that states increasingly depend upon one another through multiple channels of interaction. Economic interdependence creates both opportunities and vulnerabilities. Trade, investment, supply chains, energy markets, and financial systems can become instruments of cooperation as well as pressure. Consequently, economic diplomacy has become an important component of contemporary foreign policy.

4.8 Theme Seven: International Institutions

International organizations increasingly influence foreign-policy behavior. States use institutions such as the United Nations and other multilateral organizations to negotiate agreements, resolve disputes, coordinate policies, and pursue collective interests. Liberal theory suggests that institutions can facilitate cooperation by reducing uncertainty and providing mechanisms for negotiation. However, realist perspectives emphasize that international institutions remain influenced by the distribution of power among states.

The analysis suggests that international institutions are neither completely independent of power politics nor irrelevant to international relations. Their influence depends partly on the interests and capabilities of member states.

4.9 Theme Eight: Great-Power Competition

Great-power competition remains one of the most important contemporary challenges. The changing distribution of global power creates strategic uncertainty for smaller and middle powers. States may face pressure to align with one major power, maintain neutrality, or develop balanced relations with competing powers. This creates a difficult foreign-policy environment in which economic interests and security concerns may sometimes point in different directions.

4.10 Theme Nine: Cyber Security and Technology

Technological transformation has created new dimensions of foreign policy. Cyber attacks, digital espionage, artificial intelligence, information warfare, technological sanctions, and control over strategic technologies increasingly affect international relations. Technology is therefore not simply an economic issue. It has become closely connected with national security and geopolitical competition.

4.11 Theme Ten: Non-Traditional Security Challenges

The analysis identifies climate change, terrorism, migration, pandemics, food insecurity, energy security, and transnational crime as important emerging challenges. These issues cannot be effectively addressed by individual states acting alone. Consequently, contemporary foreign policy increasingly requires international cooperation and multilateral diplomacy.

4.12 Overall Findings

The thematic analysis produces the following major findings:

1. National interest remains the fundamental objective of foreign policy.
2. National interest includes both traditional security and economic, technological, and environmental concerns.
3. Power remains important, but contemporary power includes both hard and soft dimensions.
4. Foreign policy is influenced by domestic political institutions and leadership.
5. Perception and misperception can significantly affect foreign-policy decisions.
6. Bureaucratic organizations may influence policy outcomes.
7. Globalization has increased economic interdependence and foreign-policy complexity.
8. International institutions provide important mechanisms for cooperation and diplomacy.
9. Great-power competition creates strategic challenges for smaller and middle powers.
10. Technology and cyber security have become important components of national security.
11. Non-traditional security challenges require greater international cooperation.
12. Effective foreign policy requires flexibility and adaptation to changing international circumstances.

4.13 Discussion

The findings demonstrate that no single theoretical approach is sufficient to explain the entire phenomenon of foreign policy. Realism effectively explains the importance of power, security, and national interest. Liberalism provides insight into international cooperation, institutions, and economic

interdependence. Constructivism explains the role of identity, ideas, norms, and perceptions. Foreign Policy Analysis provides a deeper understanding of leaders and decision-making institutions. The findings therefore support a multidimensional approach in which international structure and domestic factors interact. Foreign policy can be conceptualized as the outcome of a continuous interaction between external pressures and internal political processes. International structures create opportunities and constraints, while domestic institutions and leaders interpret those pressures and formulate policy responses. This integrated perspective provides a more comprehensive understanding of foreign-policy behavior in the contemporary international system.

5.1 Conclusion

Foreign policy remains one of the most important areas of International Relations because it determines how states interact with the international environment and pursue their national interests. The study has demonstrated that foreign policy is a multidimensional and dynamic process. Traditional concerns such as sovereignty, national security, military power, territorial integrity, and strategic alliances remain important. However, globalization and technological transformation have significantly expanded the foreign-policy agenda. Economic diplomacy, international trade, energy security, climate change, cyber security, migration, terrorism, technological competition, and global health have become increasingly important dimensions of international relations. The study also demonstrates that foreign policy cannot be explained exclusively through the international system. Domestic political institutions, leadership, public opinion, bureaucratic organizations, national identity, economic conditions, and political perceptions can significantly influence foreign-policy decisions. The theoretical analysis shows that realism provides an important explanation of power and national interest, while liberalism highlights cooperation and institutions. Constructivism demonstrates the significance of identity and norms, while Foreign Policy Analysis emphasizes decision makers and domestic institutions. The combination of these approaches provides a more comprehensive explanation of contemporary foreign policy. The study concludes that national interest remains the fundamental basis of foreign policy, but the nature of national interest has expanded. In the twenty-first century, states must protect not only their territorial security but also their economic, technological, environmental, and societal interests. Effective foreign policy therefore requires strategic flexibility. States must be capable of balancing national interests with international obligations, maintaining diplomatic relations, managing strategic competition, and responding to emerging global challenges.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study proposes the following recommendations:

1. Strengthening Strategic Planning

States should develop long-term foreign-policy strategies rather than relying exclusively on short-term responses to international crises.

2. Enhancing Diplomatic Capacity

Professional diplomacy should be strengthened through specialized training, research, negotiation skills, and greater use of modern diplomatic tools.

3. Promoting Economic Diplomacy

Foreign policy should increasingly integrate economic objectives, including trade, investment, energy security, technology, and international markets.

4. Strengthening Multilateral Engagement

States should actively participate in international organizations and multilateral forums to pursue their interests through cooperation and diplomacy.

5. Developing Technological Capabilities

Cyber security, artificial intelligence, digital diplomacy, and technological resilience should become important components of national foreign-policy strategies.

6. Improving Domestic Coordination

Foreign-policy institutions should coordinate effectively with economic, defense, intelligence, and political institutions to develop coherent national strategies.

7. Promoting Evidence-Based Decision-Making

Foreign-policy decisions should be based on reliable intelligence, expert analysis, historical knowledge, and careful assessment of alternative policy options.

8. Balancing Hard and Soft Power

States should combine military and economic capabilities with diplomacy, culture, education, international reputation, and other sources of soft power.

9. Addressing Non-Traditional Security Threats

Climate change, terrorism, pandemics, migration, food insecurity, and energy security should receive greater attention in foreign-policy planning.

10. Maintaining Strategic Flexibility

In an increasingly competitive international environment, states should avoid unnecessary dependence on a single major power and should preserve diplomatic flexibility wherever possible.

5.3 Limitations of the Study

This study is based primarily on secondary sources and does not include interviews, surveys, or original field research. The study also focuses on foreign policy as a general phenomenon rather than conducting a detailed case study of one particular state. Future research could apply the theoretical framework developed in this study to specific countries and compare their foreign-policy behavior under different domestic and international conditions.

5.4 Future Research Directions

Future researchers may examine:

- Foreign policy of small and middle powers.
- Foreign policy and great-power competition.
- Artificial intelligence and foreign-policy decision-making.
- Economic sanctions as a foreign-policy instrument.
- Climate diplomacy.
- Digital diplomacy and social media.
- Civil-military relations and foreign policy.
- Public opinion and foreign-policy formulation.
- Foreign policy under democratic and authoritarian regimes.

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