

To what extent can a sovereign state pursue an independent foreign policy?

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**To what extent can a sovereign state pursue
an independent foreign policy?**

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Abstract:

Sovereign states remain the main actors of the international system. Foreign policy is key element of shaping a state's interaction within the international community. Sovereignty is discussed from different perspectives; however international legal and Westphalian sovereignty are compatible with the essay's context. foreign policy is: "the conduct and practice of relation between different actors, primarily states, in the international system", and it is derived by the national interests. A state's foreign policy is influenced by three levels; individual level (the leaders), national attributes, and international system. Independent foreign policy is controversial subject, and it differs from a state to other state.

Key words: Sovereignty, Sovereign state, Independent foreign policy, national interest, individual's characteristics, national attributes, international system, Turkey, Poland.

الملخص:

تبقى الدول ذات السيادة هي الفواعل الرئيسية في النظام الدولي. والسياسة الخارجية هي عنصر هام في تحديد أسلوب تفاعل الدولة داخل النظام الدولي. لقد تم مناقشة مفهوم السيادة من عدة جهات نظر مختلفة، ويبقى منظوري القانون الدولي ومعاهدة وستفاليا للسيادة هما الأقرب لسياق المقال. تُعرف السياسة الخارجية بأنها سلوك وتعامل الفاعلون، بصفة أساسية الدول، في النظام الدولي، وتوجه المصالح الوطنية للدول سياستها الخارجية. هناك ثلاث مستويات تؤثر على السياسة الخارجية للدولة؛ المستوى الشخصي (القادة)، صفات ومقومات الدول، النظام الدولي. السياسة الخارجية المستقلة هي مثار للجدل وتختلف من دولة إلى أخرى.

الكلمات المفتاحية: السيادة، الدول ذات السيادة، السياسة الخارجية المستقلة، المصالح الوطنية، المستوى الشخصي، المقومات الوطنية للدولة، النظام الدولي، تركيا، بولندا.

Introduction.

The international system is composed of different actors who interact and communicate among each other. Sovereign states remain the core of the international system. This communication among the states, and between the state and other actors, takes place, and is influenced by foreign policy. The ever-changing international environment makes sovereign states' foreign policy a subject for questioning. This essay will discuss one of the controversial issues around foreign policy: "To what extent can a sovereign state pursue an independent foreign policy?"

First section will study sovereignty as a main pillar of state. Sovereignty has been used in four different ways, domestic, interdependence, International legal and Westphalian sovereignty. From the essay's perspective, International legal sovereignty and Westphalian sovereignty fit within the question's context, since they provide essential bases for some foreign policy's activities.

The second section will study foreign policy concept in details. Firstly, it will define the national interest as they are the main drivers for state's foreign policy. Secondly, it will study the three levels of influences on foreign policy. Individual level is an important aspect in foreign policy. This essay will mention some conditions of leaders' impact on foreign policy, rather than delve into leaders' personal attributes. National attributes are essential dimensions in a state's foreign policy. This essay will use Hudson's definition of national attributes. He mentioned a state's size, natural resources, geography, political system, military capabilities, economic capabilities, and demographics; some scholars add history, others add technology. As examples of national attributions size, natural resources, geography, and economic capabilities will be explained with some examples provided. International system has significant impact on state's foreign policy; with polarity being at the centre of the international system's impact on a state's foreign policy.

The third section will discuss the essay's explanation of 'independent foreign policy', through lens of alliances. It will consider that as state pursue independent foreign policy from the alliances foreign policies. Turkey and Poland will be the examples to illustrate this assumption.

Sovereign state

Theoretically, the common state's pillars are people, territory, government, and sovereignty.¹ Sovereignty has been tackled with different approaches. Firstly, domestic sovereignty which is connected to the state's public authority institutions, and their ability to control the state's territory. Secondly, interdependence sovereignty is connected with the state's ability to control the movement through its borders. Thirdly, international legal sovereignty is connected with the recognition of the state internationally. Fourthly, Westphalian sovereignty is connected to the state's ability to prevent external players from intervention in domestic authority configuration.²

International legal and Westphalian sovereignty are compatible with the essay's context. These two types provide essential ground for many forms of interactions among international system components such as contracts, conventions, coercion, and imposition.³

Foreign policy.

This section will discuss the definition of foreign policy and the state's national interests as its main driver. To communicate with the international system actors, a state formulates and adopts a 'foreign policy'. Chris Alden defined foreign policy as: "the conduct and practice of relation between different actors, primarily states, in the international system".⁴ States use foreign policy for achieving their national interest goals in International Relations (IR). Foreign policy tries to achieve the best desired outcomes for the state's national interest by using the available instruments of its national power.⁵ In other words, one can suggest that national interests are the ends; the foreign policies are the means; and foreign policy's tools are the ways. All of them must be identified, cohered and coordinated to achieve the national objectives.

National interests are the main drivers for the foreign policy; described as "things may be essential to the survival and wellbeing of the nation as a whole".⁶ In general, national interests could be categorized into three groups. Firstly, security interests which include issues such as protecting the borders, securing the citizens, and maintaining knowledge. Secondly, economic interests which include issues such as promoting the living standards, and securing economic development. Thirdly, ideological interests which include issues such as protecting and promoting moral way of life, culture, religious values of nation or people. Achieving the nations goals

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requires the use of foreign policy tools; intelligent and information; diplomacy; aid, economic development and trade; and military influence, power, or force.⁷

In world of uncertainty, insecurity, and lack of effective global governance to achieve international justice, national interests are the main concern of the decision makers. Statesmen focus on national interests because it represents the reality perspective.⁸

This next section will discuss the levels of influences on a state's foreign policy. It will use Kenneth Waltz's approach where he distinguished three levels of understanding the individual, the state, and the international system.⁹

Individual level.

In 1970s, CIA created an office of leadership analysis. However, to concentrate on an individual's characteristics may be an obstacle to understand unintended actions and decisions caused by environment where leaders operate.¹⁰ So, the focus will not on leaders' characteristics, but it will be on the conditions might determine the extent of leaders' involvement in foreign policy. First, regimes types have various levels of leaders' control over foreign policy. Second, the level of the leader's interest in foreign policy; he may delegate wide authority to subordinates. Third, context and situation; the most critical situation or crisis, the highest

level of government power be involved in foreign policy. Fourth, the level of ambiguity may lead the leader to exercise his judgement on the state's foreign policy. Fifth, the level of the leader's diplomatic training. Untrained leaders are likely to relay on their personal worldview in foreign policy issues. Sixth, the level of the leader's experience in specific area or region of the world leaves personal touch on the foreign policy. Seventh, the style of leadership; the leader may depend on team work or use more 'hand-on' style of leadership.¹¹

National attributes.

The state has specific attributes which affect its foreign policy. Firstly, size of the state. Likely, large states are active actors in foreign policy. Their aims always increase as extra capabilities are developed. They are ambitious since their capabilities continuously grow. In addition, massive landmass provides large states with two advantages, harder to be defeated in war, and higher probability of having variety of natural resources.

In contrast, small states may follow the direction of their bigger neighbours. Also, in case of existing between two conflicting large countries neutral foreign policy is more desirable.¹² Finland prefers to be a NATO partner rather than NATO member to maintain neutrality between NATO and Russia.¹³ Likely, small states lack of foreign policy tools. They

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do not have the ability to reward or punish other states. Moreover, relatively poor small states lack of diplomatic representation which may hamper their scope of foreign policy.¹⁴

In contrast, although Israel is small in size, it has expansionist foreign policy. The history of founding Israel influences Israeli policymakers' decisions. They had memories of diaspora and Holocaust. Moreover they insist on holding the occupied territories and they always use force as first resort.¹⁵ In 1967, Israel captured the Sinai desert from Egypt; the Golan Heights from Syria; and the West Bank and East Jerusalem, from Jordan. The 1967 war assured the 1948's fact that Israel an occupier. Moreover, in Palestinian lands "Israel built settlements for Jews, in defiance of international law that says occupiers cannot settle their people on the land they capture".¹⁶

Secondly, natural resources possession or lack of it plays a key role in state's foreign policy. Regarding oil, China has been attracted to deal with Sudan since Sudanese oil was not contracted to Western countries or Japan. As a result, China used veto against any UNSC resolution accusing Sudan during Darfur crisis. Also, India's huge power needs, led it to court countries like Iran and Turkmenistan.¹⁷

Regarding water, Ethiopia's Renaissance Dam on the Blue Nile is under construction. It will cut into Egypt water supply,

which already faces water shortage. Since the Nile provides more than 95% of Egypt's water supply, Egypt considers this issue the most important challenge to the national security.¹⁸ Relating to the national interests' categorization, the dam will threaten the Egyptian security, and economic national interests. It will destroy parts of Nile Valley precious farmland, which is confined to the Nile Valley and delta, with a few oases.¹⁹ Millions of Egyptians work in agriculture will be affected by losing their lands and jobs; consequently, it will affect the social-economic stability.

Thirdly, the state's geography; it determines the state's wealth of natural resources. Japan is a volcanic island, and its basalt soil does not contain any fossil fuel. Consequently, it is necessary for Japan to follow foreign policy compensating this lack of energy resources. Also, foreign affairs are heavily influenced by strategic importance of state's ports, water paths, and land features.²⁰

Suez Canal was always the vital objective in many wars on the Egyptian soil. For example, Suez Crisis was centred on the Canal. "The Suez Canal provided Britain with a shorter sea route to its empire and, as the 20th Century dawned and oil grew in importance, it provided a short sea route to the oilfields of the Persian Gulf"²¹. On 26 July 1956, President Nasser nationalised the Anglo-French Suez Canal Company. Although Egypt agreed to provide free navigation through the canal, "in October 1956, it

was a secret agreement that Israel should attack Egypt, thereby providing a pretext for an Anglo-French invasion of Suez".²² Also, high terrains between conflicting countries are always determinants of foreign policy, such as Golan Heights between Syria and Israel. The conflict over high terrain may be for control or for its water resources.²³

Security and stability in the neighbouring countries affect the foreign policy. Most recent instability in the Middle East after 'Arab Spring' has shifted Egyptian policy dramatically. One of the Egyptian foreign policy priorities is to achieve reconciliation and political settlement in Libya, since situation in Libya make the 1200 KM borders control from one side relatively impossible. Moreover, Egypt started to exercise air strikes in Libya against terrorist groups violating Egyptian nationals in Libya and threatening Egyptian national security in general.²⁴ In Sinai, Egyptian military presence increased since 2011 to counter the terrorist activities, in contrast with the peace treaty with Israel.²⁵

Also, access to sea is vital aspect of state's geography. Closed countries may fall under mercy of their neighbours on cost lines. In some cases, countries like Russia have ports but majority of them are frozen for six months a year.²⁶ This is one of the main reasons for Russian intervention in Crimea. Sevastopol Port provides Russian Black Sea Fleet access to warm water. Direct impact on world's energy security comes from any

interrupt of Sea Lines of Communication. Thus, Jimmy Carter considered the protection of free passage in Hurmuz Strait as a vital American national interest.²⁷ Many countries cooperated in counter piracy operation in Gulf of Aden to ensure the freedom of movement for international trade.

Also, borders are geographic factors shaping the state's foreign policy. Russian stretched borders may justify the Russian behaviour. The NATO expansion in Eastern Europe, invokes the Russian fears of long-standing security vulnerability.²⁸ In addition, borders were drawn by colonial powers in Africa and Middle East has great impact on the foreign policy in these regions. The artificial borders did not consider ethical, religious, tribal, and culture differences. These borders create inter-state and intrastate conflicts and affected the way of behaving among these countries.²⁹

Fourthly, economic capabilities affect the state's foreign policy. In the globalized economy, states among themselves are more interrelated. Countries depending on export a single or few numbers of commodities, on the one hand these countries might be rich from this export. On the other hand, fluctuating prices paralyze the government from having clear vision for future plans. Western African countries depend on exporting Coca to import food for their people. These kinds of economies may lead to foreign policy compliance.³⁰ Another example of economic

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capabilities appeared in oil crisis in 1973. There was enormous impact on the foreign policy during and after 1973 war between Egypt and Israel when Arab oil was embargoed from the US.³¹

International system.

Foreign policy is seen like a group of ongoing transactions, so it can be studied from the viewpoint of its environment. In other words, One can argue that foreign policy is a feature of the environment of other foreign policies, and all the foreign policies represent a part of the international system combination.³² Realists see the international system as an anarchic³³, where no supreme overarching authority. Each state must therefore look out for its national interests as an unprecedented priority.

The international system has been transferred into different kinds of polarity. Multipolar system when it contains more than two influential actors. The alliances in this system are formed for specific reasons and shifting is related to the interest not ideology. In WWII the Allies were united to fight the Axis. Bipolar system, cold war illustrated this kind of world's system. Two blocs (NATO, and Warsaw pact) preferred to follow the minimum margins of direct confrontations. Hegemony when one state commands the commons in the world. Post-cold war, there was no effective counterweight to the power of the US.³⁴

Scholars disagree over which system is more stable. Although cold war has witnessed crucial crises, such as the Cuban missile crisis in 1960s which would be destructive nuclear war, the bipolarity balance of power was a key element in preventing the escalation in this crisis. From essay's perspective, during the cold war era many situations indicated that bipolar system is more stable.

From what were discussed above, it could be concluded that there are variations in foreign policies. In general, foreign policy is complicated, multi-dimensional, and subject to context. Changing any factor influences foreign policy, will affect the whole process. Definitions of national interests vary from state to another; for example although Egypt, and Saudi Arabia have mutual understanding in majority of the Middle East problems, they are dealing differently in Syria. On the one hand, Egypt seeks to peaceful political settlement, regardless the continuity of the current regime or not, to maintain Syria as a factor in the balance of power in the region, as it was in 1973 War. On the other hand, Saudi Arabia aims to change the pro Iran regime as a strategic objective in Syria, since Saudi Arabia consider that as a strategic victory over Iran.³⁵

States' leaders are a key factors in which foreign policies exercised. Revolutionary leaders may cause instability, regionally or internationally. They may invade their neighbours; Saddam

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Hussein invaded Kuwait in 1991.³⁶ Also, the circumstances around the leaders influence the state's foreign policy.

National attributes are considered as cards at the hand of the foreign policy players. National attributes vary and interrelated with each other. The foreign policy makers must know the state's national attributes, and use them effectively, in the state's foreign policy, to achieve the best outcomes. National attributes are definitely relative; France is large state in Europe, but not from the world largest countries. By the same token, state's national attributes are assessed relatively.

The International system is the environment of interactions of foreign policies. The international system imposes implicit and explicit relative constrains on the states' actions. The state must adopt a foreign policy can achieve its goals; by mitigating the effects of international system constrains and enlarging its benefit from the chances provided by international system.

Independent foreign policy.

Linking to the essay's question, this section will discuss the 'independent foreign policy'. For the essay's purpose, independent foreign policy will be addressed as state's independent foreign policy from its alliances. Interestingly, the forms of alliances in bipolarity, which became common post-cold war and further, are more connected to the essay's context.

During the section of addressing the sovereign state, the essay mentioned that a state can sign conventions and contracts. Most important kind of these commitments is alliances, because states relinquish some sovereignty in the exchange for benefits gained from these alliances.

As a case study, Turkey as a NATO member adopts an independent foreign policy. On the one hand, in 1952 turkey joined the NATO. Since ever, Turkey follows NATO principles and tries to adapt to the changing security environment. NATO has played a key role in Turkey security.³⁷ On the other hand, Turkey appears to be more self-centric. Turkey strengthened its relations with Russia. This shifting of axis away from west raised the questions around the Turkish foreign policy.³⁸ Although Turkey should depend on armament system interoperated with NATO weapons system; in 2017, Turkey has completed its buying of Russian advanced air defence missile system S-400; which kept the relations with NATO tense.³⁹

Moreover, there are different perspectives towards Kurd between Turkey and the US as the NATO leader. Turkey independent operation in Syria 'Euphrates Shield' shows its determination on clearing the borders from Kurdish People's Protection Units. Turkey sees its national security threatened by the PKK. In contrast, the US aided Iraqi Kurdish Peshmerga to fight ISIS. One can argue that Turkey considers the Kurd as a

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political existential threat; Kurdistan region's independence from Iraq could inspire the Syrian, and Turkish minorities of Kurds to claim their self-determination right; which will affect the Turkish territorial integrity. It is clear that Turkey prioritized national security over political mutual understanding.⁴⁰

Also, there some human rights violations against NATO members' values. After coup attempt in July 2016, the government declared a state of emergency. Thousands of soldiers, police, teachers, and judges were jailed, or dismissed. There were evidences of torture of detainees after the coup attempt. Hundreds of media outlets and NGOs were closed.⁴¹

On the other hand, Poland is an example for the commitment to NATO's policies. Poland was Warsaw Pact member. In 1989, Poland held its first free election to the senate. This was a big step in the fall of communism.⁴²

Russia is the main threat to Poland's security. Since the last Russian troops left Poland, the relations have witnessed many disputes. However, the worst was the polish plane crash in western Russia. It was carrying the Polish president, and Poland blamed the Russian air traffic controllers. Most recent fears came after Russian annexation of Crimea⁴³

In return, since Poland joined NATO in 1999, it contributed to all NATO operations and missions.⁴⁴ Poland boosted its

contribution in tackling the Middle East security crisis to persuade its NATO allies to increase their presence in Eastern Europe.

In April 2017, Poland welcomed the first deployment of US troops, in multinational forces across the Baltic region, to counter potential threats from Russia. The troops have been deployed only 57 Km away from Russian nuclear capable missiles.⁴⁵ In August 2017, NATO declared that the battlegroup in Poland is fully operational.⁴⁶

In short, based on national security requirements, regional situation, on the one hand Turkey follows relatively independent foreign policy. On the other hand, Poland sticks to NATO policies. From the essay's perspective, the two styles of foreign policies are result of many different factors. However, the two examples represent the importance of state's geography. Turkish borders with Syrian Kurds, and Iraqi Kurds play major role in the Turkish foreign policy. Also, Poland-Russia neighbourhood is a main driver for the Polish foreign policy.

Conclusion :

In conclusion, a common ground of state's definitions that it has four pillars. Sovereignty is one of the state's pillars. Sovereignty is argumentative concept and has been used in four ways; domestic, interdependence, international legal, and Westphalia sovereignty. To provide consistency, this essay

depended on third and fourth types of sovereignty since they are more compatible with the essay context.

The deepest discussion was about 'foreign policy'. Foreign policy drivers, the national interest, were discussed. Three levels of factors influence the state's foreign policy were studied. Although individual level is important, this essay did not focus on the psychological dimension of the leaders. The essay concentrated on conditions may affect the extent of leader's involvement in the foreign policy. Some national attributes, which represent the level of state's influence in foreign policy, were studied with some explanatory examples. The essay discussed the international system transforms from a polarity shape to another and the impact on the state's foreign policy.

The many factors shaping a state's foreign policy, prove how complicated the foreign policy is. Every country has its interpretation to its national interest. Also, individual level, leader's character, and conditions around the leader, affects the state's foreign policy. The relative national attributes determine the state's foreign policy. Finally the international environment sets the context of interaction between the foreign policies.

'Independent foreign policy' is a wide concept. This essay sensed the increase of alliances all over the world; so, it has assumed that independent foreign policy means the sovereign state foreign policy's independency from the state's alliances

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foreign policy. Turkey and Poland represented interesting case studies. Both are NATO members, while they have different styles of foreign policies.

The essay's concepts; sovereign state, foreign policy, and independent foreign policy are complicated and controversial issues. Moreover they are part of IR field, where having common conceptual agreement is an elusive ideal. There is no straight forward answer for the essay's question, yet it depends on many interrelated factors affecting the conduct of the states in the international system.

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