

**Assessment of National Interest in Foreign Policy Making in Africa : Nigeria as a Case Study**

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**ABSTRACT**

The paper examines the assessment of national interest in foreign policy making in Africa: Nigeria as a case study. The concentric circle of Nigeria's foreign policy is geared towards the promotion of her national interest, the definition or articulation of national interest varies from one nation to another. Political leaders in Africa countries and Europe invoke the word to validate their actions as a means of promoting the interests of their nations even when these interest are not favourable to other nations. In Africa as well as other nations in the world, national interest is taken seriously because it is one of the core objectives of foreign policy. The study adopted chronological and explorative research design . Findings from the study clearly revealed that although scholars argued that the concept is ambiguous but agreed to a large extent that national interest refers to the interests that are crucial to states and are encapsulated in socio economic development, political stability, geographical factors, as well as historical ties. The study recommends that the scholars of international relations should provide an explicit definition of national interest, while government functionaries should give precedence to national interest by paying attention to the welfare of their citizens.

**Keywords:** National Interest, Africa, Foreign Policy, Nigeria, Decision making, government.

## INTRODUCTION

The importance of national interest in foreign policy making in Nigeria cannot be undervalued especially when we consider its relevance by state and non actors in the study of International Relations. However, the concept lacks clarity because of differing perceptions of it, sometimes political leaders describe it to justify their actions. National interest is considered paramount to nations because it is considered the foremost interest states seek to uphold in their relations with one another. The concept is vague and lacks a clear definition because what constitutes national interest for one state differs from the other and sometimes, Political leaders vindicate their actions of protecting their national interest irrespective of how offensive these actions may be to the citizens of other nations. (Obasogie,2024)

National interest is fundamental in foreign policy making because, it describe, explain, predict, or prescribe international behavior. Throughout history, individuals of high profile and groups have appealed to the national interest to justify the policies they preferred. Alcibiades. ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wik/mark\\_cartwright](http://en.wikipedia.org/wik/mark_cartwright)) who was an Athenian statesman, a general, a strategic advisor and a military commander, claimed he was acting in the interest of ancient Athens when he recommended the Sicilian expedition during the Peloponnesian War. Napoleon acted in French national interest when he launched the disastrous Russian campaign and sought to conquer Europe. Hitler vindicated his multifront war invoking a mindless execution of about six million Jews In the name of national interest. ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wik/mark\\_cartwright](http://en.wikipedia.org/wik/mark_cartwright))

The obscurities that surrounds the concept of national interest makes it difficult to understand what it actually means , different analysts in Nigeria as well as other sophisticated nations in the world provides divergent opinions about how national interest should be determined. Some scholars believe that any policy that enhances a state's economic position is deemed as being the national interest. Others perceive it as improving a nation's balance of trade, strengthening the industrial base, or guaranteeing access to mineral resources as national interest. (Akinyemi, 2006). While some political leaders indicates that several factors determine foreign policy inclusive of economic factors. The inclusion of economic well-being as a core area of national interest is common to all nations in the world, but generally, third-world countries prioritize socio economic development than developed nations. Nigeria leaders since the realization of flag independence in 1960 have sought various ways to promote their foreign policy objectives by giving preference to national interest especially in their relations with other contries but to what extent have the leaders been able to accomplish this purpose. Again the relationship between national interest and foreign policy making is also crucial to states' survival because every states wants to survive while pursuing her national intreast (Akinyemi, 2006) Has Nigeria been able to achieve socio economic development geared towards the welfare of their citizens since the attainment of independence? How viable is the four concentric circle of Nigeria's foreign policy? These are some of the questions this paper hopes to explore.

### **Concentric circle in Nigeria' Foreign Policy.**

National interest is vital to nations in the world because it helps nations to be councious of how to protect the interest of their citizen. Nigeria has continued to play an active role in her dealings with other nations in the world. The four concentric circle of Nigeria relvoves around safeguarding its territorial integrity, promoting economic growth and development and ensuring the welfare of her citizens, this can be integrated as one of the definitions of national interest. Nigeria's relations with West Africa countries especially in the area of economic development is also important when addressing the issue that bothers on national interest. The nations in her relation with West Africancountries builds stability, regional

cooperation as well as regional integration with other countries. National interest also focus on the promotion of peace, development and cooperation amongst the people of Africa while Nigeria engagement with the rest of the world, including international organizations such as the United Nations also helps in the promotion of the nation's image and integrity. Therefore in the promotion of Nigeria;s national interest, the promotion of economic growth and development, values, regional integration and cooperation are all embedded in the promotion of national interest. The concentric circle of Nigeria's foreign policy has not been effective due to some factors such as corruption on the parts of political leaders, nepotism, tribalism, iack of accountability, dishonesty and bad governance. These have adversely affected the image of the nation in the eyes of the international community.

### **Foreign Policy: Conceptual Clarification**

Foreign policy is a crucial aspect of International Relations that seeks to explore how a state acts and interacts with other states and non-state actors in the international arena. These interactions are based on socio-economic development, political stability, geographical and historical ties among states in the international system. Foreign policy is an important aspect of international relations that seeks to explore how a state interacts with other states and non state actors in the international system.( Garrison, Kaarbo, Foyle, Schafer & Stern, 2003). Several factors influences a nation's foreign policies, this can be internal or external factors depending on the political history of the nation, culture, and geographical factor, domestic political consideration and public opinion can also influence foreign policy making.(Csurgai,2021).

### **Statement of the Problem**

The concept of national interest has been misconstrued and treated with levity in the politics of the Nigerian state. The pursuit of a vibrant foreign policy is impossible without consideration of national interest. National interest is supposed to bring national progress to every citizen in the nation. National interest sums up economic, political, cultural, security to mention but a few. What is seen today is the fractionalization of elites and group grivences. Some of the problems currently going on in Nigeria include, high inflation, fuel protest, food insecurity etc. (Ottoh,2007). This further explains why there are so many conflicts in Nigeria, since the creation of the Nigeria states, the leadership has been dysfunctional to permit national integration that will foster a robust domestic interest which is the foundational layer of the 4 concentric circle of Nigeria's foreign policy.

### **Research Objectives**

To respond to the above research questions, some objectives have been formulated as stated below

1. To investigate why the concept of national interest is important in the discourse of concentric circle in foreign policy.
2. To ascertain if Nigeria has successfully defined her national interest.
3. To explore ways Nigeria can promote her national interest in Africa

### **Research Questions**

1. Why is the concept of national interest is important in the discourse of concentric circle in foreign policy.
2. Has Nigeria successfully defined its national interest?
3. Has Nigeria been able to promote her national interest in Africa?

### **Methodology**

This paper adopted a chronological and explorative research design. The secondary source of data collection was adopted in the study. Journals and textbooks were consulted in the course of carrying out this research.

### **Literature Review**

Several texts have highlighted the significance of national interest in the study of international relations. Adeniran (2007) perceived national interest as that interest that is paramount to a state ranging from the political, economic, and socio-cultural interest that citizens benefit from their government. Akinyemi (2006) and Akinboye described the concept of national interest as ambiguous and stated that political leaders often invoke the concepts to justify their actions. Leaders often invoke it repeatedly to justify actions ranging from the most vital to the most trivial. In human history, individuals and groups have appealed to the national interest to justify the policies they preferred.

Alcibiades stated that he was acting in the interest of ancient Athens when he endorsed the Sicilian expedition during the Peloponnesian War. ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wik/mark\\_cartwright](http://en.wikipedia.org/wik/mark_cartwright)) Ani (2013) stated that there is a connectivity between foreign policy and national interest and advised the government to take the issue of national interest seriously. Asobie (2002) also stated explicitly the importance of diplomacy and foreign policy when addressing the issue of national interest in Nigeria.

Folarin (2010) believes that national leaders should be proactive when addressing the issues bothering national interest. What this means is that leaders should take action on issues that would improve the political situation, economic, and social well-being, health, and culture of the people as well as their political survival. They are urged to take action that will improve the lives of the people rather than pursue policies that will subject the people to domination by other countries. Policies which are likely to make them unable to stand among other nations' national interest is paramount to the survival of citizens of nations.

Hassan (2010) in his work on Diplomacy, Governance, and International Relations provided a more elaborate definition of national interest when he reiterated that there exists connectivity between diplomacy and national interest when addressing the issue of governance in the country. The concept refers to the vision of the good life, some ideal set of goals that the state would like to realize. The target goal could be a long-term objective such as the unification of the state into a nation or its rapid economic and technological development. The operational level has to do with the total of interest and policies pursued by a particular state while the last level which is the polemic. National interest refers to the use of concepts in political arguments in real-life situations to explain, evaluate, rationalize, or criticize international behaviour.

Ibrahim (2014) in his work on National Interest and Foreign Policy Options for Nigeria in the Central African Sub-region believes that leaders in Africa vigorously pursue and protect the national interest of the citizens in their countries. However, in contemporary times one can observe that the whole notion of national interest has been jettisoned by political leaders or actors who sit in the helms of affairs. Nigeria is a typical example of a nation that seems to have lost direction in this regards. Since the attainment of flag independence in 1960, the government of Nigeria has oscillated from one policy to the other. Nigeria's government has initiated policies and road maps for national development. However, Policies such as the War Against Indiscipline (WAI), Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), and The Seven Point Agenda did not live to see the light of the day after the transition of power from one government to the other. Admittedly, these policies were domestic policies but they had implications in the area of the nation's foreign policy thrust.

Scholars have reflected on the concept of national interest and believe that when people sometimes assert that a state policy should reflect the national interest, what they have

in mind essentially is that they desire to see the makers of national policy rise above the narrow and special economic interest of parts of the nations to focus their attention on the more inclusive interest of the nation. The interest of the nation is paramount to the interest of elites that are sectional and discriminative; therefore the Government should be responsible in the area of protecting the national interest of the entire nation (Nwanolue, 2015; Lukpata, 2013).

Foreign Policy is also very paramount to states in the pursuit of their respective national interest. In the pursuit of national interest and foreign policy decision-making, national leaders are expected to make rational decisions for the well-being of their citizens. When rational and informed decisions are made by the leaders of states, there is bound to be progress for the collectivity of the people. Also, when wrong decisions are made, it invariably affects the progress of a state. Specific Foreign policy objectives guide nations in trade relations, diplomacy, and international economic relations. In the contemporary period, a tree does not make a forest therefore nations need to engage in foreign relations with one another to foster their economic as well as political progress. ( Ibrahim, 2014)

Furthermore, the need to make rational decisions in the furtherance of foreign policymaking is paramount to the overall progress of a state in their interaction with one another. Rational decision-making in the area of foreign policy is important to the progress of a state in its interaction with other states. Nigeria has made blunders in the area of policy-making in the military era. In a democratic setting, the need to make more vibrant policies has become very essential. One of the examples of the blunder recorded was the impunity exhibited by Abacha's regime which led to the excommunicated of Nigeria from the commonwealth of nations. (<http://www.academia.edu/27155226>)

### **Theoretical Framework**

The socio-economic development model was adopted because of the importance of this theory to the research topic under investigation. Socio-economic development focus on the process by which societies improve their economic, social and political well-being of the citizens in the society. It encompasses various aspects of development such as economic growth, the eradication of poverty, quality education, quality health care , good governance etc.

In the discourse of national interest and concentric circle in Nigeria's foreign policy, it is imperative for the leaders of Nigeria to put in place policies and programmes that will promote socio-economic development. Nigeria leaders needs to make meaningful contribution to the development of the country by providing the basic amenities for their citizens, democratic values should be given credence and national interest should not just be a mere theoretical concept but a practical reality in the lives of the citizens.

### **The Role of Nigeria Government in the Formulation and Interpretation of National Interest and Foreign Policy Objectives**

Since the fulfillment of Nigeria's independence various presidents have made considerable efforts to pilot the affairs of the nation, the determinants of Nigeria's foreign policy have been anchored on economic and political stability, however, the nation has also experienced incessant conflicts as a result of some challenges, some of these challenges can include bad governance, economic backwardness, religious conflicts, ethnicity issues, nepotism and corruption, etc. (Ani, 2013)

The national interest of Nigeria is equivocal and not pursued like the advanced nations of the world. Nigeria from the inception of the first republic to the fourth republic has not experienced any significant progress in the pursuit of her foreign policy objectives. The military regimes especially in the era of late President Sanni Abacha practiced dictatorship and for the first time, Nigeria was excommunicated from the Commonwealth of Nations. Democracy was supposed to offer hope and relief to Nigerians, but with the trend of events happening in Nigeria, democratic leaders have created more havocs than the military in a democratic setting, in a democratic setting things are not better either. The reality is that democracy has failed according to EIU's Democracy index report of 2023, democracy in Africa is replete with conflicts and other social vices which has hindered socio-economic development.

### **Discussion and Analysis**

The discussion of this paper focused on assessment of national interest in foreign policy making in Africa : Nigeria as a case study .The problems identified in the study are lack of socio-economic development as manifest in the lives of the citizens, for example Nigeria has lost a lot of citizens as a result of bad governance, terrorism, kidnapping etc. leadership incompetence and inconsiderateness are also some of the predicaments that have affected national interest which has negative implication on the nation, What is evident in Nigeria today is the egoistic and self-centeredness of political leaders who do not care about the welfare of their citizens.

When huge capital is borrowed from great financial institutions such as International Monetary Fund and World Bank, such funds are not used judiciously to promote and project the development of the country they are lavished by politicians for their selfish interests against the national interest. It is amazing how politicians steal public funds, use exotic cars, and live in affluence while their citizens live in abject poverty. In Nigeria the image of the nation is vilified and censured, these misdemeanors displayed by political leaders have created a lacuna between the elites and the impoverished citizens of the Nigerian state. In response to the research questions earlier presented in this study which are as follows: why is the concept of national interest ambiguous?

The study revealed that what constitutes national interest for nations differs from one another hence there is no universal definition of the concept. To the second question which is has Nigeria successfully defined her national interest? The study revealed that since the first republic, Nigeria has been able to define the concept in theory, however in practice, the leaders have not been able to project and promote the objectives as stated in the constitution. And to the third question, is there a relationship between national interest and foreign policy making? The study revealed that there is a relationship between national interest and foreign policy making.

### **Summary**

The study explained the assessment of national interest in foreign policy making: Nigeria as a focal point. The researcher found out that Nigerian leaders have not been able to project their national interests properly in the pursuit of foreign policy objectives. Nigeria elites often use the term national interest to promote their selfish interests. More also, Nigeria leaders have only done a little in the promotion of effective management of external relations with other countries in the world. There is a group grievance against the state on how state institutions and foreign policy have negated democratic values. It is there incumbent on the writer to recommend the promotion of democratization, which encourage proper accountability, resource governance, transparency and rule of law.

### **Recommendations**

Some recommendations have been provided as follows

1. The four concentric circle of Nigeria;s foreign policy should reflect in the socio-economic development of Nigeria
2. The government of Nigeria should create more policies geared towards growth and development
3. There should be uniformity of purpose by Nigerian leaders in foreign policy decision-making
4. The Nigeria government should help to promote regional integration in the Africa subregion.
5. The government of Nigeria should embrace good and inclusive governance in addressing the needs of the citizens of the country.

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