



A Critical Appraisal of National Interest and Nigeria's Foreign Policy

Abstract

National interest is the guiding principle towards the formulation execution of effective foreign policy. However, in the case of Nigeria, there are external and internal factors that posed as hinderances to the effectiveness of national interest in the pursuit of the nation's foreign policy objectives. This study investigated national interest and Nigeria's foreign policy using concentric theory of international relations. Questioning and interview were administered to the chosen population and responses were derived, which gave credibility and validity to the research. The quantitative data generated from questionnaires were presented in chart and analyzed using Microsoft excel statistical tool, whereas data generated from interview were at first transcribed and analyzed thematically. The findings of the study revealed that National interest played a crucial role in the pursuit of Nigeria's foreign policy as well as in the nations engagement with foreign government and international organizations in advancing Nigeria's foreign policy goals. the study recommended that Nigeria government should endeavor to diversify its economy in order to generate more revenue that can be used in addressing the challenge of insufficient/poor funding of diplomatic mission.

Keywords: National interest, Foreign. policy, Diplomacy, External/Internal Factors, International Relations.

Tanko Adnan Tanko

Faculty of Social Science
Department of Pollical Science
Nassarawa State University Keffi.

Prof, Bello Muhammad B.

Faculty of Social Science
Department of Pollical Science
Nassarawa State University Keffi.

Assc Prof, Ruth Caleb

Faculty of Social Science
Department of Pollical Science.
Nassarawa State University, Keffi.

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-8505-2524>

Corresponding Author's Email:
adnantankoadnan@yahoo.com

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Introduction

The historical antecedent of Nigeria's foreign policy owes much to the vision of Alhaji Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa. Nigeria's first Prime Minister and Head of Government from October 1960 to January 1966, and can be located in his famous speeches during the pre and post-independent periods. The objectives of Nigeria Foreign Policy are

enshrined in Chapter two, section 19 of the 1999 constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria under the rubric of fundamental objectives and directive principle of state policy (Lawal & Aluko, 2019).

Nigeria's political leaders believe that committing Nigeria to a foreign policy that encourages and promotes peace, security and development in the West

African sub-region would enhance her national interest. Thus, Nigeria's national interest of domestic peace and regional responsibilities placed heavy commitment on that. This corroborates Wale & Prey's (2020) position that "Nigeria's strategic location, national interest, assumed responsibilities and status in West Africa informed its commitment to regional politics."

Nigeria is a major player in the world of diplomacy as the most populous black nation in the world with diverse natural and material endowments. The country is saddled with enormous international responsibilities, not only in Africa where it is a continental leader, but its diplomacy is also connected to every corner of the world (Oshewolo, 2019). To facilitate its relations with the rest of the world, Nigeria has established several foreign missions. These missions have steadily increased over the years. For illustrative purposes, as a result of the oil boom in the 1970s, Nigeria's missions abroad expanded greatly. This was done to give effect to the country's hegemonic status in Africa and accelerate its level of development (Saliu, 2018). According to Oshewolo (2020), while in 1970 Nigeria had only 46 diplomatic missions abroad, by 1975, the number of missions had increased considerably to around 80. Now, the country has over 100 missions abroad (Saliu, 2018).

There is a consensus that there are five core values or ingredients that constitute what can be seen as Nigeria's vital interests. These are "self-preservation or survival, security, economic well-being or prosperity,

prestige or honour and peace" (Eminue, 2013:76). Self-preservation or survival is the most fundamental ingredient of any nation's national interest. Self-preservation or survival includes the need for internal unity and political stability. "The preservation of the nation as a political unit is considered the sine qua non of a nation's foreign policy and therefore, a paramount consideration because, without that imperative of national survival, no other value, goal or objective can be realized" (Eminue 2018). Morgenthau described national interest as the "irreducible minimum" element of foreign policy states thus: The survival of a political unit, such as a nation, the determination of its content in concrete situation is relatively simple: for it encompasses the integrity of the nation's territory, of its political institution and of its culture. The survival of any nation is at stake whenever its territory is threatened with an imminent attack or is actually attacked. Any shift in the balance of power that favors a state's adversary may be seen as an indirect threat to that state's survival (Ebegbulem, 2019).

Certain factors that are basic influenced the shaping of Nigeria foreign policy and those products of factors that are internal and external to Nigeria. Among these factors, are the nature and structure of Nigerian economy and which is mono cultural and oil driven, geo-political location in West Africa, the nature of political leadership, military capability, population and domestic political situation in Nigeria (Kayode, 2016). These factors be it internal or external has to a large extent kept some commentators and analyst in a state of

dilemma as to whether Nigeria's foreign policy is conducted in line with the nation's national interest or not. Others sees Nigeria's national interest as inextricably linked to the selfish interest of the ruling class.

From the foregoing, this study argues that after viewing the relationship that exists between foreign policy and national interest, there are elements of national interest that appears constant in foreign policy, while there are others that may be contextual or may remain in the realm of ideals to be attained in the future.

It is against this background that this study is set out to investigate Nigeria's foreign policy and national interest

Research Questions

- i. What is the role of National interest in the pursuit of Nigeria's foreign policy?
- ii. How has Nigeria's national interest worked towards achieving the country's foreign policy objectives?

Research Objectives

The general objective of the study is to investigate national interest and Nigeria's foreign policy, whereas as the specific objectives are to:

- i. Examine the role of National interest in the pursuit of Nigeria's foreign policy
- ii. Examine how Nigeria's national interest worked towards achieving the country's foreign policy objectives

Theoretical Framework.

Concentric Circle Theory

Concentric circle theory was initially propounded by a Sociologist Ernest Burgess in 1925 when it was used to provide an insight into the organization of urban social structures (Burgess, 1925). However, in the Nigerian context, it was Former Nigerian Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Ibrahim Gambari that employed the theory to regulate Nigerian foreign policy thrust when he served as External Affairs Minister under Buhari/Idiagbon regime between 1984 and 1985 (Benjamin 2014). So, according to Gambari, the Nigerian Foreign policy will thrive well if concerted efforts were made by scholars and policy makers alike to develop the segment approach to Nigerian foreign policy conduct. This he believed will help to protect and promote the country's national interest. By concentricism, Gambari upheld the value that Nigerian national interest should take priority over other interests, such that Citizens' welfare would come first followed by West Africa Sub region, then Africa, then the extant world.

The "concentric circles" model of Agboola Gambari in (1989) provide a framework which established the fundamental role of the domestic environment in the evolution and development of a nation's foreign policy. The domestic being the innermost circle of Nigerian foreign policy, also has other critical elements which include security, ethnic, economics and political challenges as the domestic environment poses limitations to the realisation of the nation's effectiveness in foreign affairs.

The innermost circle indicates Nigeria's own security, independence and prosperity are centered on its immediate neighbor. Benin, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger while the second circle revolves around Nigeria with West Africans countries at large in regional development, the third circle focuses on continental Africa, on issues of peace, development, human rights, democratisation, good governance, integration, while the fourth circle involves or relates with international organizations in the world on bilateral and multilateral matters (Omotere, et al 2011).

Methods of Data Collection

Data for this research was collected using both primary and secondary method of data collection.

Primary Sources of Data

Primary data were gathered through the administration of structured and closed-ended questionnaire instrument, using Likert Scale method. The questionnaire consists of part A, B, C and D. Part A comprise of the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents' section whereas the part B, C, and D of the questionnaire contained questions generated from the research questions for the sole purpose of achieving the research objectives. A total of 271 questionnaires were administered.

On the other hand, open ended interview guide was designed to elicit complementary information. These methods were used to gather information from 12 KII who are officials/staff of the above-named organizations.

Secondary Sources of Data

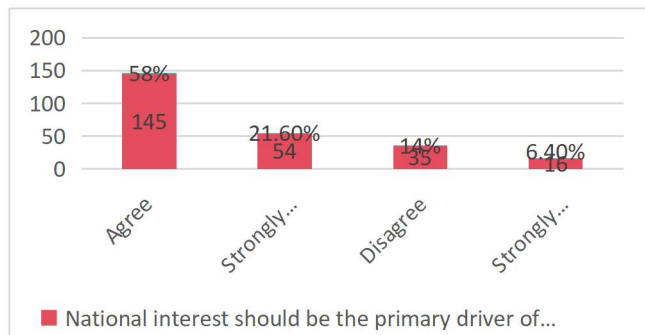
The sources for gathering secondary data in this research includes relevant journals of security studies, counterinsurgency, bilateral relations among others and text books. Furthermore, library search, lectures, seminar papers, NIPSS publications, policy papers, newspapers, news magazines and Internet sources also form part of the secondary sources of data collection.

Data Presentation and Analysis

The survey design involved the gathering of data from primary sources through questionnaire and KII. The analysis of data was conducted utilizing simple frequency analysis. This technique was adopted due to its precise and unambiguous nature. The data collected were presented in tables and charts to provide graphical aid to the interpretations of results obtained. The findings of the field survey are buttressed with the data from secondary sources as highlighted in previous chapters of this research.

The study administered questionnaire to sampled population. A total number of 271 copies of questionnaire were administered across all strata of the sampled population, out of which 250 were retrieved, representing 92 per cent response rate, while 21 copies of the questionnaire were not returned representing 8% per cent. With this response rate, it can be assumed that the administration of questionnaire has covered to a large extent, the scope that can provide the required assessment.

Figure 1: Assessing Whether National Interest Should be The Primary Driver of Nigeria's Foreign Policy Decisions.



Respondents were asked to assess whether or not national interest should be the primary driver of Nigeria's foreign policy decisions.

Figure 2: Assessment of National Interest Should be The Primary Driver of Nigeria's Foreign Policy Decisions.

The analysis in Figure 1 shows that majority of respondents cumulatively ranking 199 (79.6 per cent) respondents assessed the national interest should be the primary driver of Nigeria's foreign policy decisions and considered it to be significant contributor. Only 20.4 per cent of respondents cumulatively opined that national interest should not be the primary driver of Nigeria's foreign policy decisions.

It could be surmised from the analysis that the national interest should be the primary driver to the formulation and implementation of a nation's foreign policy. Hence, the need for Nigeria to always put its national interest in consideration when formulating the foreign policy in order to achieve the nation's foreign policy objectives.

Figure 2: Ascertaining whether Nigeria's National Interest has played a Significant Role in Shaping and Guiding the Country's Foreign Policy Decisions.

Another question posed to the respondents was to ascertain whether or not Nigeria's national interest has played a significant role in shaping and guiding the country's foreign policy decisions.

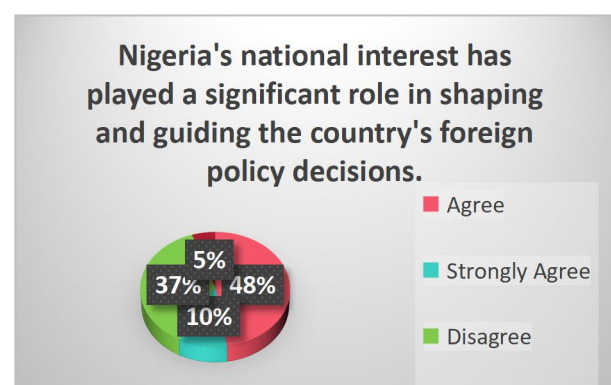


Figure Respondents view on whether Nigeria's National Interest has played a Significant Role in Shaping and Guiding the Country's Foreign Policy Decisions.

Figure 2: above depicts that, 145 respondents representing 58 per cent cumulatively opined that the Nigeria's national interest has played a significant role in shaping and guiding the country's foreign policy decisions. In addition, 37 per cent and 5 per cent of respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed that Nigeria's national interest has played a significant role in shaping and guiding the country's foreign policy decisions.

It is, therefore, imperative for the Nigerian government and stakeholders involved in foreign policy making and

diplomatic practice to ensure that their actions and inactions are in tandem with the ideal national interests and foreign policy objectives of the nation as enshrined in the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as amended 2011.

Figure 3: Ascertaining whether or not Nigeria's National Interest Has Played a Significant Role in Guiding and Shaping the Country's Foreign Policy Decisions.



Respondents were asked to ascertain whether or not Nigeria's national interest has played a significant role in guiding and shaping the country's foreign policy decisions.

Figure 3: Respondents view on Whether Nigeria's National Interest Has Played a Significant Role in Guiding and Shaping the Country's Foreign Policy Decisions.

The analysis on Figure 5: above shows that majority of the respondents cumulatively 50.4 per cent concur to the fact that Nigeria's national interest has played a significant role in guiding and shaping the country's foreign policy decisions, whereas, 49.6 per cent

cumulatively disagreed with the posed question.

In line with the forgoing analysis, a Director from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Abuja (20/12/23) submitted that Nigeria's national interest has played a significant role in guiding and shaping the country's foreign policy decisions. National interest provides a framework for identifying and prioritizing the objectives and concerns that are crucial for Nigeria's development, security, and well-being. It helps in determining the focus areas, strategic partnerships, and diplomatic engagements that align with our national priorities. By considering our national interest, we can make informed and strategic decisions that promote Nigeria's regional and global influence, protect our citizens abroad, attract foreign investment, and contribute to international peace and stability.

Discussion of Findings

The study unveiled that national interest played a crucial role in the pursuit of Nigeria's foreign policy as well as in the nation's engagement with foreign governments and international organizations to advance Nigeria's foreign policy goals as well as promotion of economic interests and attracting foreign investments. In corroborating the findings of the research, it was alluded that the emphasis of national interest and foreign policy is now on investment and economic cooperation.

The study established that Nigeria's national interest has played a significant role in shaping and guiding the country's foreign policy decisions in the sense that

the national interest of the nation align with its foreign policy objectives. Furthermore, it was observed that there is a consensus that there are five core values or ingredients that constitute what can be seen as Nigeria's national interests. These are "self-preservation or survival, security, economic well-being or prosperity, prestige or honour and peace.

From the foregoing, this study argues that after viewing the relationship that exists between foreign policy and national interest, there are elements of national interest that appear constant in foreign policy, while there are others that may be contextual or may remain in the realm of ideals to be attained in the future. It can be said that, as a matter of fact, Nigeria's national interest, within the framework of its foreign policy, has to a large extent aided the country by giving it a sense of direction and bearing in its pursuit of foreign policy.

Finally, even though the foundation of a rational foreign policy is beset with difficulties, a state must have some clear conception of the policy goals it desires to achieve in her interaction with other states in the international community. The first task in foreign policy formulation therefore, must be to identify the goals (national interests) to be achieved.

Conclusion

Since independence, Nigeria have been involved in foreign relations through balancing and rebalancing of negotiations with countries of the world. Sometimes it requires persuasion and inducement strategies to pursue the foreign policy objectives in line with the

national interest. The foreign policy of Nigeria is specially established and saddled with the onus responsibility of promoting the external image of the nation as well as promote and pursue with all rigor the foreign policy objectives of the nation.

No doubt, Nigeria's national interest has to a large extent been actively involved in shaping and guiding the execution of the foreign policy objectives, however, there are myriads of internal and external hurdles that posed hindrance to the effectiveness of the national interest in the pursuit of the nation's foreign policy goals. These challenges ranges from poor funding of the diplomatic mission to appointment of unqualified diplomats to represent the nation as well as influence of superpowers and strong economies who directly or indirectly influence the foreign policy objectives.

By and large the diplomatic skills of Africa and indeed Nigeria are tested mostly during periods of conflicts and threats to regional security which form part of the foreign policy objectives of the Nigeria. The study made some recommendations to improve the situations around the challenges militating against the successes of Nigeria's foreign policy on the basis of national interest in ensuring the actualization of the nation's foreign policy objectives.

Recommendations

- i. Nigerian government should endeavor to diversify its economy in order to generate more revenue that can be used to

- address the challenge of insufficient/poor funding of the diplomatic mission so as to enable the diplomats discharge their duties efficiently and effectively in line with the nation's national interest.
- ii. The Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs should device an effective foreign policy measures that can be used in the pursuit of the foreign policy objectives of the country on the basis of national interest.
 - iii. Appointment into the position of diplomat should be done within the career diplomats rather than political appointees in order to ensure that the best are selected to represent and pursue the foreign policy objectives of the nation which will be tied to the national interest of the country.

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