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## Nigeria's Foreign Policy and Codification of National Interest: A Prescriptive Analysis

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**Abstract:** Nigeria has an ambitious foreign policy but an ambiguous, unscripted, not well defined and inconsistent national interest. Aside the fact that this is not good for a country that pursues an ambitious external agenda and incongruent with its stature in global politics; it also makes the concept and reality of national interest susceptible to personalized interpretations, manipulations and distortions by the different political regimes. In other words, national interest becomes different strokes for different folks, depending on how each perceives and wishes it. Like every other sovereign country of the world, Nigeria's national interests have been largely determined and defined by the various leaderships that have over the years ruled the country. This paper builds its argument on the premise that a country's national interest is pivotal to its foreign policy and national development. Using the National Interest Theory (NRT) for a historical-descriptive discourse, the underlying issues found include the fact that in the case of Nigeria, as vital as the concept is both to the existence of a nation and as a source for the analysis of foreign policy behaviour of states, national interest has been subject to exploitation. Successive leadership of the country has hidden under the cover of national interest to perpetuate their individual interests. The probability for carrying out such acts is very high because Nigeria's national interest lacks proper codification and documentation. This paper thus makes a case for the codification and documentation of Nigeria's national interest. It does not suggest what the "interests" should be, but argues for intelligible national interest for direction, focus and attention to topmost priorities in the country's external relations.

**Keywords:** *Foreign Policy, National Interest, Codification*

### Introduction

In their relationship with other states and as a major actor in international politics, states identify and pursue definite national interest with the overall objective of national development (Folarin, 2010; Morgenthau, 1989). For states with

long-term objective to be a world power, as Nigeria, it should not only have clearly stated national roles and national interest, they must also be able to have a tangible document of what the roles, interests and objectives are, that point direction to the strategies and acts of the states

per time. Ambitious states, who are also the world powers, such as the United States, Britain, France, Russia and China, among others, have documents embodying their national interests in global politics. Their interests are codified and are known by any political group, party and the populace at any point in time.

It is strongly held an opinion that Nigeria deserves to tow this line, because of its monumental roles and actions in Africa and the world, as well as in view of its ambitious foreign policy. This paper thus, attempts to make a case for the articulation, identification, prioritization and codification of Nigeria's national interest for the purpose of a more robust, intelligible and definite platform for foreign policy pursuit and realization.

### **The Problem**

Globally, it has been identified that countries design and execute foreign policies in order to guide their external relations as well as promote, protect and defend their fundamental national interests. These include: defence of territorial integrity, promotion of economic, military, diplomatic and strategic interests and all that a country considers as fundamental to its national interest (Folarin, 2014). Therefore, it is expected that Nigeria's foreign policy ought to be fundamentally guided by its national interest, which ordinarily should serve to either validate or deny the nation's action or inaction in the international

system. As Nigeria became a sovereign state in 1960, the country has engaged in ambitious foreign policy that has seen her part away with large numbers of human resources and huge amount of economic resources, with little or nothing to show for this expensive diplomatic generosity. This has become worrisome to scholars and stakeholders within the country. To them, Nigeria operates a "Father Christmas style" of foreign policy, which has contributed immensely to the economic doom of the nation.

Ade-Ibijola (2013), noting the words of retired Brigadier Olagunsoye Oyinlola on the amount expended by Nigeria on extending largesse to the external context, which underscores the problem associated with indefinite and unintelligible national interest, , affirms that "Nigeria has spent 10 billion dollars since independence on peace-building around the world. It would have been more profitable to humanity if such funds were channelled to human and societal development."

Flowing from this standpoint is that it is obvious that Nigeria has suffered misplaced priorities owing to non-codified and documented national interest. Otherwise, how explicable is it that a country with numerous social and infrastructural laybacks and without internal peace or stability could spend such amount money on the peacekeeping and peacemaking of other nations? Nigeria is a country where more than two-third of its population

lives below poverty line of one US dollar per day (Ade-Ibijola, 2013:571). The national interest in a nation's foreign policy should dwell squarely on the welfare of the people of that country, towards the promotion and protection of the economic well-being of the people. To say the least, it is irresponsible of a country in a competitive international political system and for a giant of Africa- self- declared or popularly acclaimed- not to have clearly defined and tangible national interest. Nigeria has not had one beside the five-point agenda scribbled down in the 1999 Constitution as its foreign policy objectives. This is grossly inadequate for a country that has led the continent for about 50 years and that continues to pursue an ambitious foreign policy.

In the light of the above, this paper basically explores literature on Nigeria's foreign policy and its national interest and argues for its codification and documentation in view of international best practices among major players in world politics. Attempts are made to clarify some concepts that are fundamental to this discourse. These include national interest and foreign policy, while also discussing the different perspectives to the concept of national interest.

### **Conceptual Analysis**

#### ***Foreign Policy***

There is no generally acceptable definition for the concept of foreign policy. This is because of the

countless definitions by various international relations scholars. Hence, in Aluko's words (1981), nobody has really formulated a universally acceptable definition of the concept and the probability of someone doing so is very slim.

Irrespective of its countless definitions, this paper intends to view few definitions of foreign policy. Folarin (2014) likens foreign policy to a "wedding ring" with which the domestic context of a nation solemnizes its union with the international community. Northedge (1968:9) sees foreign policy as the use of political influence in order to induce other states to exercise their law-making power in a manner desired by the states concerned. It is an interaction between forces originating outside the country's borders and those working within them (cited in Oviasogie and Shodipo, 2013). Put differently, foreign policy is an interplay between the inside and the outside of a state. In line with the above definition is that of Akinboye (1999), who defines foreign policy as a dynamic process involving interaction between the domestic and the external environments. On the other hand, Morgenthau (1989) ties the goals of a nation's foreign policy to what he calls national interest, which is a guide to the formulation of foreign policy. In sum and from the numerous definitions of foreign policy given above, one could state generally, that, foreign policy represents an attitude of the state

towards the international environment. This is to say that, the state takes into consideration, not only its own objectives, interests, aspirations and problems, but also those of other states. This therefore suggests that, no nation can have a true guide as to what it must do and what it needs to do in foreign policy without accepting national interest as a guide.

### ***National Interest***

The concept of national interest has been defined differently by different scholars of foreign policy analysis. Against this background, the concept is a controversial one that lacks a universally acceptable definition. Rosati (2006) contends with the view of the possibility of having anything being referred to as “national” in view of the multitude of prevailing personal, group, class, sectional and public interest in a state. This is because there is no definitive measure for the streamlining of all these conflicting concepts to a “nation-al” interest (Rosati, 2006 cited in Folarin, 2014:38).

According to Marchall (1994), interests refer to whatever contributes to the general well-being or fulfillment of a purpose, of an individual. Thomas Hobbes on the other hand, equates interest with self-preservation, a view embedded in a philosophy founded on a materialist view of human nature. According to this view; self-preservation is the underlying motivation of all human actions in relation to other human beings.

Different scholars therefore have various perceptions of the concept in line with their understanding of the subject-matter. Implicit in various attempts is the problematic issue of determining who actually determines national interest. Is it the leadership or the citizens of the nation? The leadership has the responsibility of protecting the people as well as providing them the good life and controlling the affairs of the state for positive change; while the citizens of the country are directly affected either positively or negatively by the drive of the country’s national interest. Hence, the national interest of a state aims at promoting the national development, and by extension image, prestige and respect both at home and abroad.

Ake (cited in Echikwonye, n.d) identifies what constitutes the core of national interest to include: national security, political independence, territorial integrity, promotion of economic interests of the nation and world peace. Inherent in the above perception is the passionate desire by nations to secure and maintain political independence, secure its territory and project its economic interest to enhance the standard of living of its citizens and the maintenance of national integrity, territorial integrity and self-respect. National interest can therefore be viewed as the ideal goals upon which the domestic and foreign policies of a state are hinged (Rosati, 2006). The concept of national interest therefore,

has continued to play a significant role in the foreign policies of a sovereign state. A state's foreign policy is not operated in a vacuum. The main policy instrument in the conduct of foreign policy is invariably the promotion and pursuit of national interest. Thus, national interest can further be illustrated to mean the totality or the aggregate of interests of individuals and groups within a given nation-state (Folarin, 2014; Asobie, 2007; Atim, 2006).

Viewed from its classical sense, national interest encompasses the various strategies employed in the international interactions of states in order to ensure the preservation of the stated goals of society. Generally therefore, national interest is a channel to the formulation of foreign policy. It is not an end in itself, but a means to an end (Sklenka, 2007).

#### **Theoretical Analysis: National Interest Theory (NRT)**

The National Interest Theory (NRT) naturally fits into the discourse here. NRT is as old as classical and modern discussions on the primacy of the objectives, will and aspirations of the state as driving force in international politics (Machiavelli, 2012; Thompson, 1960; Morgenthau, 1989; Clausewitz, 1873). Realists and constructivists more recently, have claimed that the national interest is a key explanatory tool in the analysis and understanding of foreign policy. This perspective is strengthened by the fact that all a state desires in international politics

is its betterment and that power, which is both an end in itself and a means to an end, is the primary interest of states. This is the central argument in realpolitik or power politics (the realist theory unmasking the underlying factor of state act as its own national good).

The pursuit of national interest and the primacy of national power are considered to be in the calculations of nations from the foundation of the realist school of International Relations. From Sun Tzu, Thucydides, Machiavelli, Clausewitz, Carr, to Morgenthau and Waltz, political realism celebrates national interest and holds that foremost in national role conception are pursuits of national interest and power, negating the moralistic and legalistic fusion into foreign policy by the idealists with the view to creating a utopian and impossible institutional framework on global scale.

This standpoint explains the central argument in this paper, that if national interest forms the bedrock of state action beyond its borders, then Nigeria requires not only a national interest-driven foreign policy, but also that the interests should be codified and documented. These become a guidebook for its leaders and foreign policymakers.

#### **Perspectives on National Interest**

There are three schools of thought on the concept of national interest. These are Realist, Behaviourist and the Marxist (Political Economy)

schools of thought (Eze, 2010:80; Echikwonye, n.d).

### **The Realist School**

There are at least two traditions within the realist school, namely, the power theories of Morgenthau and the eclectic tradition of Kennan. But for the purpose of this paper, focus will be on that of Morgenthau. For Morgenthau, (1989) the “objectives of foreign policy must be defined in terms of national interest, and should be supported with adequate power” as the case may be. In addition, he is of the opinion that the national interest of a state “can only be defined in terms of national security and the national security must be defined as “the integrity of the national territories and its institutions” (Morgenthau, 1989). Morgenthau strongly believes that a state would be irrational if it failed to pursue those concrete objectives dictated by national power. As a result of this, his tradition of the realist school rejects a moralistic approach to international politics. What this means is that, this tradition considers the core interests of the nation as relatively permanent because it has to do with the protection of the physical and cultural identities of the nation against encroachment by other nations.

### **The Behaviourist School**

This school of thought holds a different view from the realist’s on the meaning of national interest. For the behaviourists, the basic national

interests of all states are broadly similar, but only in the sense that the basic needs and wants of states centre on their security and welfare, the preservation of the political system and their national life-style (Echikwonye, n.d). Behaviourists reject the idea that national interest is a single objective or truth that prevails whether or not it is perceived by the members of the nation. The theorists also interpret the concept of national interest as a constantly changing “pluralistic set of subjective preferences” (Agreen, 2010). These preferences, according to them, change whenever the requirements and aspirations of the citizens change.

### **The Marxist School of Thought**

The Marxist school of thought, also referred to as class theory, rejects the conceptions of national interest proffered by both the realist and behaviourist theorists. The class theorists argue that defining national interest in terms of power, implies accepting the principles that might is right. It is an indirect way of giving legitimacy to the doctrine that the mighty has a right to rule the world- a rationalization of the domination of the world by states that are militarily powerful. It is a form of justification of the continued exploitation of the weaker states by the stronger ones. Therefore, power theories based on the realist notion of national interest should be rejected by all militarily weak states (Obajili and Obi, 2003).



Secondly, the class theorists further stress that defining national interests as decision-makers do, has the effect of deceitfully portraying the interests of a few as the interest of the majority or the whole nation which to a large extent is the general norm in most countries.

Thirdly, the use of the concept, national interest, in the way as defined by the realists and behaviourists, has the effect of blurring or obliterating the differences between the external behaviours of states with divergent class characteristics. Thus, the differences in the behaviour of capitalist and socialist states, industrialized and undeveloped economies, democratic and authoritarian regimes are masked by the theory that each category of states, or each state, is guided by its national interest (Mamadu, 2006). With the foregoing, and from the standpoint of the Marxist political economy, in every class society, national interest is another name for class interest. Whenever and whatever the phrase that national interest is used, it should be understood as the interest of the state. And the interest of the state is essentially, but not exclusively, the interest of the dominant class in that vital goal which the dominant class persistently pursues in relationship with other classes at home and abroad. It is that goal which is essential for the continued reproduction of the dominant class. In this sense, national interest is an

objective reality, which differs from the differences in the class character of the state (Mamadu, 2006).

Of the three schools of thought, the realist school aptly explains the central issue in this paper, namely, that the survival and preservation of a state are the primary objectives for going into international relations. For Nigeria therefore, its survival, preservation and security and well-being of its citizens-its national interest- should be its primary worries.

#### **An Overview of Nigeria's National Interest**

Nigeria's fundamental principles of foreign policy have been fairly consistent since they were first espoused shortly after independence in October 1960 (Ashiru, 2013). Nigeria's national interest, according to Olukoshi (1992) and Eze (2010) since independence in 1960 till date, has been very difficult to identify or define. This is because of the numerous diplomatic variations and beliefs adopted by Nigerians over the years. Research has shown that some foreign policy analysts believe that Nigeria has no clear-cut national interest. But it is interesting to note that like every other sovereign country of the world, Nigeria's national interests have been largely determined and defined by the various leaderships that have over the years ruled the country (Ashiru, 2013; Ade-Ibijola, 2013; Eze, 2010; Agreen, 2010) . From Tafawa Balewa's era, some of Nigeria's foreign policy goals have

included decolonization, pan-African solidarity, and world peace.

Another attempt was made to define Nigeria's foreign policy in the 1979 and 1999 Constitution, which includes promotion of African Unity as well as total political, economic, social and cultural liberation of Africa and other forms of international cooperation. Under Babaginda's regime, national interest was simply national security. Yet, in the "Workshop on Nigeria's National Interest and Values" held on April 15<sup>th</sup>, 1988, an attempt was made to define national interest again and finally, the 1999 Constitution and the Vision 2020 document also elaborated on what was meant by national interest in the context of foreign policy. The Vision 2020 document gave an overview of Nigeria's foreign policy, indicating its response to the changing dynamics of the global system.

Amid the countless efforts made at defining Nigeria's national Interest, the following broadly spell out what constitutes Nigeria's foreign policy objectives:

Promotion and protection of the national interest, promotion of African integration and support for African unity, promotion of international cooperation for the consolidation of universal peace and mutual respect among all nations and elimination in all its manifestations, respect for international law and treaty obligations as well as the

seeking of settlement of international disputes by negotiation, mediation, conciliation, arbitration and adjudication, and promotion of a just world order (Agreen 2010; and Eze, 2010).

Foreign policymakers may perceive Nigeria's foreign policy as bright and promising, but experience over the years has belied the failure of the policy in more recent times, to give the country and its people the degree of honour, respect and reverence it was known for and deserves. The question in most quarters today has been: what went wrong with the highly respected foreign policy? Could this be traceable to the serious systemic problem of the country's domestic policies? The Nigerian State has been described as having transited from the magnificent to the bizarre, in the way it angelic abroad and satanic at home (Ladipo-Soares, 2014; Agreen, 2010).

By virtue of its amazing resource endowments and population, Nigeria is naturally expected to shoulder Africa's economic and social burdens (Agreen, 2010). It is however more contended that in view of all its resources, should its people lack anything in terms social, physical and economic infrastructures? Interestingly, in most countries, Nigeria is represented by political appointees and party loyalists as diplomats, whose primary obligation is to the client and not the general or national interest. Hence, the manifestations of poor handling of external diplomacy,

inability to protect Nigerians abroad and the lack of understanding of what constitutes the national interest of Nigerians at home and abroad have made serious charges that Nigeria's foreign policy is designed basically to be generous to other nations. On a more serious note, there seems to be agreement among critics that Nigeria's foreign policy lacks nationalism. Generally, Nigerians do not even enjoy social welfare, and basic fundamental rights within the country. Yet, Nigeria spent billions of dollars to restore peace in Sierra Leone and Liberia without any concrete benefits economically, socially or politically to the country (Ade-Ibijola, 2013: 570). Instead, Nigeria displays a hearty profile of peace keeping experience, yet at home the word "peace" is far from being a reality.

However, Nigeria's false charity and penury at home are evidence that her world is full of pretenses. In reality, Nigeria, over the years has overstretched itself to maintain peace in other countries, while at home it is obvious that all is not well. This explains the social decadence, infrastructural backwardness, and growing insecurity that manifests in Boko Haram insurgency, militancy in the Niger Delta and incidences of high-profile kidnap. Nigerians in other African countries alone reportedly suffer rejection, deportation, brutalization and recrimination. For instance, there was the infamous case of the death of Master Amara Iwuchukwu Tochi

in Singapore, Malaysia. The eighteen-year old boy was arrested on November 27, 2004 at the Changi Airport for being in possession of capsules containing diamorphine. Unfortunately, he was sentenced to death by hanging after three (3) years of trial, precisely January, 2007. In spite of the several pleas for mercy from both international and local human rights group (UNOG, 2007), the Nigerian government only found it essential to act when the issue had gone sour. Amara's death, only buttresses what the Osaghae description of Nigeria as a crippled giant (Asobie, 2007).

Nigeria's noxious domestic policy environment has narrowed the menu of policy choices at the multilateral level (Ashiru, 2013). Nigeria is the sixth largest oil producer in OPEC, which is not commensurate with the comatose economic situation. Nigeria is characterized by severe insecurity issues, dilapidated economic and social infrastructure, and mass poverty which have triggered the forces of marginalization, ethnicity and corruption (Ashiru, 2013; Ade-ibijola, 2013: 570). The debate is that because of Nigeria's undivided focus on African issues, its foreign policy outside the continent of Africa is unclear and not anchored on principles that would bestow on Nigeria a healthy economic or political advantage. This foreign policy leaning has vitiated Nigeria's capacity to attract foreign investment

from trusted nations in the global context (Lukpata, 2013).

In the words of Lukpata (2013), clear indications show that, Nigeria has not effectively financed her foreign missions. This inclination may be attributed to politics of financing, it is appropriate to state that Nigeria's foreign policy is yet to boost sectorial legitimacy by adopting a proactive position in explaining the fundamental objectives to stakeholders in the Nigerian scheme. The so-called leadership appears not to have a defined role for her citizens in the Diaspora in terms of their participation in the economic, scientific and technological development of the nation. Invariably, the Diaspora intelligentsia has no role to play because the Nigerian leadership has not taken cogent steps to restrain the wave of brain-drain of the significant sector of the populace.

Recently, Nigeria's political economy was characterized by a combination of social insecurity caused by frequent eruption of violence, a fast declining economy and a deteriorating infrastructural base, all of which have culminated in instability and poor external image. Terrorism or counterterrorism has in more recent times, become a critical feature of Nigeria's diplomatic priorities. The basis of economic diplomacy has been the running of Nigeria's bilateral and multilateral economic relations to develop areas

of mutual benefits with other countries, which underlies its external relations with African countries. These are evident in the areas of economic cooperation, technical assistance and trade. Incidentally however, the economic diplomacy seems to have borne little relevance to national growth, thus being barely significant to national interest.

Again, Nigeria played a very important role towards the eradication of apartheid in Southern Africa. But this has brought little or no change to national economic growth. Now that Southern African countries have been liberated, they have not been Nigeria's 'market spaces' or external industrial base as some western nations would do with countries they "liberal" for capitalist democracy. If there is anything, Nigeria has grown or diminished to become the 'big market' for South African companies and commerce.

What Nigeria requires, in view of the dynamics of world diplomacy, is defining its national interest and codifying it. The welfare of its citizens and the strength of the economy should be at the fore of its national interest (Ade-Ibijola, 2013:569). There is an urgent need to identify, define, codify and document Nigeria's national interest and the pursuance of such objectives is paramount in engineering change to the damage image of the country in the international scene.

It is obvious that the national interests of any given nation are

determined by the leadership (Echikwonye, n.d). The citizens are expected to support or play in part in such articulation of interest. The fact remains that national interest will always be within the purview of the ruling class; however, what is perceived as the greater good of the state should underlie the considerations, with or without consulting the masses. The idea of citizen diplomacy should be revisited, but with modifications and clearly defined precepts (Folarin, 2010).

Basically, Nigeria demonstrates bogus charity abroad, which is merely an impressionistic attitude rather than commanding leadership and respect. In the face of the frequent molestation of Nigerians abroad, a Citizen Diplomacy, such as was adopted by the Yaradua-Jonathan administration, but which should have been more clearly spelt out, would be a bold attempt at realization of national interest.

#### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

Nigeria has been loud in Africa and the world, but has not got the control volume for its megaphone diplomacy (*a la* Chidozie, *et al*, 2013). Put differently, Nigeria does not have a document articulating, point by point, its foreign policy objectives and national interests; neither does it have a body of ground rules charting a course for the implementation of its foreign policy and national interest, nor does it have national interest gazette per time. It therefore seems like a sailor navigating the high seas

without maps, charts and other critical instruments. It is like a vigilance group moving about in a neighbourhood in the dead of the night without torchlight. Nigeria moves around the world and Africa in particular, with national interest only in the mind of each leadership, and not in bold print for all administrations and policymakers to see and appreciate the limits and priorities. This is crude and certainly not good enough for a country that pursues an ambitious foreign policy.

In view of the foregoing, the following are recommended:

- There is the urgent need for Nigeria's foreign policy and national interest to undergo the process of codification and documentation, which will ensure a well-defined and structured policy, for effectiveness, efficiency and transparency as well accountability of those in the position of implementation. The government could seek the assistance of some policy bodies like National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies (NIPSS), Nigerian Institute of International Affairs (NIIA), Development Policy Centre (DPC) and scholars as well as captains of industry, among other interest groups, to articulate its national interest and break down its foreign policy objectives.
- In documentation or codification, legal frameworks

to make the foreign policy and national interest binding should be put in place. This will make the leadership accountable at all times for any breach or upholding of the principles. The legal code will be bound by the Law of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and ensure that citizens home and abroad are protected and catered for by the government at all times..

- One major bone of contention is the fact that because of Nigeria's overzealous involvement in African issues, Nigeria's foreign policy outside the African continent is indiscrete and not anchored on standards that would earn an enviable scorecard. Based on the above mentioned, Nigeria needs to have its horizon broadened and stop being satisfied as a 'local West African or African champion'.

- Also, vigorous efforts should be made to bridge the communication gap between the general public and policymakers. The public should be carried along in the promotion and defence of Nigeria's national interests, to prevent a situation that makes it difficult for the public to appreciate the enormity of government's efforts or inadequacy of same.
- Furthermore, it is very important that Nigerians at home and abroad partner with government, to achieve qualitative policy objectives, with constructive ideas, based on individual and collective experience, travel exposure, education and training. Nigeria's common objectives and goals can be achieved in unison.

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