

# **Overview of National Interest, Continuities and Flaws in Nigeria Foreign Policy**

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## **Abstract**

Since becoming a sovereign nation in 1960, the nation called Nigeria had engaged herself with the world on a weak foreign policy that had saw the nation part away with a huge chunk of her human and economic resources without having something tangible to show for her huge diplomatic generosity. This has become worrisome to scholars, and stakeholders within the nation-space. To some, Nigeria only operates a father xmas style of foreign policy which had somehow contributed to the economic misery of the nation.

In light of the above, the article set-out to investigate certain issues in Nigeria foreign policy statement. To this end, the paper focuses on issues such as national interest which drives the nation's foreign policy coupled with the continuities as well as the flaws associated with Nigeria policy of external relations since attainment of independence. The paper argues that Nigeria should embark on a reform of her foreign policy as a matter of urgency as what obtains presently can best be described as diplomatic prodigality. This is the summation of what Nigeria had ever done in the realm of foreign relations.

## **Introduction**

For a country to relate effectively and gainfully with another, its foreign policy must be well defined, and well thought. It is against this background, that this paper seek to investigate three germane issues in the foreign policy of the nation. First, is the national interest issue which form the basis for external relations. The paper is to find out whether Nigeria has been able to secure her interest viz-a-viz her engagement with the world. Second, the paper will examine continuities of policy under successive governments from 1960-2007. This is to enable us understand the trends in foreign policy. Third, the flaws bedeviling the foreign policy of Nigeria are examined.

## **Conceptual Clarification**

Foreign policy: This work defines foreign policy relatively; it is used in this article to depict the driving factor behind Nigeria's interaction with other nations of the world. It is summed as the declared intentions of a state.

National Interest: National interest is used to explain the motives behind Nigeria's relations with other countries of the world. The country's foreign policy is driven by a set of principles and objectives that the state intend to actualize in the course of her relation with other countries. Hence, national interest is defined as the totality or aggregate interest of groups in a given state.

### **Basic Goals Of Nigeria Foreign Policy**

From the foregoing, it is clear that Nigeria foreign policy is driven by national interest. A cursory look at the principles and objectives shows what the nation intend to achieve in her foreign relations. The subsequent segment of this work will find out if the national interest of the nation which is primarily aimed at promoting and protecting the economic well being of the country has been secured in respect to the manner in which Nigeria as conducted her foreign policy

It is essential to state that Nigeria's relations with the outside world is driven by objectives and principles. Thus, state actors have or present a wide range of objectives that they seek to achieve. These often vary in terms of scope, the intensity with which they are pursued and the available resources for their achievement. Foreign policy objectives serve as guiding principles for a country as it relates with the international environment.

In formulating foreign policy objectives, every state makes an analytic distinction between interest which are critical to its very existence and those that are not. The first group is called vital interest, while the second group is called secondary interest.

Foreign policy objectives are a comprehensive plan and goal values that a country intends to achieve as it relates with other members of the world. Corroborating this, Ajayi said that foreign policy objectives concern the goal-values that a state aspires to attain in its external relations. The objectives are also referred to as the state's national interest.

The Nigeria's foreign policy objectives and principles according to S. Lamido at independence consist of the following: The protection of the sovereign and territorial integrity of the Nigerian state; The promotion of economic and social well being of Nigerians; The enhancement of Nigeria's image and status in the World at large; The promotion of unity as well as the total political, economic, social and cultural liberation of our country and Africa; The promotion of the rights of the black people and others under colonial domination; The promotion of international cooperation, conducive to the consolidation of world peace and security; mutual respect and friendship among all peoples among the state; Redressing the imbalance in the international power structures that has tended to frustrate the legitimate aspirations of developing countries; The promotion of world peace based on the principles of freedom, mutual respect and equality of all persons of the world.

These objectives like the principles have, since the country's attainment of nationhood in 1960 been broadly and succinctly spelt out by successive administration.

These fundamental objectives of our foreign policy have remained largely unchanged since independence and have been pursued by successive administrations with varying degrees of emphasis and focus. This is simply to state that the objectives enjoyed consistency but with varying degree of implementation by successive regimes. It is instructive to state that the administration of Muritala/Obasanjo in 1975 clearly addressed or elaborated the broad strands of Nigeria's national interest. This position has been espoused by Kolawole when he opined that: "the years of Muritala/Obasanjo regime can be appropriately seen as years of foreign alertness."

Shortly after the assumption of office, General Muritala Mohammed set up the Adedeji commission to examine Nigeria's foreign policy in all its ramifications. The recommendations had far reaching effects on Nigeria's external. Based on the commission's report, General Obasanjo in June 1976 identified the elements of the national interest, which equally constitute the objectives of the country's foreign policy. These are as follows: The defense of our sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity; The creation of the necessary political and economic conditions in Africa and the rest of the World which will facilitate the defense of the independence and territorial integrity of all African countries while at the same time foster national self-reliance and rapid economic development; The promotion of equality and self-reliance in African and the rest of the developing world; The promotion and defense of justice and respect for human dignity, especially the dignity of the black man; and The defense and promotion of world peace.

A cursory look at the objectives clearly indicates the description of the Nigeria's national interest. An important, germane and sensitive question is whether Nigeria has the capabilities to attain some of these objectives. According to Aluko "some of them are not realizable and cannot therefore, provide rational and realistic basis for the country's external behaviours. The second and the third objectives appear to extend beyond the capabilities of Nigeria. This possibly informs the emphasis on three broad objectives by General Obasanjo. These are – territorial integrity, independence and rapid economic development as being central to national interest.

#### CONTINUITIES IN NIGERIA FOREIGN POLICY UNDER SUCCESSIVE GOVERNMENTS SINCE INDEPENDENCE

It is essential to identify the areas where different administrations both military and civilian had exercised continuity in Nigeria's Foreign Policy. The nation's foreign policy stipulates that Africa should be the central focus, in other words, from Balewa to the Obasanjo Presidency. This feature had remained unchanged and constant irrespective of the frequent changes in government especially during the military era.

For instance, stable features in Nigeria's southern African policy can be observed in over the two decades of Nigeria's independence. The southern African problem has been one of the occupations of Nigerian government since the attainment of independence. From the official pronouncements of the Balewa, Ironsi, Gowon, Murtala/ Obasanjo Shagari regimes it could be concluded that Nigeria operated assertive Africa policy. Successive Nigerian administrations have inherited the problem of southern African, and they have to varying degrees pursued policies designed to solve the problem.

Official pronouncement on foreign policy emphasize for example, Nigeria's duty and special responsibility in ensuring equality of treatment to all mankind. Nigeria's diplomacy also reflects its world view namely that morality is a necessary element of foreign policy. This has also remained constantly unchanged since independence. The Nigerian nation has made various efforts in support of the cause of oppressed peoples and mediation in disputes, in pursuit of peaceful resolution. The role of morality in foreign affairs would serve to explain the remarkable consistency in the various governments attitude toward the question of Apartheid in Southern Africa and South Africa itself as the bastion of the inhuman policies.

As earlier said, the southern Africa issue, for instance has been one of the constant concerns of the Nigerian government since the attainment of independence. At the first debate on foreign affairs in the house of representative in November 1960, the prime minister, Abubakar Tafawa in apparent reference to south Africa reassured the leader of the opposition that on the issue of south Africa, Nigeria has a duty to see that there is equality of treatments to all mankind. Calling for withdrawal of South African from the commonwealth, the prime minister warned:

So long as one member openly advocated racial discrimination it is impossible to accept that the commonwealth was indeed an association of free and equal nations

The point to note here is that since the Balewa era, each new administration has reaffirmed Nigeria's basic commonwealth to the eradication of apartheid and the struggle against white minority domination in southern Africa as one of the fundamental tenets of Nigeria's foreign policy. It is important to state that it was the perception and vision of Balewa on the problem in southern Africa that set the tone and provided the basis for southern Africa policy.

Another area of which the nation foreign policy has witnessed continuity is in the settlement of disputes between countries in Africa and participation in peacekeeping missions within the African continent. Nigeria played leading roles in the resolution of crisis in countries like Congo, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Ivory coast Guinea Bissau, Sudan to mention a few since independence. Nigeria in her bid to ensure peace on the continent and the world at large has spent a colossal \$10 billion and lost over 2,000 soldiers in the process. The country has sustained assistance to countries in Africa since its emergence as independent state. From the foregoing, it could be concluded that the nation's foreign policy has been truly pursued in favour of African states. From Balewa to Obasanjo presidency, the African centerpiece nature of Nigeria's foreign policy has remained unchanged. It is imperative to observe that despite unexpected, sudden and

sometimes violent changes in administrations and even the trauma of the civil war, there have been no radical changes in or departures from the fundamental foreign policy orientation. The country's foreign policy goals has remained intact and unaltered.

### **Flaws In Nigeria Foreign Policy**

Having discussed the continuities in Nigeria foreign policy under successive since independence, it is necessary to note that the nation's foreign policy have hitherto been undermined by flaws. This segment will examine the flawed areas of Nigeria foreign policy. The flaws would be examine from the economic angle. To this end, issues such as global peace support operations and its economic implications shall be taken into consideration. This is to be able to explain the flaws as it affects the national interest of the nation. Since 1960 to date, the Nigerian nation has suffered from a self inflicted diplomatic burden that has seen her choke under a huge cost of global peace operations, a circumstance occasioned by the absence of a lucidly defined national policy on foreign relations. As it is now, Nigeria foreign policy lacks the most important ingredient known as economic diplomacy which as partly contributed to the impoverishment of the nation itself. The absence of a national strategic framework means that Nigeria participation in peace support operations is not driven by economic interest. Consequently, the nation has not benefited not benefited "maximally" and this has to do with the fact that Nigeria has not developed the capacity to exploit the benefit of peace support operations" said a communiqué issued at the end of an international seminar on peace support operations, organized by Nigeria's ministry of defense in 2010. It is ironical that Nigeria, a nation that is home to a mega population of over 140 million people rated in 2009 human development report as one of the world's most poorest nations could be preoccupied with a resource -draining venture like peacekeeping. The nation is the fourth largest contributor of troops to united nations peacekeeping missions across the world. Her foreign policy is flawed on this basis because Nigeria has refused to understand the need to secure concrete gains that would be commensurate with her enormous sacrifices on the international scene.

Nigeria with her poor economic status has repeatedly failed to use its massive investments in global peace support operations to its advantage. This a fundamental flaw in her foreign policy that Nigerian authorities have failed to realized. This situation is indeed embarrassing because there is no justifiable reason why outside problems should take priority over that of the inside. For a nation whose internal security has rapidly degenerated through catalogues of ethno-religious clashes, armed robbery, kidnapping and lately terrorism. It defiles logic and reason for a nation that still suffer from this vices to be preoccupied with restoring peace in other climes as doing this amounts to Nigeria giving what she does not possess or enjoy. Though, Nigeria is not in a state of war but it cannot be said that the nation is enjoying peace. According to official sources, Nigeria has the fourth largest contingent in United Nations peacekeeping operations since 1960, having committed 250,000 men and women losing 2,000 troops in the process and expending over 10billion dollars. Presently, Nigeria has more than 17,000 troops serving under the world body. Alas, the nation's contribution so far has not been anchored on solid economic diplomacy that could ensure rewards for fortunes invested. It seems Nigeria been the most populous black nation on earth, feels fulfilled being perceived as

the “giant of Africa” and “potential leader” of black race, a self bestowed title. Nigerian leaders past and present have seen issues of peace keeping as routine humanitarian assistance to other countries. Nigeria seems to have played lip service to its economic diplomacy initiated since 1988. The policy was to ensure adequate economic reward for government goal of economic revival and sustainable development. It regrettable however that economic gains from Nigeria foreign policy has been non-existent over the years.

It is on record that Nigeria played a critical role in restoring peace to war ravaged countries such as Liberia and sierra-leone after years of civil wars. It is also on record that Nigeria was at the forefront for the liberation of south Africa from the shackles of apartheid as well as playing crucial roles in ensuring countries like angola Rhodesia were brought to a state of independence. Though, the foregoing represents one of the goals of Nigeria foreign which is to ensure the freedom of countries under the yoke of colonialism. The question now is; how many of these countries that benefited from Nigeria rare generosity appreciates the nation’s sacrifices? The case of south-Africa comes to mind here, as said above Nigeria stood for south-Africa when it mattered most, yet Nigeria living in south-Africa have been victims of xenophobia attacks in recent years. The flaws of Nigeria foreign is further exposed with the emergence of south-African business interest like MTN, DSTV, SHOPRITE AND STANDARD BANK.

This development is made possible because Nigeria leaders past and present had never deemed it necessary to protect the nation’s economic interest. This is a major fundamental flaw of Nigeria foreign policy. If the likes of South Africa originated companies mentioned above are recording high sales here in yet Nigerians living in South Africa are still been treated with disdain, then there is diplomatic problem. South Africa is the best economy on the continent of Africa today while Nigeria is far behind. The truth is that South Africa has been able to use her multinationals to her advantage and this was a nation Nigeria fought for tirelessly. Just some months ago South African immigration authorities deported more than one hundred Nigerians on a trivial issue of not possessing the yellow card vaccination certificate a development that led to diplomatic crisis between Abuja and Pretoria. The ugly development provoked some prominent Nigerians such as federal legislators to call for stiff actions against South Africa. In fact some senators called for the withdrawal of operating license from the MTN an immediate closure of Nigerian embassy in South Africa, Though, the treat in the author opinion ought to have been carried out to prove that Nigeria isn’t a fool. After all there are Nigerian companies that can take over from them. The MTN makes far more profit in Nigeria than in her home country.

According to Professor bolaji Akinyemi, Nigeria’s former foreign affairs minister, Countries in Africa should understand that “they need Nigeria more than we need them” He went further to say that “Nigeria foreign policy have been marred by fellow African countries that voted against us on the international scene we have got to have a foreign policy, which penalizes countries that vote against us” the above submission clearly indicates that there are serious flaws in Nigeria’s foreign policy. As earlier said, Nigeria played a lead role in restoring peace to countries like Liberia and sierra -leone after years of civil wars, this adventure cost Nigeria billions of dollars. However, since these countries return to the path of peace, nations that did not make

such sacrifices have been busy since the wars ended exploring economic opportunities, Economies of these nations have been dominated by Indians, Chinese and others. If Nigeria had not expended blood and money in these countries to bring peace which they now enjoy, would they have had the opportunity to reap where they never sowed? Something must be done to address this imbalance.

At a lecture titled the “Imperative of peace and development” Delivered at the 10th anniversary of the centre for peace and conflict studies (university of Ibadan, Nigeria.) The guest lecturer, Olagunsoye oyinlola, a retired brigadier general of the Nigerian army said that Nigeria has spent 10billion dollars since independence. He however lamented that it would have been more profitable to humanity if such funds was channeled to human and societal development. Judging from oyinlola position, it is obvious that Nigeria has got her priorities wrong. Otherwise, how do one explain that a country without peace like Nigeria could spend such money on peacekeeping and peacemaking of other nations. Nigeria is a nation where more than two third of the population live below one American dollar per day, it is better imagined what 10billion dollars would have done in tackling these challenges . “The promotion and protection of the economic well being of Nigerians” as stipulated in the foreign policy statement which ought to be paramount in the mind of the leadership has been relegated to the detriment of Nigerians. Nigeria should face her own mountain load of problems at home first as it is wrong to give people what you lack. Nigeria must re-prioritize in her foreign policy conducts by putting in a place a diplomatic machinery that would ensure adequate economic rewards while still participating in maintaining peace across the globe.

### **Conclusion**

While it is not a bad idea to give support to countries that are in need of such, it is however expedient to do that sensibly bearing in mind the socio-economic status of Nigerians. Nigeria does not need to embark on peace support missions out of a desire to impress others, or because the leaders want the country to continue to be seen in the eyes of the world as the so-called giant of Africa. This is a wrong diplomatic gesture to adopt.

### **Recommendation**

In view of foregoing, the following recommendations are suggested. First, Nigeria should embark on a reform of her foreign policy as doing this will pave way for a well defined policy. The government should seek the input of research bodies such as the Nigerian institute of international affairs(NIIA) as well as the National institute for policy and strategic studies(NIPSS) in carrying out the reforms. Secondly, there is need to revisit the economic diplomacy initiated in 1998. The policy was to help rejuvenate the ailing economy and ensure value returns for the nation’s huge investments on other nations of the world.

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