International Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Studies
Volume 6, Issue 10, 2019, PP 49-60
ISSN 2394-6288 (Print) & ISSN 2394-6296 (Online)

Nigeria's National Interest and Foreign Policy: A Critical Evaluation

Dr. Joseph C. Ebegbulem*

Department of Political Science, University of Calabar, Nigeria

***Corresponding Author:** Dr. Joseph C. Ebegbulem, Department of Political Science, University of Calabar, Nigeria*

ABSTRACT

The foreign policy of all the countries in the international system is guided by their national interest. Foreign policy is the aggregation of the interests and objectives that a state seeks to achieve in her dealings and interactions with other states in the global community. National interest constitutes a key element in the formulation of foreign policy. It is a means or device for analyzing fundamental objectives of foreign policy of a state. Foreign policy is therefore predicated on the national interests of states, and any foreign policy that fails to reflect the country's national interest is doomed to the general disenchantment of the citizens of that state. Nigeria's national interest is seen as the ideal goals upon which her foreign policy is hinged. The country's national interest serves to either justify or repudiate her actions or inactions in the global community. The study will take a holistic view of national interest and foreign policy. It will examine Nigeria's national interest and her Afrocentric foreign policy. Attention will be paid to those strategies put in place for the achievement of Nigeria's national interest. Nigeria's new foreign policy thrust in economic and citizen diplomacy will also be examined.

Keywords: *National Interest, Foreign Policy, Diplomacy, Afrocentric, national Security*

INTRODUCTION

NATIONAL INTEREST AND FOREIGN POLICY

There is no universally accepted definition of foreign policy as different scholars view it from different perspectives and give the concept different definitions. While Frankel (1975:9) defines foreign policy as a "dynamic process of interaction between the changing domestic demands and support and the changing external circumstances," Alade (1997:66) states that "foreign policy is the actions of states towards external environment and the conditions, usually domestic, under which decisions are formulated." Millar (1969:32) posits that foreign policy is presumably something less than the sum of all policies which have an effect upon a national government's relations with other national governments." In summation therefore, foreign policy is a mechanism through which nation-states attempt to project and preserve their independence and security, as well as the pursuit and protection of their national interests.

Like foreign policy, national interest lacks a universally accepted definition. While scholars define it differently, states link the concept to their foreign policy based on their aspirations and needs. While Henderson (2005) sees national interest as the collective aspiration of a state on worldwide scale, Morgenthau conceives of national interest in terms of power. Generally, national interest is conceived as the goals and aspirations of nation-states in the international system. While national interest is a principle that guides the conduct of nation-states in global affairs, foreign policy is all about the interests and the objectives that a nation seeks to achieve in her dealings and interactions with other nations. Abia (2003:105) agrees with the above view when he states that, "the rudiments of foreign policy encompass interests and goals which a particular nation-state seeks to achieve as well as the means available to her in achieving those goals." No nation, according to Morgenthau (1973), "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 that guide."

The concept of national interest has continued to play a significant role in the foreign policies of sovereign states. Since a state's foreign policy is not operated in vacuum, there are always goals which a state wishes to accomplish in her

interaction with other states. The main policy instrument in the conduct of foreign policy is invariably the promotion and pursuit of national interest. National interest embraces all the various strategies employed in the international interaction of states in order to ensure the achievement and preservation of the goals and aspirations of such states. Broadly conceived, national interest is a guide to the formulation of foreign policy. What propels a state's foreign policy is its national interest.

National interest, as it bears on foreign policy, represents a guide to, and restraint on decisions and actions of nation-states. According to Good (1966) cited in Okoro (2002:30), "national interest defines the outmost limits of choice beyond which responsible statesmen must not trespass because to do so risks the security and perhaps the survival of the nation." Put differently, Okoro (2002:30) posits further that:

The ends of foreign policy are determined by national interest. As the major criterion governing a nation's relations with the international community, national interest serves two main purposes. First, it gives policy a general orientation toward the external environment. Second, it serves as the controlling criterion of choice in immediate situations.

From the viewpoint of Okoro (2002), Abia (2003) and Alade (1997) we can therefore, deduce that national interest is the key concept in foreign policy which constitutes an important element in the formulation of foreign policy.

It is believed that this is why Morgenthau (1973) emphasized that the objectives of foreign policy must be defined in terms of national interest which he defines in terms of power. Morgenthau's position seems to agree with Asogwa's submission that power is a concept which cannot be separated from national interest. He submits that "power is the principal instrument for the realization of national interests" (Asogwa, 2009:166). Any policy that enhances a state's power is therefore in its national interest. "Power permits a state to survive, and therefore it is in the interest of all nations to acquire power" (Morgenthau, 1973 cited in Eminue, 2013:70). Nation-states are also interested in what Morgenthau calls "policy of the status quo, imperialism, and policy of prestige." In his clarification of what Morgenthau means here, Abia (2003) explains that all nation-states attempt to ensure that policies are pursued only to the extent that values indentified to be very crucial to their interests are preserved. This, according to him, depends on the utilization of national power and influence in international politics.

In linking national interest to foreign policy, Seabury (1963:80) asserts that:

National interest has been adopted as a means or device for analyzing fundamental objectives of foreign policy of a nation-state. National interest is regarded as those purposes which the nation, through its leadership, appears to pursue persistently through time. It is also some ideal set of purposes which a nation should seek to realize in the conduct of its foreign relations.

Abia views this relationship between national interest and foreign policy from the same perspective. He argues that foreign policy is predicated on the national interests of nation-states; and any foreign policy, according to him, "that fails to reflect the country's national interests is doomed to the general disenchantment of the populace. He observes further that "national interests cover three outstanding components of national security, protection and preservation of the welfare of the state and national prestige" (Abia, 2003:81). National security, according to him, relates to the defense of a country's territorial integrity and political independence.

Accordingly, every country's foreign policy must be predicated on the national interest of such a country. This interest ranges from the preservation and security of her independence to the pursuit and protection of her economic interest and the wellbeing of her citizens. To Harrington (1950), the concept of national interest centres on economic forces and strategic patterns which include security, sovereignty, territorial integrity, political independence, economic development, enhanced status, and national prestige.

In their formulation of foreign policy, all nations, whether big or small, put into consideration what Alade (1997:70) calls vital interest. These vital interests, according to him, could be classified into three:

- *All nation-states are interested in self-preservation, that is national security as well as stability of the system;*
- *all nation-states are interested in the economic well-being, economic stability and prosperity, the fight against unemployment, inflation and unfavorable trade relations with others;*

- *Nation-states are also generally interested in prestige and power, which implies that weak or poor nations want to have some degree of prestige among the comity of nations.*

Vital interests are those interests which States commit their very existence, and which must be preserved or extended at all times or make ultimate sacrifices. In his contribution on what constitutes vital national interests, Asogwa (2009) identified vital interests as "those interests for which a state is willing to fight immediately and ultimately." He identifies secondary interests to include "all the desires which individual states would like to obtain but for which they will not fight or go to war" (Asogwa, 2009:168). According to him, Nigeria's secondary interests include socio-economic development, human equality, welfare and equality of the people, African unity, justice, world peace and security.

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 2013:77). Morgenthau (1952), describing 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 (Morgenthau, 1952 cited in Eminue, 2073:77).

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.

Another vital element of national interest is national security which has to do with the possession of the capacity to maintain, protect or preserve legitimate national interest in war or in peace. This is in line with Lippmann's (1963) view that "a nation has security when it does not have to sacrifice its legitimate interest to avoid war, and it is able, if challenged, to maintain by war" (Lippman (1963) cited in Eminue 2013:77). What constitutes national security therefore; include the securing of a nation's boarders and the maintenance of the nation's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Economic well-being or prosperity is another ingredient that constitutes the vital interests of any nation. In contemporary democratic systems, citizens constantly demand that their economic well-being be incorporated into the national interest of their state by way of providing food, shelter, improved health conditions and other basic needs which guarantee citizens' comfort and happiness.

Commenting on the importance of economic well-being as a vital national interest, Adisa (1990:27) points out that:

National allegiance is best secured in an environment where the generality of people regard their government as being responsible and concerned with social justice. In developing countries, such care or provision, understood contextually after political independence as the "revolution of rising entitlement," and when not satisfactorily met, has produced a revolution of rising frustration.

Maintenance of domestic and international peace is another vital national interest which nation-states cherish. According to Eminue (2013:80) "domestic peace and tranquility presume the prevalence of political stability, economic prosperity, social harmony, and distributive equity/ justice." Eminue went further to stress that "it is a compelling national interest for a country to keep its house in order, and to reduce the level of serious threats to its survival as one nation under one government and under one destiny."(Eminue 2013:80)

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 historical analysis, Nigeria's national interest, within the framework of its foreign policy, has gone through different phases of mutation from the

immediate post colonial period to date, even when the core elements have remained largely the same.

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.

NIGERIA'S NATIONAL INTEREST AND THE AFROCENTRIC PRINCIPLE

Every state in the international system, irrespective of size, economic status, ideological orientation or culture, has some form of interests or goals defined as national interest. Scholars and political analysts have different perceptions of the concept of national interest in line with their understanding of the subject matter. There have been debates among scholars over who determines the national interests of states. Is it the leadership or the citizens that determine a state's national interest? It is the responsibility of the leadership of the state to control the affairs of the state for positive change and good standard of living, while the citizens in that state are directly affected either positively or negatively by the derivable of national interest. National interest is seen by Morgenthau, (1989) as an aim to promote the image, prestige and aspect of a state both at home and abroad. On his part, Olukoshi (1992) identifies what constitute the core of national interest to include: national security, political independence, territorial integrity, promotion of economic interest of the state and world peace.

Inherent in the above perceptions is the strong and enthusiastic desire by nations to secure and maintain national and territorial integrity, self-respect and economic interest that will enhance the standard of living of the citizens of the state. Amoda (1988) views national interest as the ideal goals or objectives upon which the domestic and foreign policies of a state are hinged.

The issue of what constitutes Nigeria's national interest has however, remained a matter of intense disagreement among scholars. During Balewa's administration at independence in 1960, some major foreign policy goals which include, decolonization and eradication of racism, Pan- African solidarity, national economic development and world peace were identified. After the Nigerian civil war, foreign policy was seen as an integral part of national programme for social and economic development (Eze 2010).Nigeria would also pursue a dynamic policy of non-alignment based on the consideration of national interest whose elements were seen as political unity, economic growth, national security, as well as the promotion of African interest. The above elements were captured in the 1979 constitution. Section 19 of the 1979 constitution stipulates that:

The state shall promote African unity as well as total political, economic, social and cultural liberation of Africa and all other forms of international cooperation conducive to the consolidation of universal peace and mutual respect and friendship among all peoples and states, and shall combat racial discrimination in all its ramifications.

Nevertheless, the framework provided by Aluko (1981), Olusanya (1986) and Nweke (1986) gives a fairly comprehensive detail which is beyond argument on aspects of Nigeria's national interest. Aluko (1981) states three elements which he refers to as vital elements of Nigeria's national interest. These according to him are self-preservation of the country, the defense and maintenance of the country's independence, and the economic and social well-being of the people. He further identified some other elements as not constituting core or vital elements. These are, "preservation and promotion of way of life of Nigerians, especially their democratic values, enhancement of the country's standing in the comity of nations and the promotion of world peace" (Aluko, 1981:265). For Olusanya and Akindele (1986), Nigeria's national interests are:

The defense of the country's sovereignty, independence and integrity, the restoration of human dignity to black men and women all over the world, the creation of relevant political and economic conditions in Africa and the rest of the world, the promotion and improvement of economic well-being of the Nigerian citizens and the promotion of world peace and justice (Olusanya and Akindele, 1986:135)

To Ogunbambi (1986:162) Nigeria's national interest includes:

Political stability, security, export promotion, access to external resources and technology, foreign aid, protection of its citizens abroad, the cultural and moral expressions for Nigeria and

a fair, effective and rigorous presentation of Nigeria's points of view on regional and global issues.

The interests advanced by these scholars as this study finds out are embedded in the principles and objectives of Nigeria's foreign policy. A lot of similarities exist in the analysis of these interests but they change from one regime to the other. Some of these interests were vital or core in some regimes, while in others, they were not. The actual issue about Nigeria's national interest is the lack of a coherent strategic approach to its realization. Nigeria's national interest as postulated by these scholars mentioned above and others finds justification on certain principles which have informed Nigeria's foreign policy since independence, and which successive governments, whether military or civilian, have maintained and pursued, albeit with varying degrees and commitment.

Nigeria's foreign policy has been largely Afrocentric in posture since independence in 1960. In an official statement made by Prime Minister Tafawa Balewa on August 20, 1960, two months before Nigeria's independence, the Prime Minister stated that "Nigeria was adopting clear and practical policies with regard to Africa; it will be our aim to assist any country to find solution to its problems." Prime Minister Balewa's position was further reinforced by General AguiyiIronsi when he stated that, "in the whole sphere of external relations, the government attaches great importance to our African policy" (Al-Hassan, 2008:1).

It is under the above foreign policy directions, among others, that Nigeria ventured into the complex theatre of Afro centrism. This can be appreciated when we consider the fact that successive regimes in Nigeria both military and civilian accorded significant attention to Afrocentric foreign policy. However, a panoramic review of extant literature on the various engagements made by Nigeria towards an African agenda in areas of decolonization, conflict resolution, peacekeeping operations, as well as other bilateral and multilateral aid she rendered in the continent, to a very large extent showed that the ominous nature of the principle of Afro centrism may not have served the country's national interest in a commensurate measure. As Ola (1999) argues, the direction of a state's foreign policy is always informed by the core value of her national interest. These are interests which states cherish and sacrifice a lot to realize. In the context of the Nigerian state, this is appreciated in her Afrocentric foreign policy on one hand, and on the other hand, by her national interest predicated on internal security, political stability, economic development which the country realizes can be attained within the context of regional peace and harmony, economic development and wellbeing of her citizens. This policy of brotherhood with African states, especially those of them in the West African sub-region informs the nature and dimension of Nigeria's Afrocentric foreign policy. Considering the fact that Nigeria is a power to be reckoned with in Africa and the most powerful nation in West Africa, her regional responsibilities and commitment appear very huge.

It is the understanding of Al-Hassan (2008) that Nigeria's foreign policy in the West African sub-region seeks to achieve her national interests which are anchored on national security, national welfare and prestige. Probably, this understanding informs Adebo's (1968:287) view that:

Because of the cold War and its dangerous prospects for humanity and because of Nigeria's desire to base all considerations of foreign policy on Nigeria's national interest, the makers of Nigeria's foreign policy stressed the necessity for world peace, the main idea being that peace within Nigeria would be strengthened if there is peace in the international system.

This view was reinforced by Ofoegbu and Chibuzor (1980:121) who stated thus:

Nigeria's foreign policy makers perceived Nigeria's national interest in terms of values, which could be meaningful and easily understandable to the Nigerian people. These were expected to be related primarily to the political integration, socio-economic advancement and general well-being of the people of Nigeria.

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 her. This corroborates Wale and prey's (2010:19) position that "Nigeria's strategic location, national interest, assumed responsibilities and status in West Africa informed its commitment to regional politics."

Nigeria's big brother role in Africa has had very serious implications for the country's foreign policy in Africa. Scholars like Alade (2000) and Shaw (1987) have argued that Nigeria's Afrocentric foreign policy posture is actually beyond her capabilities. Alade points out that "sheer size, population and resources do not make a leader; regional leadership is not only a function of geography and resource endowment, but more importantly, of the capability to convert and utilize them to advantage and command respect of regional peers." (Alade, 2000:36). Alade's view aptly represents the position of another radical scholar in the person of Shaw (1987) who believes that Nigerian statesmen gave the country a "grandiose regional policy," which has drained her development resources, and has failed to maximize the objectives towards the realization of her national interest.

Oil and gas have been a denominator of Nigeria's foreign policy making. Nigeria made oil and gas readily available to some states in West Africa, while she also provided steady electricity supply to others. Soremekun (2003:87) however, believes that the "primacy of oil in Nigeria's foreign policy engineering has given Nigeria's foreign policy makers a false ego to engage in messianic pretensions, which has made them to fritter away precious resources meant for purposeful internal development." Soremekun's assertion agrees with Shaw's (1987:40) position on Nigeria's commitment to Africa. According to Shaw, "Nigeria exaggerated its potentials and overrated its capacity, thus over-doing things in the name of commitment to Africa and relevance in the world." Aluko (1981:56) on his part cautioned against two particular errors based on economic and psychological misperceptions, as he stated that:

To cast for Nigeria a role in world affairs that is clearly beyond our means and the psychological error made by most Nigerians in and outside government that because of the size, population, and agricultural and mineral resources in the country we are destined to lead Africa.

Even though Aluko may be right on the thesis of error of judgment, there are some Nigerians in and outside government who continue to pride Nigeria as "Giant of Africa" because of these fortunes of nature; they remain essentially boosted by these factors as they articulate national interest. Yet few scholars like Akinyemi (2005), Mier (2002) and Soyinka (1997) share the sentiment that the "Giant of Africa" mentality is self- imposed, undeserved and laughable because the glory has faded with the plethora of domestic problems and downslide in the economy. Many Nigerians both at home and in diaspora believe that such sentiments harbor the fear that the desire of Nigerian leaders to showcase Nigeria as a "Giant of Africa" at all costs may have been responsible for the stretching of the economy to its elastic limits which has done more harm than good to Nigeria's national interest. No wonder Onyearu (2008:65) advised that "Nigeria should rather face the home front, revitalize the economy, pursue a citizen-based diplomacy in Africa and naturally re-earn her place of pride."

It is Adaramola's (2001) contention that because of Nigeria's over-concentration on African issues, her foreign policy outside continental Africa is "vague and not anchored on principle that would confer on Nigeria robust political and economic advantage. According to him, Nigeria's ability to attract from investments from many industrialized nations of the world has been vitiated by her Afrocentric foreign policy leaning. Reuben Abati, presidential spokesman to President Good luck Jonathan also observes that Nigeria has been extraordinarily naive by restricting her foreign policy to Africa as its cornerstone. He believes that Africa as the centerpiece of Nigeria's foreign policy no longer suffices. He advocates for a broader perspective. Reuben Abati and other scholars and writers like Onyaru (2008), Ajayi (2006) and Adaramola (2001) believe that Nigeria's domestic policies have not provided an enabling environment to support her Afrocentric foreign policy posture. These scholars have criticized the adoption of Afrocentric foreign policy because, according to them, Afrocentric foreign policy negates economic diplomacy which thrives on multilateralism.

However, there are some liberal scholars like Moyosore (1990), Hoffman (1996) and Obiozor (1996) who believe that Nigeria's Afrocentric foreign policy objective of regional peace is largely achieved despite her limited capabilities and negative consequences on domestic development. They argue that the development at home should not be analyzed within the context of Nigeria's foreign policy. Lack of development at home should rather be seen as the consequence of the visionless Nigerian leaders who failed to articulate and vigorously pursue development objectives in line with

domestic aspirations and national interests. These scholars believe that Nigeria achieved the objective behind her financial, human and material commitment In Africa. Hoffman (1996) expressed that Nigeria's overwhelming financial, human and material resources commitment to Africa is a manifestation of political realism, that is, her ambition to become recognized as a regional power. Hoffman's argument is in line with the thought of Moyosore (1990) and Obiozor (1996) who contend that Nigeria's natural and historical endowments, coupled with the intense contributions and sacrifices for Africa's progress since independence have naturally earned the country honour and leadership position in Africa.

STRATEGIES FOR ACHIEVING NIGERIA'S NATIONAL INTEREST

Like every other sovereign state of the world, Nigeria's national interest has been largely determined and defined by the nation's leadership. It is the elites who constitute the leadership of the nation that determine what should constitute the national interest of the nation. However, Olukoshi (1992) states that the following broadly spell out what constitute Nigeria's national interest:

- *The defense of Nigeria's sovereignty;*
- *The creation of the necessary political and economic environment in Nigeria, 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 Africa 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;*
- *The defense and promotion of international peace and security.*

Nigeria adopts several strategies to achieve these national interests. These strategies range from diplomacy to military actions and from cultural exchange to economic cooperation. This study will discuss these strategies under internal and external strategies.

Internal Strategy

Under the leadership of Sir Tafawa Balewa after independence in 1960, the issue of Nigeria's indivisibility and economic development became Nigeria's priority. In other words, the leadership of the first republic saw the need to develop the country politically and economically. This is a vital national interest Nigerian leader then aspires to achieve. Saleh (2006) explains that the strategies employed by Nigerian leaders in achieving this aspect of her national interest were largely centred on economic self-reliance, improvement in education, industrialization, development in agriculture as well as ensuring peace in the country. With regard to the economic self-reliance, and with reference to Nigeria's second National Development Plan, Amechi (1987:74) describes Nigeria as "the largest concentration of natural and human resources in the African continent; the most attractive single market in Africa." Under the Second National Development Plan, Nigeria was thus committed to the pursuit of policy of national self-reliance. She was able to use her rich endowments to pursue the goals of economic independence as well as the defeat of neo-colonial forces in Africa.

From the angle of peace and security, Saleh (2006:105) asserts that Nigeria has used military strategy to achieve the corporate existence we have today. According to him, "since the civil war, the Nigerian government has been able, not minding conspicuous limitations, to mobilize external political, moral and military support to keep Nigeria as one unified political entity." In the area of agriculture, Atim (2006) argues that attempts have been made by successive governments to address the problem of underdevelopment without success. He listed some of the adopted strategies by past administrations in tacking rural poverty and raising productivity to include among others: the Farm Settlement Scheme-1960s, Agricultural Developments-1970s, Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) -1978-79, Green Revoluation-1980-85, The Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI) -1986-92 and the current National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategies (NEEDS).

External Strategy

After independence in 1960, successive administrations in Nigeria saw the need to develop African continent, hence making Africa the centerpiece of Nigeria's foreign policy. The conveyance of the All Nigeria People's

Conference in1961 by the Balewa administration was influenced by Nigeria's adoption of Africa as the centerpiece of her foreign policy. The conference was conveyed to formulate Nigeria's response to some of the challenges confronting Nigeria, especially in the area of foreign policy. At the conference, different strategies were outlined to include the issue of African Unity. One of them was Nigeria's acceptance in principle of the imperative of political union of African states as well as exploring the possibility of an African Defense Force.

With regard to the decolonization of the African continent, Nigeria aided many African states attain independence by extending financial and material assistance to them. She also supported liberation movements in Southern Africa which gave her the appellation "Frontline State" even though she was far from the theatre of these liberation struggles.

Nigeria maintained a robust economic relationship with both East and West to enhance her economic development. This Ate (1992) sees as an advantage to her economic development. He states that "on development, Nigerian employed the strategy of ensuring that the nation accepts economic aid from the East and the West in the global ideological divide and pursued a strategy of sub-regional integration". Contributing from the angle of world peace, Saleh (2006) maintains that Nigeria employed a strategy of pursuing a policy of non-ligament.

Historically, we have seen that successive Nigerian regimes have adopted various strategies to achieve Nigeria's national interest since independence in 1960 till date. Since independence, the country has been able to maintain cordial diplomatic relations with other sovereign states of the world; she has been able to contribute immense material and human resources towards global peace and security through her active participation in peacekeeping operations at various times under ECOWAS, the African Union (A U) and the United Nations Organisation (UNO) (Ate, 1992).

However, these strategies are not without some challenges. A major challenge identified by Mbachu (1998) that affects the strategies adopted by Nigeria in achieving her national interest is the communication gap that exists between the general public and policy makers. He affirms that the public is not carried along in formulating policies that will promote and defend Nigeria's national interest, a situation that make it difficult for the public to appreciate the enormity of government's efforts in using foreign policy as an instrument of nation-building. Mbachu (1998) notes that, in the context of Nigeria's national interest, it is generally presumed that such interests are regime interests and not national interests. Such regime interests, according to him, have not benefited Nigerians. Another major challenge identified by Mbachu is the non-coordination of public policies. Many institutions of government, especially foreign policy making institutions work towards achieving the same objectives, but they do this independent of one another which often make them work against one another. This leads to a situation where many foreign policy institutions and actors work in opposite directions for the same purpose. Embezzlement and mismanagement of public funds is also identified as another major challenge militating against the realization of Nigeria's national interest. Public offices have always been seen by Nigerian leaders as an arena for amassing wealth and not an arena for patriotic service to the nation.

Mbachu's position corroborates Olukoshi's (1992:78) contention that "the determination of national interest by powers that be or the kingmakers without due consultation and consideration of the future prospects of the nation is personal or self-interest and not national interest in the real sense".

NIGERIA'S NEW FOREIGN POLICY THRUST IN ECONOMIC AND CITIZEN DIPLOMACY

Nigeria, since becoming a sovereign state in 1960, has placed her foreign policy priority on Africa. This continued until after the end of the Cold War between the West (represented by the United States) and the East (represented by the Soviet Union) when Nigeria's foreign policy was tied to the country's domestic agenda, a radical departure from her foreign policy posture. Nigeria has since then embraced economic diplomacy. This is how Eze (2010) succinctly captures this departure from Africa-centred foreign policy to economic and citizen diplomacy:

The conjunction in the victory of the decolonization programme and the decline of the national economy required a new paradigm for the nation's foreign policy. In consequence, Nigeria shifted emphasis to the development of the economy. Economic diplomacy became the

new paradigm for the nation's foreign policy except that the current administration has introduced a new concept, citizen diplomacy (Eze, 2010:85).

Economic diplomacy is a new foreign policy thrust which would encourage foreign investments in Nigeria and promote economic development. In economic diplomacy, much emphasis is laid on cooperation among nation states as an essential factor for economic development. Based on this, Akinterinwa (1991:107) broadly defines Economic Diplomacy as:

A non-confrontational policy, a tactic adopted to create an environment of mutual understanding between Nigeria and her economic partners in order to enhance domestic growth and development. The tactic is predicated on the offer by Nigeria of more incentives to investors, information dissemination, the mobilization of all relevant actors, the posting of "competent" economic diplomats to man trade sections of Nigeria's missions abroad, and above all, the search for general understanding of Nigeria's economic problems by the country's principal trading partners.

Viewed from the global perspective, economic diplomacy, as a foreign policy concept can be defined as the process of interaction among states in the international system which seek to maximize their national gains and prestige in all their engagements, especially in the area of trade, investments, and other forms of economically beneficial exchanges where they enjoy comparative advantage. Economic diplomacy, as a foreign policy concept, became a foreign policy thrust in Nigeria's foreign policy during the Ibrahim Babangida's administration. Babangida's administration conceptualized economic diplomacy as "the promotion of export trade, investment and increased financial assistance from friendly countries." Building on this, the then Foreign Affairs Minister, Ike Nwachukwu, in his June 1988 speech entitled; "The Dynamics of Nigeria's foreign policy", provided the policy direction when he stated that, "it is the responsibility of our foreign policy apparatus to advance the course of our national economic recovery."

From Babangida's administration till date, economic diplomacy has guided Nigeria's foreign relations with other states in the international system, including African countries. This is manifest in the area of trade, economic cooperation and technical assistance. This is why Ambassador Ashiru stated categorically that Nigeria's new foreign policy direction is now on investment and economic cooperation. According to him:

The emphasis now is on investment and economic cooperation. The new posture of government is that while we retain the leadership role in our sub-region, and while we play our leadership role on the continent by taking the lead in all major issues on the continent, the foreign policy direction will also be used to propel the economic and industrial development of our country (Ashiru cited in Osuntokun, 2012:36).

Ambassador Adeniji is also an apostle of this new foreign policy thrust, and he could not have been more correct by noting that:

Nigeria's foreign policy direction has to lead to where there are development funds and technical assistance, particularly in the light of the weakness in intra-African cooperation, crises and conflicts in Africa, as well as Africa's mobility to bail Nigeria out of her economic doldrums (Adeniji 2003:12).

The economic pressures that were exerted on the Nigerian economy due to the introduction of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) under Ibrahim Babangida's administration inspired the imperative for an economic diplomacy in Nigeria's foreign policy framework. The idea was to promote export, encourage direct foreign investment, embrace neo-liberal economic measures and involve Nigeria deeply in the interplay of the capitalist international political economy. From the political angle of economic diplomacy, it is hoped that Nigeria will ingratiate herself and cultivate the friendship and goodwill of the industrialized nations of the world.

Ogwu and Olukoshi (2003) also acknowledge the imperative of the economy as an important component of the nation's foreign policy endeavours. The sharp decline in government revenue as a result of drastic fall in the price of crude oil in the world oil market galvanized the recourse to emphasis on economic diplomacy. In economic diplomacy, we saw the adoption of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) sponsored Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), promotion of foreign investment flows, encouragement of exports, call for debt cancellation and rescheduling etc. Asobie

(2002) and Akindele (2005) however, observe that economic diplomacy will make Nigeria to depart from her traditional role in Africa, and they expressed the fear of possible abandonment of Afro centrism. However, scholars and career diplomats like Obiozor (1996) and Fafowora (2001) do not share this view. Outlining the multiple dimensions of Afro centrism since the 1990s, including Nigeria's active involvement in the reorganization of the African Union (AU), the establishment of NEPAD, pressure on the industrialized nations for debt reduction and outright cancellation, Fafowora (2001) upholds the view that Africa remains the centre piece of Nigeria's foreign policy.

There are others, like Al-Hassan (2008) and Onyisi (2011), who have argued that the economic diplomacy in Nigeria's foreign policy was a mere hype. To them, it is not achievable, as they argue that Nigeria lacks the infrastructure to use economy as a major instrument of diplomatic engagement. According to them, this is so because the production forces in the economy are grossly underdeveloped; there is the dearth of capital, a lack of entrepreneurial ingenuity; the economy is mono-culturally dependent on oil revenue and rent oriented. They believe that this is partly responsible for Nigeria's inability to make appreciable economic gains from her foreign policy adventures, particularly in the West African sub-region. The two scholars have argued further that it is difficult for any foreign policy thrust to succeed on the basis of reliance on a single factor, such as the economy, as according to them, foreign policy is borne out of multiplicity of factors.

The inability of the Nigerian economy to withstand pressures of the international economy was the very basis for embarking on economic diplomacy as a foreign policy thrust.

Complementing economic diplomacy, the Yar'Adua administration embarked on foreign policy reform whose product is citizen diplomacy. In her effort to develop the country, the administration tried to solicit the assistance of Nigerians both at home and in diaspora through people oriented foreign policy thrust called citizen diplomacy. Dickson (2010) sees citizen diplomacy as a foreign policy thrust that promotes the welfare of Nigerian citizens and seeks to defend them anywhere they find themselves. This is in line with Ojo Maduekwe's submission that citizen diplomacy is about the protection of Nigerians wherever they may be. Chief Ojo Maduekwe, a former Minister of Foreign Affairs further explained that, citizen diplomacy or citizen-centred foreign policy entails the responsibility of the Nigerian government to defend the rights of Nigerians in Nigeria and in diaspora. He argued that what should drive Nigeria's foreign policy is national interest anchored on citizens' welfare. The advocates of citizen diplomacy contend that the welfare of Nigerian citizens should be paramount in the formulation of Nigeria,s foreign policy.

Eke (2009) cited in Okeke (2014: 78-79) listed some basic elements of Nigeria's citizen diplomacy to include among others:

- *Nigeria and Nigerians should constitute the primary focus of the country's foreign policy, i.e. Nigerian citizens should be the centre-piece or focus of Nigeria's foreign policy, while ensuring and maintaining its avowed commitment to the development of Africa;*
- *Nigeria's foreign policy must accomplish the country's development aspirations and objectives to the improvement of the citizens;*
- *Nigerian missions abroad must actively engage the Nigerian community and Nigerians in diaspora, and render quality consular and other services to them as a matter of rights of the citizens and duties and obligations of the mission of the Nigerian government;*
- *Foreign policy making and implementation must be democratized to involve Nigerians from all works of life and not left for a narrow circle of experts and practitioners alone;*
- *Nigeria will be guided by the principle of reciprocity in its international relations with the rest of the countries of the world;*
- *Nigeria will resist being profiled and showcased as a sanctuary of ardent criminals, simply on the basis of despicable conduct of a few of its nationals, the propaganda machinery mounted against Nigeria by a few states too envious about Nigeria's global acclaims and those who have sworn to take no due recognition of the country's tremendous contributions to world civilization, socio-economic and scientific developments as well as security initiatives;*
- *Every Nigerian foreign policy endeavour must meet litmus test of determining the*

extent to which it protects and advances what is best for Nigeria and what will best benefit the Nigerian citizens;

- *Nigerian citizens anywhere in the world would be protected and defended irrespective of charges of violation of laws of the host countries on such accused Nigerian nationals;*
- *Nigerians are to serve as the country's ambassadors by exhibiting the most exemplary conduct, good behavior or etiquette at all times not just at home but most especially when they travel or live abroad.*

With Nigeria's battered image abroad as a country that is very corrupt, with the citizens being deprived of the basic necessities of life, where there is lack of basic infrastructure, where the leaders loot the government treasury for self-aggrandizement, scholars like Okeke (2014) maintain that citizen diplomacy is bound to fail as a foreign policy thrust. Thus, Okeke argues that "Nigerian diplomats have never boosted the country's image or taken care of Nigerians living abroad. Nigeria has no moral justification, social basis or economic foundation to seek reciprocity in its dealings or relations with other states" (Okeke, 2014: 79). Okeke's argument corroborates Abati's contention that:

Citizen diplomacy seems not to have yielded the envisaged dividend due to some factors that are both domestic and international. In Nigeria, the government does not value the lives of its citizens. At home and in diaspora, Nigerians are left to their own survival tactic as many have learnt not to expect anything from their government. Back home the average Nigerian is treated badly by the authorities, for instance, the Nigerian Police Force, vested with the responsibility of maintaining internal peace and security have in all ramifications become agents of terrorism, engaging into extra political killings, illegal arrests and detention of innocent citizens, extorting of multifarious dimensions and brutality (Abati, 2009 cited in Okeke, 2014: 80).

Saliu (2010, on his part, contends that citizen diplomacy is a dubious intellectual construction, not energizing for Nigeria and incapable of addressing the wide gap which exists between the citizens and the leadership in relation to the conduct of Nigeria's foreign policy. This gap has continued to widen since the adoption of citizen diplomacy as a foreign policy thrust, as the external image of Nigeria has not improved. The consequence of this, is the lack of closeness between the government and the citizens, which citizen diplomacy was expected to address. As a result of this alienation of citizens at home, citizen diplomacy has fallen short of making the required meaningful impact on the lives of Nigerians abroad.

CONCLUSION

The undisputed assertion is that the foreign policy of every nation is guided by her national interest. Foreign policy is all about the interests and objectives that a nation seeks to achieve in her dealings and interactions with other nations. No nation, according to Morgenthau, 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 that guide. Nigeria is not an exception.

Nigeria's national interest could be viewed as the totality or aggregation of interests of individuals and groups in the country. In linking Nigeria's national interest to her foreign policy, national interest has been adopted as a means or device for analyzing the fundamental objectives of her foreign policy. In Nigeria's existence as a sovereign state, the influence the country wields through the instrumentality of foreign policy which seeks to promote and protect her national interest can be better assessed within the context of regional and continental leadership aspirations. National interest is therefore viewed as the goals upon which Nigeria's domestic and foreign policies are hinged. The country's national interest is embedded in the principles and objectives of her foreign policy. It can therefore be concluded that, Nigeria's national interest finds justification in certain principles which have informed her foreign policy since independence, which successive governments have maintained and pursued, albeit with varying degrees and commitment.

Nigeria's foreign policy has been largely Afrocentric in posture since independence in 1960. Since then the country has attached greater importance to this Afrocentric foreign policy. Successive governments after independence have accorded significant attention to Afrocentric foreign policy. However, since after the Cold War, Nigeria's foreign policy has witnessed a radical departure from her Afrocentric foreign policy posture to economic and citizen diplomacy.

REFERENCES

[1] Abia, V. (2003).Contemporary Issues in International Relations. Lagos: Concept Publications Limited.

[2] Adeniji, O. (2003). Essays on Nigerian Foreign Policy Governance and International Security. Ibadan: Dokun Publishing House.

[3] Adisa, J. (1990). "National Interest and values", in A.E. Ekoko, and M. A. Vogt, (eds) *Nigerian Defence Policy: Issues and Problems,* Lagos: Malt house Press.

[4] Akinterinwa, B. (1991). "External Response to Nigeria's Economic Diplomacy" *Nigerian Journal of International Studies*, vol. 15, Nos. 1 and 2, pp 12.

[5] Alade, C. A. (1997). Theories, concepts and Principles in the Study of International Relations. Lagos: Elemi Educational Limited.

[6] Al-Hassan, H. Y. (2008). Nigeria-Africa Foreign Policy: Time for Sober Reflection. Retrieved from *http:/ /www. Economic confide ntial.com/Agusfeatureshadi.htl*(Accessed21/ 01/ 14).

[7] Aluko, O. (1981*).* ***Essays on Nigerian Foreign Policy.*** London: George Allen and Unwin.

[8] Asobie, H. A. (2002). "New African Union and its Constitutive Act". *American Journal of Political Science.*

[9] Asogwa, F. C. (2009). Anatomy of Foreign Policy. Enugu: John-Jacob's Classic Publishers Ltd.

[10] Ate, B. E. (1992). ***Towards Integrative Approach to Nigeria's Security Relations with the immediate Neighbours***. Jos: Nano Expressions Ltd.

[11] Eminue, O. (2013). National Interest in H. Saliu and F. Aremu (eds.) *Introduction to International Relations*. Ibadan: College Press & Publishers Limited

[12] Eze, O. C. (2010). "Interrogating Nigeria's National Interest in O. Eze (ed.) *Beyond 50 Years of Nigeria's Foreign Policy: Issues, Challenges and Prospects.* Lagos: NIIA.

[13] Frankel, J. (1979). International Relations in Changing World. Oxford: Oxford University Press

[14] Henderson, C. (2005). ***International Relations: Conflict and Cooperation at the turn of the 21st Century***. Boston: McGraw-Hill

[15] Miller, C. A. (2003). A Glossary of terms and Concepts in Peace and Conflict Studies. Geneva: University for Peace

[16] Morgentau, H. J. (1973). Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace. Chicago: Chicago University Press

[17] Ofoegbu, R. (1998). "Formulating Nigeria's Foreign Policy."*The Guardian*, Lagos

[18] Ogunbambi, R. O. (1986). "Foreign Service: The Nigerian Ambassador and His Tasks", *Nigerian Journal of International Affairs,* Vol. 12, No. 1 and 2.

[19] Okoro, J. (2002). Understanding Nigerian Foreign Policy. Calabar: CATS Publishers

[20] Olukoshi, A. (1992). "Nigerian National Interest and National Security Objectives."*Geographical Studies of African States* Lagos: Nigerian Institute of International Affairs

[21] Olusanya, G. O. and Akindele, R. A. (1986). Nigeria's External Relations: *The First 25 Years*. Ibadan: University of Ibadan Press

[22] Oshuntokun, A.(2012). Survey of Nigeria's Foreign Policy. Lagos: *The Nation Newspaper*, Feb. 16, 2012

[23] Saleh, D. (2006). Nigeria's Foreign Policy. Daily Graphic.

Citation: *Dr. Joseph C. Ebegbulem., "Nigeria's National Interest and Foreign Policy: A Critical Evaluation". (2019). International Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Studies, 6(10), pp.49-60*