

## Nigeria's Foreign Policy Objectives and National Question: Assessing Implementation and Challenges

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### Abstract

Foreign policy is concerned with the development, security, actualization, and promotion of a country's national interests. This paper focuses on the implementation of Nigeria's foreign policy aims in tandem with domestic objectives of addressing several 'National problems' themes such as insecurity, revenue sharing, resource control, underdevelopment, insurgency, ethnic and religious upheavals, and so on. Secondary sources of data such as textbooks, journals, newspapers, and online resources were used to gather data for the paper. The results of the study indicate that there are difficulty in implementing Nigeria's foreign policy since the emphasis was on addressing continental and global issues rather than domestic ones. The study recommends a new approach to Nigeria's foreign policy initiative in order to solve the National Questions. As a result, it is proposed that in order for Nigeria to reap the benefits from its foreign policy, it should concentrate and reformulate its foreign policy only on national interests rather than through the lens of African-centered policy or global one. It also advocates the urgency for the Nigerian state to address the economic challenge facing Nigerians, the situation exacerbated by the recent fuel subsidy removal by the recently inaugurated federal administration; this would significantly reduce the degree of insecurity in the country, and when security and social life improve, it will strengthen Nigeria's standing in the international community.

**Keywords:** Foreign policy, National interest, National Questions, Insecurity and Economic Development

### Introduction

A country's first priority should be to organize its own domestic affairs. The state of a nation's internal affairs significantly impacts on how that nation can act on the world stage. The development of nations and economies requires attention and continue confrontation with challenges. In order for Nigeria to be able to play a significant role in world affairs, Paden (2008) claims that she must overcome five important obstacles. These issues include the establishment of a functioning political system, the consolidation of the rule of law, the growth of capacity for conflict resolution, the promotion of economic development, and the eradication of corruption at all levels.

Nigeria's foreign policy has since independence been consistently guided by the same principles and objectives. However, the emphasis that has been persistently laid on them by successive governments differs depending on the domestic context within which decisions are made. Nigeria tries to be relevant in

international affairs generally as seen in its active role in the United Nations (UN) and other organizations like the Non-Aligned Movement, the Commonwealth of Nations; and the African Union (AU), leaving domestic issues behind. This is where we think quite rightly, that its resources and relative status stand it in good stead to be most effective against the National Question that has become worrisome and pathetic for a long time (Paden, 2008).

In fact, continuous political unrest within the country are not unconnected to the socioeconomic and environmental problems that lie at the heart of the National Question argument. Problems of poverty in the midst of plenty, unemployment, issue of creation of additional states, insecurity, revenue sharing, resource control, environmental negligence, power sharing, insurgency, kidnapping, political corruption etc, that implicate the action of the Nigerian government (Amaeshi & Adi, 2006).

In spite of changes of governments, there has

not been any significant changes in the policy implementation and objectives of Nigeria's foreign policy since independence; which according to Olusanya and Akindele (1986) seeks to promote African integration and unity, international cooperation for the consolidation of global peace and security, a just world economic order and democratic values. The existence and interest of the nation were both unacknowledged and taken for granted; which this paper seeks to address.

This paper is an attempt at examining some of the political and economic issues relating to the resolution of the National Question through the lens of foreign policy in Contemporary Nigeria. It looked at how Nigeria has continue to exert power and influence by way of its foreign policy, leaving domestic problems at the background. The qualitative research design is employed for the study, therefore, secondary source of data collection such as text books, journal articles, thesis and online sources were used to source for data. The paper is theoretically embedded in the national interest school of thought that encompass the political, security, economic, cultural and other interests of a country, that includes prosperity and social wellbeing. The paper is divided into five sections. The first section attempt a general introduction of the subject matter, while the second looks at the background of Nigerian foreign policy, the third section analyses the concept of foreign policy, while the fourth analyses the concept of the National Question, the fifth examines foreign policy and National Question; the final section is the conclusion and recommendations (Hassan & Fatai, 2013).

### **General Background of Nigerian Foreign Policy**

Nigeria is one of the most populous and endowed in terms of economic resources and human skills in Africa. The aforementioned descriptive labels, i.e “primus inter pares”, “giant of Africa”, etc, easily describe Nigeria's status both within the West African sub-region, African continent and the World as a whole (Akinterinwa, 2004). Nigeria's foreign policy since its independence in 1960 has tried to take this reality into consideration both in its scope and objectives. Successive Nigerian governments in articulating the country's

foreign policy have maintained a consistent focus on Africa as both the centerpiece and the major foreign policy domain of Nigeria, followed by that of the global west.

Nigerian foreign policy began on a moderate level at independence. This is anticipated because the country gained its independence on a platter of gold and was not expected to be too radical in the pursuit of foreign policy, unlike sister countries that got their independence via violent means and liberation struggle. Thus, at independence, Nigeria maintained a good relationship with Britain, the erstwhile colonial master. Nigeria adapted a conservative, pro-Western policy. Though, it embraced the policy of non-alignment, there was not serious commitment by the government towards it. According to the first and the last Nigerian Prime Minister, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, Nigeria would be “non-aligned in international relations with regard to the Big power blocs, but never neutral in matters affecting African peoples” (1962:10).

Therefore, it is unmistakably evident that Nigeria's foreign policy at the time of its independence was mostly pro-Western, and that its claim to a non-aligned position was more symbolic than real. The nation had a strong commitment to the free economic system popular in the West and saw communism as a threat that needed to be resisted.

Anglo-Nigeria Defense Pact of 1961, which allowed Britain 'unrestricted' overflying and air staging facilities throughout the federation, was the most tangible and obvious indication of the Balewa government's loyalty to Britain. The Pact was not initially considered to be in conflict with the policy of non-alignment, and it was not until 1962, following violent student protests and harsh condemnation from opposition groups, that it was revoked. Even then, there was a clause in the abrogation since the two nations had pledged to always make an effort to provide "such assistance and facilities in defense matters as are appropriate between countries in the Commonwealth." This shows that even though the contract ended, its spirit lingered on. In fact, throughout the First Republic, there were numerous instances in which the Balewa government's pro-Western attitude was evident. Similar to this, although the Balewa regime emphasized that Africa

would be the cornerstone of Nigeria's foreign policy, subsequent government actions did not support the declaration because there was little that was done specifically to demonstrate the declared Afrocentric approach (Pine, 2011).

Following the takeover of power by the military from the civilian government of Balewa in January 1966, Nigeria's foreign policy remained pro-Western. The military, upon assuming power, was more focused on addressing the country's internal issues than changing its foreign policy stance. This approach continued during the subsequent military regime that followed General Aguiyi Ironsi's government. The military traveled worldwide, explaining the reason for their takeover and the circumstances surrounding it. And the protracted Civil war that follows after, which lasted for almost thirty months, i.e July 1966 to January 1970 (Paden, 2008)

According to Walter (1998), Nigeria, as a sovereign country, actively participates in African and international affairs, playing an active role in the United Nations (UN), as well as in other organizations like the African Union (AU), Commonwealth of Nations, and Non-Aligned Movement. However, the country often overlooks its internal affairs, particularly the National Question, which remains a cause for concern.

Nigeria aimed to create favorable conditions for development in Africa and project a certain status to the rest of the world. However, it neglected to create such favorable conditions for development for itself at home. Instead, it has been content with asserting its "statistical" status. As a result, its foreign policy is limited to restating general principles such as respect for the territorial integrity of other states, sovereign equality of states, non-interference in others' internal affairs, and peaceful settlement of disputes. All in the name of good neighborliness in its relations with other African countries. And 2) occasional actions that do not take national capability into consideration and therefore can only be undertaken or sub-stained at a huge cost to the economy and the people (the Nigeria-led interventions in the name of ECOWAS Monitoring Group, ECOMOG, in Liberia (1990-1997), in Sierra Leon (1997-1999) and the recent intervention in Niger Republic after a Coup d'etat in that country, illustrate this point)

(Hassan & Fatai, 2013),

### **Analysis of the Concept of Foreign Policy**

Nation-states have to interact with one another by necessity. The engagement might take various forms and serve various purposes. Although every state believes in independence and sovereignty, no state can ever exist in perfect isolation, this is impossible. All of this emphasizes the importance of foreign policy in the existence of nation-states. Foreign policy refers to the purposeful effort taken by a country with the sole aim of maximizing the opportunities that are available outside its geographical boundaries, while at the same time, minimizing the perils that abound. The purpose of foreign policy is to further a state's interests, which are derived from geography, history, economics, and the distribution of international power. Safeguarding national independence, security, and territorial integrity, political, economic, and moral, is viewed as a country's primary obligation, followed by preserving a wide freedom of action for the state (Hassan & Fatai, 2013).

There is no generally acceptable definition of foreign policy; however, as Olajide (1981) asserts, "nobody has really formulated a universally acceptable definition of the concept and probably nobody will ever succeed in doing so. Aluko (1981), in concordance with the assertion that there is no universally accepted definition of foreign policy, outlined three common features in the conduct of foreign policy (a) foreign policy is a dynamic process. In other words, it is capable of changing (b) it is a product of interaction between the domestic and external environment (c) foreign policy is not only confined to the work of the foreign service.

Foreign policy could be defined as the governmental activity which concerns relationship between the state and other actors, especially other states in the international system. Put differently, foreign policy could be seen as the totality of all actions, decisions, overtures, or interactions between states in the international system. Such could be directed or based on economics, politics, culture or creating understanding or- co-operation (Adesola, 2004). Foreign policy can also be understood as the overall orientations and policy interaction of

a state towards other states with a view to protecting its national interest (Adeniran, 1983, Ogunjobayo, 2011 & Onimode, 2001).

Funso (2004) viewed foreign policy as the study of formidable and evaluation of choice of a state as the state perceives it (Funso, 2004). we can also conceptualize it as the deliberate and conscious decisions taken by a state in coping with its external environment (Hassan & Fatai, 2013). From the foregoing definitions, three recognizable components of foreign policy are obvious: one, a state's activities; two, national or domestic interests that impact these actions; and three, a state's foreign environment towards which these actions are aimed.

Foreign policy as a concept involves the setting of goals, "the development of strategies for their attainment and implementation of those strategies or conduct of foreign policy" (Afinotan, 2007 & Owugah, 2010). Fundamentally, the main element in foreign policy would include such things as the overall policy orientation of a country towards her external environment, manifesting her intentions toward that environment, the objective which she seeks to achieve in her relations with other countries and the means for achieving those objectives (Adeniran, 1983).

The state of the economy is one of the fundamental determinants of foreign policy. An aggressive foreign policy stance may be supported by a robust economy. Others are the result of colonial legacies, particularly in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Other aspects include integration and overall social cohesiveness. A socially integrated state has the potential to convey unity of purpose to the rest of the globe. Another aspect influencing foreign policy is the leader's personality. When a country has an effective leader, be it under civilian or military government, it is more likely to have an aggressive foreign policy since the leader's personality rubs off on the policy. Others include public opinion, geopolitical location of the country, demographic factor, and international accord (Akindele, 1990). While according to Aluko (1981), the instruments for conducting foreign policy include diplomacy, propaganda, militarism, economic devices and cultural mechanisms.

### **Analysis of the Concept of the National Question**

The concept of national question is vague in meaning. This is because it means different thing to different people, which often depends on ethnic, religious beliefs and geographical location of a person concern. Given this, "every attempts at conceptualizing it end up reducing the contextualization to identity based construct; for the resources and benefits of the state that to a large extent threaten the stability of the state" (Nzongola-Ntalaja, 2001, Ojo & Amadu, 2002).

Numerous problems facing several countries including Nigeria have been coined as national question. While some have used different approaches in explaining the concept; however, in Nigeria, some have argued that "the origin of national question is traceable to the lumping together of heterogeneous ethnic group into a state" (Onimode, 2011). On January 1, 1914, British colonial overlords merged the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria with the Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria to become the Protectorate of Nigeria, and managed the area to promote the national interests of their home country (Onimode, 2011).

This perspective has likened national question to ethnic diversity and its complexity, as well as crisis that emanates from the amalgamation. However, regardless of the multiple's analysis on national question, Ade-Ajayi (1992) sees the 'National Question' as a code name for all the controversies, doubts and experimentation that surround our search for stability, legitimacy and development. Essentially, the national question concerns the fundamental basis of our political existence, that is to say, our Constitution as the basic law, which governs the co-existence of Nigerians as individuals and cultural groups within one political system or state (Ade-Ajayi, 1992).

Given the above description, the national question can be seeing as the summary of issues that surround the survival and development of Nigerian state. The basis for national question in Nigeria is how to ensure equity and social justice among its populace Onimode, (2001). And this involves issues; such like "ethnic domination, regional hegemonies, religious particularism, revenue allocation, control of

resources and military dictatorship” (Naunen, 2001 & Walter & Clemens, 1998).

The National Question in Nigeria identifies challenges that must be addressed if the nation is to survive - and critical issues that have been left unresolved and now threaten the nation state. The most common explanation for Nigeria's persistent poverty, economic backwardness, and continuous social unrest in the face of immense people and material resources is leadership failure, administrative ineptitude, technological lack, moral degradation, and massive corruption. These are some of the National Questions that need to be tackle internally (The Punch, Dec.. 2014:7 The Nations, Feb., 25, 2013: 9). There needs to be more awareness of the absence of a national spirit as the root cause of Nigeria's incapacity to assume its due place among the world's developed countries. Most of Nigeria's military and civilian political leaders operate under the dubious assumption that either the National Question does not exist or it was addressed with political independence in 1960. This group of leaders additionally disregards huge distortions in the country's federal system since the country's independence in 1960 (Akinyemi, 2001).

The biggest obstacle to addressing Nigeria's problems is the political elite's mistaken belief that Nigeria is already a unified nation. Before the European colonizers thought of a Nigerian state, there were several independent kingdoms, empires, and countries (Wuam, 2012). Wuam (2012) further explain that, on January 1, 1914, British colonial overlords merged the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria with the Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria to become the Protectorate of Nigeria, and managed the area to promote the national interests of their home country. And that, since gaining political independence from Britain in 1960, Nigeria has had all the essential features of a state, namely an established territory, population, administration, currency recognized within its boundaries, and international recognition (Wuam, 2012).

In the 18th century, the Anglo-Irish political thinker and philosopher Edmund Burke (1729-1797) stated, "a nation is not governed that is perpetually to be conquered." Furthermore, the nation's internal state functionality in terms of

efficiency, effectiveness, and credibility of state institutions is seriously lacking (Amaeshi & Adi, 2006). Hence, Since 1914, the British government has attempted to integrate Nigeria, but the Nigerian people themselves are historically diverse in their histories, religious beliefs, and practices, and show little evidence of readiness to unite.

### **Foreign policy and the National Question**

Nigeria has played a significant role in the development of Africa. Since 1960, Nigeria's foreign policy drive has earned it the titles "Front-line State" and "Giant of Africa" (Ezeolisa, 2015; Ojatorotu & Adeleke, 2017). However, Nigeria's foreign policy has faced various challenges over the years, resulting from the different policy approaches adopted by various leaders. These challenges have had an adverse impact on Nigeria's foreign policy. Moreover, Nigeria's declining status has been attributed to its poor and failing economy, leadership style and character, and how it handles ethno-religious diversity (Rosemary, 2005; Soremeku, 2003). Pine (2011) argues that the Afrocentric notion of "Africa, the Centrepiece of Nigeria's Foreign Policy" is flawed because it ignores the complex intellectual considerations and the importance of reciprocity. This approach overlooks the pressing issues that Nigerians face, and prioritizes external matters over domestic ones.

Nigeria's national question can be addressed effectively with a well-articulated and proven foreign policy, which can lead to national development. However, Nigeria's current foreign policy is uninspiring, according to Ojo and Amadu (2002). The country is currently plagued by high poverty rates, insecurity, economic downturn, infrastructural decay, ethnic struggles, and rampant corruption, all of which have become inherent characteristics of Nigeria's political landscape. It is indisputable that a country cannot assume the role of a superpower beyond its borders when its citizens are plagued by insecurity, soaring inflation, high unemployment rates, and macroeconomic instability (Idumenge, 2009).

Nigeria has adopted various foreign policy approaches since 1960, starting from pro-west to Non-alignment and from the policy of continuity to discontinuity, particularly within

the West African sub-region. The aim of these policies was to secure and develop the Nigerian state. The objective of any national government's foreign policy towards the outside world should be to address problems facing that particular country. However, despite Nigeria's significant annual expenditure on foreign policy affairs, it has shown little or no impact in addressing the nation's key issues. It is noteworthy to suggest that only a few Nigerians are informed enough to understand the relationship between foreign policy and national development.

Nigerians are eagerly anticipating the current administration's foreign policy formulation and implementation. However, it is worth noting that since the Obasanjo Presidency in 1999, no administration has made significant progress in improving domestic policies to advance foreign policies that would effectively address the national question. Achebe (1983) once stated that the abundant resources that Nigeria possesses could have been utilized to transform the country into a developed nation, and improve the lives of its citizens, especially the poor and needy. (pg, 45).

The Nigerian state has continued to stumble between confidence and conflict; deepening poverty, insecurity, endemic corruption, and other retrogressive forms since the return of democracy in 1999 (Idumangbe, 2009). Therefore, the imperative questions to ask are: how vigorously does Nigerian foreign policy protect national interest? Has Nigeria's involvement in global affairs in any way denied the necessary benefits accruing to Nigerian citizens? And more importantly, has Nigerian foreign policy in any way abated the national question debate?

Nigeria's foreign policy has failed to focus on protecting the national interest, the insecurity and fear of disintegration of the country these days ranked the highest fears among Nigerians. Essentially, any foreign policy that lacks human face is not productive. Hence, a foreign policy that ensures complete security for the nation would not in small measure tackle the "nerve center" of the national question. Therefore, the linkage between foreign policy and national questions is very deep to such an extent that the former, if not properly formulated and implemented could compound the worrying

state of the latter. Therefore, it is worthy to suggest foreign policy has the potential to resolve national questions which in the case of Nigeria arose from the crisis of nation-building.

Foreign policy should aim to promote a nation's core values such as economic viability, internal security, and territorial integrity. To achieve this, the policy must reflect the collective interest and domestic aspirations of the nation. For example, in 2008, Nigeria was ranked by the World Bank as a fragile state with a shaky economy, along with countries like Cambodia, Burundi, Comoros, Congo Democratic, and Guinea-Bissau (Onwuga, 2010). This ranking was made amidst a crisis, highlighting the importance of a foreign policy that prioritizes the nation's well-being.

Nigeria's economy is currently facing a drift, and the educational system has taken a catastrophic plunge. The Asby Commission stated that "illiteracy is an impediment to political life and self-government, which leads to frustration, tension, and even chaos" (Idumange, 2009), and recent events in the country have only proved this point. According to Idumange, successive governments in Nigeria have completely failed to stop the downward trend of socio-political and economic paralysis of the country. It is therefore imperative to reiterate that domestic policies should take into account the fact that Nigeria is an integral part of the global society, culture, and economy, and that they need to show responsive adaptation to it. Failing to do so will result in unrealistic and short-sighted policies (Akindele, 1990).

Inadequate funding is a major impediment to implementing Nigeria's foreign policy. The country's growing foreign responsibilities require significant capital, which is currently unavailable, hindering economic possibilities. The appointment of Ministers and other Diplomats in Nigeria often seems to contradict the idea of a merit-based system. Many non-career diplomats are selected based on political favoritism and ethnic background, despite lacking a thorough understanding of the "complex art of diplomacy". As a result, these Diplomats may struggle to develop effective policies. This issue contributes to foreign policy being poorly drafted and positioned to address national issues in Nigeria.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is facing a significant problem with regards to the recruitment of Foreign Mission staff. The adoption of federal character over merit and competency is hindering the level of productivity and quality of service delivery. This has resulted in Nigeria's corps of diplomatic officers being inadequate to compete with their counterparts in terms of recruitment and training. The lack of competitiveness and persistence in on-the-job training is partly to blame for this.

### Discussion of Findings

Nigeria's foreign policy has been found to have little impact on addressing the country's national issues, despite the large annual budgetary allocation to the ministry. This paper argues that a robust and effective foreign policy is needed to address Nigeria's core national interests. The solution lies in providing adequate funding to the mission and eliminating unethical behavior among the ministry staff. To avoid bureaucratic infighting and promote professionalism, comprehensive reforms must be implemented to instill discipline and dedication to duty.

### Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper evaluates the effectiveness of Nigeria's foreign policy in addressing the National Question, which encompasses issues such as security, economy, and ethno-religious conflicts. By examining the challenges faced by Nigeria's foreign policy in resolving these issues, it becomes clear that a strong foreign policy could play a key role in addressing the National Question and its associated crises.

In order to better align Nigeria's foreign policy with its core national interests, it is crucial that officials responsible for formulating and implementing foreign policy, such as the Foreign Affairs Minister, Heads of Missions, Foreign Ministry officials, and Ambassadors, are appointed based on merit. Other factors to be considered include effective training, improved funding for Missions, and good remuneration for officials. The Nigerian Ministry of Foreign Affairs should work towards strengthening Nigeria's foreign policy objectives and responding promptly to changes in the international environment in order to achieve

national interests.

The paper highlights that Nigeria's foreign policy is founded on the crucial principles of prioritizing national interest. This means that the government must focus on developing sustainable socioeconomic policies, ensuring the safety and well-being of its citizens, and promoting democratic values both locally and globally. It is vital for governments at all levels to prioritize embarking on large-scale projects, such as agriculture, and to support the development of human capacity. This paper contends that funding for trade and investment could create a conducive environment for growth in agriculture and microfinance activities.

Addressing poverty is a crucial issue that needs to be tackled in Nigeria. The problem of poverty is one of the major issues in Nigeria's national question. Therefore, having a strong and consistent foreign policy can bring in significant foreign investment, aid, and trade that can contribute to wealth creation and improve the standard of living of the citizens. When a country experiences economic growth, it can have a positive impact on managing the country's current debt crisis.

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