

## National Interest and National Development in Nigeria

**Victor I. Lukpata, Ph.D**

Department Of History And Diplomatic Studies Federal University Wukari, Nigeria  
[victorlukpata@rocketmail.com](mailto:victorlukpata@rocketmail.com)

Manuscript ID: RCMSS/IJPAMR/1308

### Abstract

The overriding consideration in Foreign Policy Implementation is always based on the concept of national interest. Therefore, national interest is highly central to the corporate existence of a nation. As vital as this concept is both to the existence of a nation and as basis for the analysis of foreign policy behaviour of states, it is subject to abuse. The president of any country could hide under the cover of national interest to perpetuate individual interest. The focus of this article is to highlight the danger of negating national interest and to point out avenues where national interest can contribute to national development in Nigeria. Historical-descriptive approach was used as a method of data collection and analysis which aided in drawing relevant conclusions.

**Key Words:** *National Interest, Nation, Foreign Policy, National Development, States.*

### Introduction

As a concept, national interest may offer guidance and a basis for broad consensus, but the term is so vague that everyone might label any foreign policy pronouncements with such an attractive term. It is because of this stack reality and for purpose of clarity of focus that many analysts in the field of international relations would like to think of national interest simply as national security interest. In accordance with the postulation of Walter Lippman in Emma Odi Chukwuma, 1991:30, National security denotes that “a nation is secured to the extend to which it is not in danger of having to sacrifice core values if it wishes to avoid war and is able if challenged, to maintain them by victory in case of war”. With this flash on the concept of national interest, let us launch into the actual discussion of “National interest and National Development in Nigeria”.

### What is National Interest?

The notion of national interest is vague and so it is difficult to give a precise definition of the term. In spite of that, national interest is defined as the general long term and continuing purpose which the states, nation and the government see themselves as serving. The national interest of a state is rooted in the social consciousness and in the cultural identity of a people. In other words, the national interest of a state is a product of social values which the people have. In practice, the national interest of a country is synthesized and checked by political leaders or policy makers. That is why national interest is defined as “what policy makers say it is” The national interest of a country is the interest of its leaders. It may also be the interest of a group such as the bourgeoisie or proletariat depending on which class is in power. It may as well be the interest of the king. Babagida (1986) maintained that he would like to think of national interest as national security interest. This is because to him the concept of national interest has



become so vague and elastic. We have been warned by social scientists that national security has many tangible ingredients which may be more menacing than external military threat. It can take subtle forms such as subversion of core values through economic sabotage, counterfeiting, drug trafficking, espionage, and cultural subversion. We are all aware of the damage which these elements can cause on a nation's psyche and survival. National security interest can be used to refer to such concepts as "self-preservation", self-defence", and even "survival". In short national security means that the state should survive. It means it should live without serious threat to all values that are regarded as important or vital (Emma 1991:19).

### **National Development**

The term national development is used to refer to a state of maturity which characterizes a nation-state. This maturity results from the interplay of modern political, economic and social forces and processes which transform diverse people, shaping a common geographical area, from acceptance and allegiance to and participation in a transitional policy to the acceptance and creations of and participation in a modern nation-state. The later is characterized by governmental machinery capable of commanding loyalty, keeping order, eliciting legitimacy, fostering integration, permitting mass participation; and satisfying popular wants and expectations. It also has a skilled citizenry which exercises its capacity to create a highly industrial society and manipulates its environment to obtain a high quality of life for the generality of the population (Mea King: 1988:5).

### **National Interest and National Development**

The term national interest is characterized with inconsistency. People do hide under the cover of national interest to project and protect their own individual or group interest. In a situation such as this, national interest does have a negative contribution to national development. But, where the interest of the people is generally projected and protected national interest can then contribute meaningfully and positively to national development. The analysis below will suffice to prove this assertion right.

### **Nigeria – Cameroon Border Crisis**

According to Olusanya (1990:398) where two Nigerian patrol boats at Ikang (border town with a population of 15,000 in Cross River State), spotted non-Nigerian patrol vessels inside Nigerian territory, they moved forward to identify the vessels, the Cameroon gendarmes in those vessels opened fire on one of Nigeria's patrol boats, killing five patrolmen and wounding at least three others. After the killing of the five Nigerian soldiers, a heavy barrage of bullets also came from Cameroon gendarmes pitched at tree tops in the river side forest. The second Nigerian patrol boat fought its way to retrieve the attacked boat and casualties. For some days after the shooting a Cameroon helicopter continued to fly over Ikang at a very low altitude. When the then Governor of Cross River State, Clement Isong, paid his first visit to Ikang area after the incident, Lt Col. F. Ehigiator of the 13 Infantry Brigade in Calabar not only confirmed the episode but he also told him that Cameroon gave Nigeria a surprise attack. This incident occurred on 14<sup>th</sup> May, 1981 and in spite of several aggressive response from politically –



conscious and articulate Nigerians, who perceived the incident as a threat to national security president Shagari blatantly failed to take military action against Cameroon.

Since the attack by Cameroon was a direct threat to Nigeria's vital interest, defined in terms of national security, it was justifiable for the Federal Government in the language of the speaker of House of Representatives, Edwin Ume-Ezeoke to return fire for fire. The Federal government's inability to return fire for fire therefore, created national insecurity that was capable of giving vent to national disintegration. A national interest position such as this can at best contribute negatively to national development. Therefore, the inability of the Nigerian Federal Government to take military action against Cameroon in the wake of the attack on Nigeria by Cameroon on 16 May, 1980 just on the ground of national interest, can have but a negative contribution to national development (Olusanya, Akindele, 1990: 398).

### **Expulsion of Illegal Aliens from Nigeria**

The action of Shagari administration with respect to sudden expulsion of illegal aliens from Nigeria, all in the name of national interest, was a behaviour that was quite inimical to national development. The decision of the Federal Government of Nigeria announced on 17 January, 1983 by Alhaji Ali Baba giving all illegal immigrants numbering between two million and three million, fourteen days to leave the country, created the worst international crisis for Nigeria. This decision it should be noted created a near universal and unexpected hostility towards Nigeria to the amazement of many Nigerians. It involved Nigeria in severe acrimony and sharp disagreement with friendly as well as hostile international actors in some respects worse than international reactions to the Nigerian civil war of 1967-70. For instance, the state Department in Westhampton described the decision as shocking and that it represented a violation of every imaginable human rights, the European Economic Community (EEC) issued a press statement from Brussels condemning the quit order, the pope, John Paul II described the expulsion as a grave, incredible drama and he went on to describe it as producing the largest single and worst human exodus in Nigeria, Mr. Michael Foot, then the opposition Leader in the British House of Commons, wrote a letter to the Nigerian High Commission in London, Alhaji Shalu Awak, in which he referred to the expulsion order and the manner in which it had been implemented as an act of heartlessness and a failure of common humanity. The Western mass media were even more violent in their attack on the Nigerian Government. In an editorial entitled "Inhuman and Heading for Disaster" the London Guardian referred to the quit order as bordering on inhumanity, high handedness and irresponsibility.

Because of this singular action by the administration of Shagari Nigerians image abroad was put in a bad light and other West African Countries such as Ghana, Ivory Coast, among others, thought it wise to reciprocate by expelling Nigerian nationals in those countries. Therefore, in a situation like this where national interest posture as projected by president Shagari affects the core values (national security of a nation) negatively, national interest has little or no positive impact on national development (Olusanya, 1999:400).

### **Adoption of Structural Adjustment Programme**

The adoption of structural adjustment programme as a foreign policy decision during Akinyemi's tenure as Foreign Affairs Minister under the administration of Babangida is a foreign policy decision, taken in the name of national interest that is quite inimical to national development. In fact, to most Nigerians who were the victims of the structural adjustment programme (SAP), many key functionaries in government as well as the organized private business interest group, the ministers bold policy initiatives was regarded as a serious error of national distraction from the pressing business of arresting the depression in the Nigerians economy (The Guardian, May 17, 1993). The structural Adjustment Programme. (SAP) brought so much untold hardship to Nigerians that a conference on "Alternative To Structural Adjustment Programme organized by Human Rights Activists was held at Imodu Hall at Nigerian Labour Congress building, Yaba, Lagos on July 1989 to find a solution to SAP (TIMES INTERNATIONAL SEPT 11, 1989:11). The necessity of the conference aforementioned hinges on the fact that the adoption of SAP which brought untold hardship to Nigerians just in the name of national interest has a negative effect on national development.

### **Nigeria's Membership of Organization of Islamic Conference (IOC)**

In January 1986, Nigeria made a formal application for full membership of the Organization of Islamic Conference during the administration of General Babangida. Nigeria's membership of the Organization of Islamic Conference in the cover of national interest as claimed by Babangida was an action that can impact negatively on our national development because of the secularity of Nigeria as a nation. The Babangida administration argued that Nigeria's full membership of IOC would afford her the opportunity to realize some of its most important foreign policy objectives. This is so, especially as the members of the OIC, except Turkey are non aligned countries. Nigeria can therefore seek the support of the countries for the purpose of realizing her vital goals in the international system. According to General Babangida the OIC is a forum, which Nigeria can mobilize support for the battle against racism and colonialism, and as well advance the interest of Nigeria as a nation. Nigeria, it should be noted is a secular state. Her membership of OIC in the name of national interest in spite of her multi religious nature is quite inconsistent with the spirit of national development.

### **Nigerian Boycott of the Edinburgh Commonwealth Games**

The boycott of commonwealth Games at Edinburgh in the name of national interest is a classic case where national interest can promote national development. Nigeria under the administration of General Babangida decided to boycott the Edinburgh Commonwealth game because of the development at the commonwealth Heads of Government. Nigeria took a strong stand against South Africa, demanding its sanction due to its obnoxious apartheid policy at the 1995 Commonwealth summit. This was also the position of other commonwealth countries, but the British Sought rather to block any of such move. Mrs. Thatcher argued that the south African Government should be given a bit more time to carry out more reforms (Olusanya, 1990:119). The British stand on this matter did not go well with Nigeria and in protest Nigeria decided to boycott the Edinburgh games. Nigeria's foreign policy objectives includes to maintain peaceful coexistence within her



neighbours in the West-African sub-region, Africa and the World, to promote good neighborliness in Africa, and to eradicate colonialism and realism in Africa. Therefore, the boycott of Edinburgh Commonwealth games is consistent with Nigeria's national development because it is in line with her foreign policy objectives.

### **Economic Community Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) Intervention in Liberia**

The intervention of ECOMOG in the Liberian crisis which started in 1989 is another episode that is associated with national interest that can promote national development. The ECOMOG which was made up of such countries as Nigeria, Ghana, Gambia, Togo and Mali operated in Liberia with the objective of: First, imposing a cease-fire in Liberia, Second, setting up an interim government, third, rehabilitation of destroyed essential services such as hospitals, electricity, water and food supplies and so forth. It should be noted that some West African countries such as Burkina Faso, Cote D'Ivoire, protested against ECOMOG Operation in Liberia. According to Blaise Compaore, Captain and President of Burkina Faso, the aforementioned countries that constituted ECOMOG did not consult with other Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) members before carrying out their operation in Liberia. He contended that the mediation committee of ECOWAS is not competent to intervene in a member state's internal conflict except when there is conflict between one member-state and another. Thus ECOMOG and its operation was illegal. Besides, the question of legality the huge financial investment in ECOMOG operation in Liberia was highly attacked by critics. The Diplomat, September 17, 1990 pointed out that the cost of the ECOMOG operation in Liberia is estimated at fifty Million Naira (#50m). It is worthy of note that the buck of the funding was done by Nigeria (The Diplomat, September 17, 1990). However, in spite of the critics position on Nigeria's involvement in ECOMOG, her involvement is quite capable of promoting national development. It should be noted that when peace was instilled in Liberia. Nigeria equally enjoy the atmospheres of peace which is both a necessary and sufficient condition for national development (The diplomat, September 17, 1990).

### **Conclusion**

National interest can negate national development as in the case of Nigerian Cameroon crisis, Expulsion of illegal aliens, the adoption of structural Adjustment Programme, and Nigerians membership of Organization of Islamic conference (OIC). On the other hand, national interest can promote national development as in the cases of Nigeria's boycott of Edinburgh Commonwealth Games and Nigeria's involvement in Economic Community Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) operation in Liberia. Therefore, Nigerian leaders should in the spirit of patriotism project and protect the national of Nigeria. Achievement of national development in Nigeria would be a far cry except the actions of Nigerian citizens are properly align to her national interest.



### References

- A. Bolaji Akinyemi: "Foreign Policy, Defence and the New Consciousness", Nigerian Forum, April, 1981.
- Address of Alhaji Ali Baba, Minister of Internal Affairs, on Aliens residing in Nigeria, and Registration of ECOWAS, Chad and Cameroon citizens on 14 Feb., 83 (Lagos Government printer).
- Bolaji Akinyemi; "Nigeria-Cameroon Dispute: Not Biafra's Revenge", *The Punch*, 11 June, 1981.
- Emma Odi Chukwuma (1991). *President Ibrahim Babangida's Foreign Policy Triumphs*, Lagos: Bissau Investment Ventures WA Ltd
- Gabriel O. Olusanya, R.A. Akindele (ed) (1990): *Structure and Process of Foreign Policy Making and Implementation in Nigeria 1960-1990*. Lagos: NIIA
- L.N. Srivastva (1984): *International Relation (From 1914 To Present Day)*. Surject Book Depot (Regd) Nai Serak, Delhi.
- Mac C. King (1988), *Localism and Nation Building*, Ibadan: Spectrum Books Ltd.
- Morton H. Halperin (1974). *Bureaucratic politics and Foreign Policy*. Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution.
- The Diplomat*, September 17, 1990
- The Guardian*, May 17, 1993
- Times International*, Sept. 11 1989.

