



A Critical Appraisal of Afrocentrism as Nigeria's Foreign Policy Thrust

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1.0 Abstract

This paper titled “*A Critical Appraisal of Afrocentrism as Nigeria's Foreign Policy Thrust*” discusses Nigeria's Afrocentric foreign policy and the role her Foreign policy has played in ensuring regional stability in West Africa. It was established that the West African sub-region has in recent past has been enmeshed in unprecedented conflicts that threatened the peace and stability of the sub-region. Thus, the nature and complexities of these crises calls for a powerful regional actor such as Nigeria to intervene in the management and resolution of these crises to ensure stability in the region. The study found out that Nigeria stand to gain considerably should her Foreign policy be well articulated and grounded in economic consideration as economic benefits of regional integration will flow into Nigeria which is undoubtedly the economic hub of the region. The paper therefore recommends that Nigeria should continue with the Afrocentric Foreign Policy thrust. However, the government should prioritize the wellbeing of the Nigerian people amongst other things.

Keyword:*Afrocentrism, Nigeria, Foreign Policy Thrust, Africa*

2.0 Introduction



National interest is a compass that guides a political leader or decision-maker to determine what his country ought to do at any given time. It can as well be defined from the perspectives of both domestic or internal and external foreign policy goals. The major aim of this paper is to discuss the concept of national interest, relate it to Nigeria's Afrocentrism and x-ray how the foreign policy has impacted on the country's national development since 1960 of political independence. To achieve this objective, the paper is divided into three Sections. Section one deals with the conceptual definition of the subject-matter, types of national interest and controversy surrounding the concept. Whereas, section two will deal on the introduction of Afrocentrism into Nigeria's foreign policy, its goals and how it has over the years impacted on the country's national development. Section three on the other hand will critically appraise the Afrocentric Foreign Policy thrust of Nigeria with relevant conclusions made.

3.0 The Conceptual Definition of National Interest

According to Wikipedia, national interest often referred to by the French expression *raison d'état* (reason of State), is a country's goals and ambitions whether economic, military, cultural or otherwise. It further mirrors national interest as an important concept in international relations where its pursuit remains the foundation of the realist school of thought Olajide Akuko, in his own definition itemizes the essential ingredients of national interest as (i) Self – preservation of the country; (ii) defense and maintenance of the country's independence (iii) economic and social well-being of the people; (iv) defense, preservation and promotion of the ways of life, especially the promotion of world peace.



At this juncture, it is pertinent to also present a more inclusive definition of the concept as propounded by OzoemenamMbachu. According to him, national interest expresses core socio-economic and political ideas, values and aspirations which are adequately defended beyond national boundaries. In other words, national interest is not limited to what takes place at the domestic environment only, but the aggregate interests pursued in the international political system.

4.0 Types of National Interest

As a key concept in the study of international relations, national interest is classified into the following issue areas:

- i. **Primary, Vital or Core Interests:** A nation's primary interests hover around the preservation of its physical, economic, political and cultural identity including honour and prestige against possible encroachment from foreign powers. This is why as Mbachu argues that "Primary interest is often equated to the issue of national defence and security". Moreso, Hans Morgenthau, asserts that "the major concern of States in the international system is the acquisition of power, and that States strive to increase their power in order to be able to pursue and protect their national interests".
- ii. **Secondary Interests:** This category of interests, though of lesser importance are quite vital to the existence and survival of the State. These include the commitment and protection of the nationals and investments abroad and ensuring of diplomatic immunities for diplomatic staff. The US and recently China have huge economic potentials emanating from unprecedented economic investments across the globe by their



governments and nationals. To be able to maintain dominance in the international economic system, the protection and promotion of overseas investments become very imperative.

- iii. **Permanent Interests:** These refer to relatively constant and long-term interests of the country in which change is rather slow. For instance, the Africa continent has since independence in 1960 been the “center – piece” or cornerstone of Nigeria’s foreign policy and despite criticisms and pressure for its review, still remains the major focus. Again Great Britain, over centuries maintained freedom of navigation to protect her colonies and volume of trade globally.
- iv. **Variable Interests:-**As the name suggests, variable interests are those interests that a nation in a given set of circumstances considers vital for national good. In this situation it can diverge from both primary and permanent interests, propelled by factors such as public opinion, personalities, partisan, sectoral interests, moral folk, etc.
- v. **General Interest:** This has to do with the positive condition that can be applied to a group of nations to the advantage of the country in particular and to others generally. For instance, the promotion of world peace and security through the ratification of treaties, conventions and absolute obedience to international laws. General interests can as well be expressed on the formation and promotion of regional and sub-regional economic groupings as evidenced in Nigeria’s roles in the birth of ECOWAS or military grouping like the ECOMOG. Other pointers include the Arab League, OPEC, NATO, etc.

5.0 Controversy Surrounding the Concept



National interest is shrouded in ambiguity and complexity making it a concept of controversy and abuse by Heads of State, politicians, decision-makers and scholars of international relations. Whether in domestic or external environment, national interest has meant different things to different people thereby giving rise to diverse interpretations of the concept.

National interest possesses dual utility, as political analysis and political action. In the case of political analysis, it is used to vividly explain and describe the sources or adequacy of a country's foreign policy. As an instrument of political action, it serves as a means of justifying or repudiating policies initiated by political leaders cum decision makers of a State. However, in both circumstances, national interest is predicated on what is best for the State driven by its foreign policy apparatus.

Elite theory or Neo-Pluralism is premised on the assumption that "public policy is always mirrored from the values and preferences of minority governing elite. The ambiguity of the concept rests not on its definition but its practical relevance. National interest is always interpreted as if it is synonymous with State's interest or elite interest or interests of decision-makers. Ibrahim Gambiricollaborates this assertion by stating that national interest reflects the needs and aspiration of national elites of political, business, bureaucratic, military and traditional ruling groups. In his own perspective Alex Nwahiri posits that;

many analysts have argued that there is nothing like national interest of a State or that it is simply what policy elite in any State claim at any point in time.



This state of affairs whereby the privileged minority rules over the majority is what Dibia apathy describes as the Iron Law of Oligarchy and therefore concluded by dismissing pluralism as a mere myth.

6.0 Afrocentrism as Nigeria's Foreign Policy Thrust

Prior to Nigeria's independence in 1960 prominent Nigerians like Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, Femi-Kayode, Ayo Rosiji, Jaja Wachukwu opined that Nigeria was pre-ordained to leadership position in Africa. For instance, as nationalist movement gathered momentum, Hon Jaja Wachukwu in a parliamentary debate requested Britain to grant Nigeria independence, and further argued that the African continent looked up to Nigeria for emancipation from colonialism and freedom from slavery. Earlier a related sentiment was expressed by Nigeria's first ceremonial president, Rt. Hon Azikiwe when he asserted that it should be the manifest destiny of Nigeria to join hands with other progressive forces in the world in order to emancipate the people of African descent from the scourge of colonialism. He further stated that Nigeria should be in the vanguard of the struggle to liberate Africans from the yolk of colonialism.

Regrettably, Nigerian leaders in recent past did not share in the vision of these few early African statesmen, and consequently the Balewa regime, following political independence neither implemented nor sustained the much orchestrated African policy especially intra-African trade relations. Accounting for this policy somersault was fundamentally the maintenance of traditional ties with western countries, coupled with poor development of intra-African communication network system.



It was from General Yakubu Gowon's government that Africa became the focus of Nigeria's foreign policy. The remarkable feature of this new policy stance include the following: firstly, Africa received greater attention than hitherto. Secondly, the Nigerian Head of State developed closer relationships with her counterparts in the continent. Thirdly, there was notable increase in the amount of financial and technical assistance Nigeria gave to other African countries. Fourthly, there was greater Nigerian involvement in the liberation struggle in Africa. The moral and material support which South Africa and Portugal gave to the secessionist regime during the civil war increased Nigeria's resolve to work towards the early liquidation of Portuguese and apartheid regimes in southern Africa. Hence, Africa as "the centre-piece of Nigeria's foreign policy" is a foreign policy thrust which basically and persistently accords utmost attention, total concentration and exclusive recognition to Africa in Nigeria's foreign policy-making and implementation before thinking of the outside world.

7.0 The Impact of Afrocentrism on Nigeria's National Development

According to Walter Rodney, development has a dual-sided process, the levels of individual and social groups. The former implies increased skill and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material well-being; while the later has to do with increasing capacity to regulate both internal and external relationships. For ObasiUgwe, development is the all-round interconnected progressive transformation of man, society and nature, made possible by his incremental mastery over them.

By definition, the concept, underdevelopment is not the absence of development because groups and countries have to a greater or lesser extent developed in one way or another.



Therefore, underdevelopment makes sense only when levels of development are rationally compared, for instance Britain and Nigeria or Europe and Africa. Igwe again persuasively argues that modern underdevelopment expresses a relationship of exploitation, that is, the exploitation of one country by another as evidenced by Nigeria's colonial experience.

However, at independence the regime of Nigeria's first Prime Minister, AlhajiAbubakarTafawaBalewa covertly controlled by AlhajiAhmadu Bello, the Northern Regional Premier under the NPC ruling political party unilaterally fashioned out the country's Afrocentric foreign policy. This state of affairs was prompted by Nigeria's immediate emergence from colonial rule and consequently lacked the much required professionalism to positively conduct its foreign policy geared towards sustainable economic growth and development.Nigeria's' development effort was fundamentally undermined by maximally utilizing the country's scarce resources to super-head the formation of OAU in 1963. By May 26, 2001 the continental organization was renamed African Union, AU to reflect global economic and political realities of which Nigeria also championed.

Under Afrocentric foreign policy, Nigeria committed huge financial and human resources in the struggle that led to the eradication of colonialism and apartheid supremacist regime from the African continent. For instance, in 1975 Nigeria granted the sum of US \$13.5 million and military assistance to Angola's MPLA and also enlisted diplomatic support for the Angolan government. This development as initiated by Nigeria spurred majority of African countries to accord recognition to the Angolan government who were hitherto unwilling to do so. Very



unfortunately, after profusely investing so much in these countries, they have overtly exhibited ingratitude to Nigeria and its nationals.

Furthermore, for purposes of economic integration and non-viability of some West African countries in terms of population and economy, Nigeria under the military government of Yakubu Gowon unilaterally mid-wived the birth of 16 – member ECOWAS nations on May 28, 1975. The monumental financial contributions made by Nigeria in the two organizations stated above have in no small measure brought about economic prosperity and political independence of many African countries but Nigeria has virtually nothing to show for it in terms of national development.

Nigeria’s involvement in the ECOWAS military intervention group, ECOMOG, though desirable brought about peace and stability to the war-thorn countries of the West African sub-region. This venture, no doubt cost Nigeria enormous resources and unspecified number of troops who paid the supreme sacrifice. Ambassador F. George painted a murky picture of the scenario by asserting that

“the historic contributions of Nigeria to regional peace missions in Liberia and Sierra Leone which cost the country the whooping sum of US \$10 billion, not to mention the gallant men and women of Nigerian Armed Forces who paid the supreme sacrifice in the course of peace are hardly acknowledged by the international community”

In addition, Nigeriasingle-handedly incurred the sum of US \$90 billion in the OAU Peacekeeping Force deployed to Chad in the 1980, coupled with the whooping sum of US \$800



million Nigeria Trust Fund under the instance of African Development Bank, ADB aimed at assisting poorer African nations obtained soft loan to execute their development projects.

However, there were near-reforms of Nigeria's foreign policy formulation during Obasanjo's administration when he charged newly appointed ambassadors in 1999 that "Nigeria's foreign policy today extends far beyond our concern for the well-being of our continent, Africa". The president further stated that debt burden was not an exclusive African affair, that it also affected many countries in the Caribbean, Asia and South America. Therefore, as a matter of necessity and extreme urgency he charged the three regions to "harmonize their efforts in the search for a fairer deal from the industrialized nations of the West" that will unarguably usher in a far-reaching socio-economic prosperity premised on global overview. These postulations are laudable as they sound but paradoxically Nigeria has intricately been involved in African projects at the detriment of its national development.

8.0 Critical Appraisal of Afrocentric Foreign Policy and Conclusion

Indisputably, every nation-state is an actor in the international system and non-State actors are in a state of autarky. This state of affairs makes it very imperative for interdependence and interchange among nations apparently occasioned by globalization. With certain measures of power and influence, nations within the confines of international political system achieve national interests favourable to their citizens; promote the much needed cachet and also aid growth and national development.

Although Nigeria is rich in strategic mineral resources which generate excessive and steady national income which assists in solving some African problems, the magnitude of such



expenditure greatly hurts Nigeria's domestic aspirations. Driven by the perception that Nigeria is richly endowed, political leaders lavished the resources on poorer African countries. This over-orchestrated foreign policy lacks focus and direction as it does not at the long-run bring about the desired national development which is the hallmark of foreign policy formulation and implementation. According to Lawani,

in dealing with other nations, a nation is jealously guarded, should be guided or can be expected to be guided by her own national interests; and since nations are selfish, they are expected to be so when they deal with other nations.

This is quite evident in Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) description of man in a state of nature in which "self-preservation" was the order of the day. Nigeria's political leaders forgot that politics is all about the struggle for power which is part of human nature. Collaboration and or cooperation only occur when interests of both players coincide while rivalry, competition and conflict automatically become inevitable when interests clash.

International relations experts, the academia and public opinion analysts have persuasively argued that there is a deep rift between Nigeria's national interest and Nigeria-Africa relations. Apparently, Nigeria is doing too much in the African continent without any corresponding positive result from the recipient countries. This ugly development has undoubtedly attracted severe criticisms from well-meaning Nigerians, for instance Mailafiya asserted that

the centre-piece of any country's foreign policy ought to be that country itself if it seriously considers itself a national actor on the world stage.... Every single action shall be adjudged by how much



it advances our power and influence and how much it advances our interests, objectives and purposes.

Collaborating the above stated assertion, Ukaeje stated that “in our false generosity abroad and punury at home is proof that we are pretending to have been overstretching ourselves”.

As diversionary as it seemed, while vigorously pursuing the Afrocentric foreign policy Nigeria’s ruling elites have been systematically pre-occupied with the use of state power and influence to perpetuate and sustain their respective regimes in power and not to radically transform the country in terms of national development. Despite its glaring shortfalls, our political leaders cum decision-makers unabatedly continue to formulate and implement policies along Afrocentric divide. According to Ogeme, (2011),

today with the countries now on firm footing in political and economic terms, many countries are once again at the door of Sierra Leone and Liberia reaping from the gain of Nigerian sweat while little had been done to turn the nation’s sacrifices in the country into economic gains.

It is a near-consensus opinion of these advocates that attention should be paid to achieving vital national interest directed towards greatest happiness of the greatest number as postulated by Jeremy Bentham. If Nigeria’s foreign policy thrust was *abinitio* formulated and implemented with national interest as a driving-force for economic growth and sustainable development, politico-socio-economic vices such as Boko-haram insurgency, militancy, violent agitation against abject poverty, endemic diseases, looming youth unemployment, how industrialization, low per capita income and a host of other underdevelopment indices would not have had a place in Nigeria’s history as a nation.



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