

NATIONAL INTEREST AND SELECTED MILITARY ADMINISTRATIONS IN NIGERIA: A CASE OF INCONSISTENCY

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Abstract

The concept of the national interest is used in both political analysis and political action. As an analytic tool, it is employed to describe, explain, or evaluate the sources or the adequacy of a nation's foreign policy. As an instrument of political action, it serves as a means of justifying, denouncing, or proposing policies. Both usages, in other words, refers to what is best for national society. The both also share a tendency to confine the intended meaning to what is best for a nation in foreign affairs. However, while the concept of national interest is fundamental in politics, its inconsistency has been challenged by scholars such as Karl Von Clausewitz in the field of international politics. Such cases of inconsistency are highlighted in this article with a view to evaluating the role of selected chief executives in the Public Sector of Nigeria, in their pursuit of Nigeria's foreign policy. Historical descriptive approach was adopted as method of data collection.

Key Words: National interest, World Politics, inconsistency international Relations, foreign policy.

Introduction

As a concept, national interest may offer guidance and a basis for broad consensus, but the term is so consistent that everyone might label any foreign policy pronouncements with such as attractive name. it is because of this start 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, National Security denotes that "a nation is secured to the extent 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, the philosophical inconsistency associated with the term and how this can influence foreign policy behavior of states shall critically be examined using the role of a select chief executives in Nigeria's public sector in their pursued of foreign policy.

What is National Interest?

National interest is a concept that is often inconsistent with the action of leaders. Therefore, 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 rich and poor classes depending on which class is in power. It may as well be the interest of the ruler. In his address at the All Nigeria – Conference on Foreign policy NIPPS, Kuru on 7th April, 1986, President Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida (IBB) 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 such as Walter Lippman, Arnold Wolfers and Karl Von Clausewitz that national security has many ramifications. They argue that threat to 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 (Chukwuma, 1991:19).

Philosophical Inconsistency Associated with the Term National Interest

The term national interest is characterized with inconsistency. Politicians do hide under the cover of national interest to project and protect their own individual, or group interests. This is true in the sense that most foreign policy behaviours are quite inimical to national interests of states. The analysis below will suffice to prove right this assertion:

Nigeria-Cameroon Border Crisis

According to Olusanya (1990:20) two Nigerian patrol boats at Ikang, a border town with a population of 15,000 in Cross River State, spotted non-Nigerian Patrol Vessels inside Nigerian territory. Moving forward to identify the vessels the Cameroon gendarmes in these 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 also told him that Cameroon gave Nigeria a surprise attack (Olusanya, 1990:70). This incident occurred on 16th 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-the core or vital interest of Nigeria, president Shagari perhaps because of democratic bottle necks failed to take military action against Cameroon. The military option could have been justified on at least two grounds, namely, national interest and self-defence. 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 then speaker of House of representatives, Edwin Ume-Ezeoke to "return fire for fire", after failure of possible diplomatic measures. The Nigeria-Cameroon border crisis can be compared with the Sino-Soviet border dispute of 1969 (between Kazakstan and Sinkiang) in which five soviet border guards were believed to have been killed (Srivastva, 1984:1117).

The national interests, that is, national insecurity of both countries were at stake. Both reacted with force and China, the apparently weaker side, went to the extent of building up the Gaullist equivalent of a nuclear force de Frappe (strike force) directed against the Soviet Union. On 2 March, 1969, the Frontier groups of both countries clashed over Damansky Island in the USSURI river, with heavy casualties 31 dead and 14 wounded on the Soviet side (Srivastva 1984:1117) 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 was quite inconsistent to the national interest of Nigeria (Gabriel Olusanya and Raymond Akindele 1990:398).

Expulsion of Illegal Aliens from Nigeria: The action of Shagari administration with respect to sudden expulsion of illegal aliens from Nigeria was a behaviour that was quite inconsistent to Nigeria national interest. The decision of the Federal Government of Nigeria announced on 17 January, 1983 by the then

Minister of Internal Affairs, Alhaji Ali Baba giving all illegal immigrants numbering between two million and three million, fourteen days to leave Nigeria 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 Nigerian. 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 right. The European Economic Community (ECC) issued a press statement from Brussels deploring the quit order (Olusanya, 1990:400). The pope, John Paul II denounced 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 (Olusanya,1990:400). Mr. Michael Foot, then the Opposition Leader in the British House of Commons, wrote a letter to the Nigerian High Commission in London, Alhaji Shahu 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 (Olusanya 1990:400) 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 (1983:15) referred to the quit order as bordering on inhumanity, high-handedness and irresponsibility. Because of this singular action by the administration of Buhari, Nigeria's image abroad was put in a bad light and other West African Countries such as Ghana, Ivory Coast thought it wise to reciprocate by expelling Nigerian nationals in those countries (Gabriel Olusanya and Raymond Akindele 1990:400).

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 President Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida is another foreign policy behaviour that was inconsistent to the national interest of Nigeria. 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 minister's bold policy initiatives were regarded as a serious error of national distraction from the fundamental and pressing business of arresting the depression in the Nigerian economy. The structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) brought so much untold hardship to Nigerians that a four-day workshop on SAP and the Nigerian Environment organized by the Nigerian Environmental Study/Action Team (NEST) held in Benin-city on May 1993 to examine the effect of SAP on the country's renewable resource utilization, the housing industry, agriculture and waste disposal and called for a "complete review of the programme", - *THE GUARDIAN*, May 17, 1993. In the same vain, a conference on *alternative to Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP)* was organized by *Human Rights Activists* held at Imodu Hall at Nigerian Labour congress building, Yaba, Lagos on July 1989 to find a solution to structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) (*TIMES INTERNATIONAL 11, SEPT.* 1989:11). The necessity of the workshop and conference aforementioned hinges on the fact that SAP as a policy was inconsistent with the national interest of Nigeria.

The Nigeria Boycott of the Edinburgh Commonwealth Games

Nigeria under the administration of General Babangida decided to boycott the Edinburgh commonwealth game because of the development at the Common wealth Heads of Government summit held in Nassau, Bahamas, in October 1995. At the Summit, Nigeria's position was that a strong stand against South Africa be taken over its obnoxious apartheid policy. 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 to the apartheid system. The British stand on this matter did not go well with Nigeria and in protest Nigeria decided to boycott the Edinburgh games. The point to note here is that a lot of money had been spent on the Nigerian preparations for the games which could have been spent on preparations for an alternative sport meeting for the benefit of the Nigerian sportsmen and women who had been in camp training for the Edinburgh meeting. Furthermore, the

popular feeling in diplomatic and intellectual circles was that the boycott was largely the result of Bolaji Akinyemi's strong anti-commonwealth views. His critics failed to understand that he was representing the elite's class. If this is anything to go by, it shows that personal interest has now influenced the boycott of Edinburgh Games policy formulated in the name of national interest (Gabriel Olusanya, 1990:413).

Nigeria's OIC Membership: In January 1986, Nigeria made a formal application for full membership of the Organization of Islamic conference (OIC), during the administration of General Babangida. The Babangida administration argued that Nigeria's full membership of OIC would afford Nigeria the opportunity to realize some of its most important foreign policy objectives. This was so, especially as all the members of the OIC, except Turkey were non-aligned countries. Nigeria could therefore, seek the support of these countries for the purpose of realizing her vital goals in the international system. According to General Babangida, the OIC was a forum, which Nigeria could mobilize support for the battle against racism and colonialism, and as well advance the interest of Nigeria as a nation. It is worthy to note that one of the stated objectives of the OIC was to combat racist and colonialist oppression all over the world and support liberation efforts directed against colonialism and racism. Nigeria, it should be noted is a circular state. The attempt at registering Nigeria as a member of OIC in spite of her multi-religious nature was inconsistent with the spirit of national interest.

ECOMOG Intervention in Liberia

The intervention of ECOMOG in the Liberian crisis which started in 1989 was in line with the concept of regional peace and security. The Economic Community Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) which was made up of such countries as Nigeria, Ghana, Gambia, Togo and Mali operated in Liberia with the objective of:

- a) Imposing a cease-fire in Liberia
- b) Setting up an interim government
- c) Rehabilitation of destroyed essential services such as hospitals, electricity, water and food supplies, etc.

It is worthy to note that some West African countries such as Burkina Faso and Cote d'ivoire protested against Economic Community Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) Operation in Liberia. According to Blaise Campaore, Captain and President of Burkina Faso, the aforementioned countries that constituted Economic Community of West Africa (ECOMOG) did not consult with other Economic Community of West Africa (ECOWAS) members before carrying out their operation in Liberia. He contended that the mediation committee of Economic Community of West Africa (ECOWAS) was not competent to intervene in a member state's internal conflict except when there was conflict between one member-state and another. Thus, Economic Community Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) and its operation was illegal. In collaboration, Mr. Uchegbu, an International Lawyer argued that events in Liberia fall "within the exclusive jurisdiction of Liberia" and any attempt by any other country to interfere constitutes "unjustified interference" in the domestic affairs of Liberia. Besides the question of legality, the huge financial investment in Economic Community Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) Operation in Liberia was contrary to national interest. The Diplomat, September 17, 1990 pointed out that the cost of the Economic Community Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) operation in Liberia was estimated at fifty million Naira (#50m). The bulk of the funding was done by Nigeria.

America had \$500m worth of equipment in Liberia. The firestone company in Liberia belongs to American citizens. And yet Mr. Andrew Young, former U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations maintained on Voice of America Programme that "U.S. should focus its interest in Africa on humanitarian rather than political matters". Mr. Young according to the Diplomat was talking in line with American national interest. Nigeria can not justify her huge financial investment in Economic Community Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) operation in Liberia to be in line with national interest when back home there was growing poverty, unemployment, destitution, crime rate and violence. While Nigeria was unable to address these issues of core

value she was spending heavily in Economic Community Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) Operations at the expense of the lives of our soldiers who died in Liberia in the course of operation, and financial investment that would otherwise have been used for local investment in setting up economic ventures that could create employment and reduce poverty.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is worthy to remark that the concept of national interest is associated with inconsistency. This perhaps is so because the term national interest is inconsistent and its inconsistency give policy makers in the international system the impetus to protect and project individual or group interest using national interest as a disguise as seen in the illustrative cases above.

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