



A Peer Reviewed Refereed Journal

CHOOSING THE BEST ALTERNATIVE FOREIGN POLICY OBJECTIVE BETWEEN NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL INTEREST

**SHERIFF GHALI IBRAHIM, FAROUK IBRAHIM BIBI-FAROUK AND
DAVID SAMUEL IMUHA**

*DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS,
UNIVERSITY OF ABUJA, ABUJA*

ABSTRACT

The paper delved into the issue of best alternative foreign policy objective in international relations, and analyses the selection between national and international interest in achieving such designated objectives. Findings show that, states cannot ignore national interest for international interest which they see as the best alternative foreign policy objective to be achieved. States may work together based on international norms to pursue an international agenda, but they still consider national interest before the international. The paper concludes that all states formulate their national interest according to their needs and aspirations, which may differ from others. Every state projects this interest through the instrumentality of its foreign policy. These interests are divided into core or vital and non-vital interest. The paper recommends that States should always look at humanity at large and support their national interest with that in order to make the world a better place for all human race and communities.

Keywords: foreign policy; alternative; objective; national; international; interest.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose and goals of a state, expressing its corporate needs and interest are embodied in its foreign policy. The foreign policy is carried out by the deployment of the relevant resources or power of a state. The particular actions or modes designed to achieve these purposes and goals are the instruments of foreign policy (Ifidon (2002). A major school of historians and students of world affairs have emphasized on the concept of national interest as a central theme for the framing of foreign policies. Obviously, the leaders of every nation are expected

to promote the national interest, but the interpretation of that interest may differ or vary greatly by states (Palmer and Perkins: 2007).

Sovereign states engage in the game of nations, not to promote the international needs of man but to protect and enhance their national interests. Even diplomatic tools of altruism like financial grants, food, aids, technical aid, investment, technology transfers etc. are all manipulated by diplomats to attain the national interest of nations. Power and defence-based foreign policy are inter-related. The relationship between the two is such that the realists continually show that the central force of International Relations is power (Moregenthau, 1987.5), and states manipulate power in order to defend their national interest in both bilateral and multilateral relations.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Many scholars have given a myriad of interpretations and thoughts on what constitute the concept of foreign policy. These thoughts and interpretations have influenced many countries in their foreign policy formulation and implementation over the years. In the writings of Child (1948:64) foreign policy is “the substance of foreign relations,” meaning, international relations is felt through the identification of the foreign policy of other states which define the objectives states seek to achieve. In a broader sense of conceptual interpretation, Legg and James (1971:28) are of the view that foreign policy is:

A set of explicit objectives with regard to the world beyond the borders of a given social unit and set of strategies and factors designed to achieve those objectives. It implies the perception of a need to influence the behavior of other states of International organizations.

Extracting from the above argument, Legg and James have left no stone unturned in presenting some special elements of foreign policy looking at influencing the behavior of other states and international organizations with a strategy to achieve the designated objectives of states. Northedge (1968:15) has differently interpreted the concept of foreign policy when he posits that it is “interplay between the outside and inside.” The notions of outside and the inside refer to the way and manner a state sets its policy principles on how to relate with the foreign states (the outside). In line with Northedge’s (1968) assertion, Frankel also sees foreign policy almost same way, when he pointed out that foreign policy is a dynamic process of interaction between the changing domestic demands and supports, and the changing external environments (Frankel 1975:9).

Two major significant variables that determine foreign policy explanation are internal and external notions. The intermediary is the policy which sets the principles and rules of the interaction between and among states. Gibson

(1944) views foreign policy as “a well-rounded comprehensive plan, based on knowledge and experience for conducting the business of the government with the rest of the world. It is aimed at promoting and protecting the interests of the nation”. Foreign policy in the writings of Modelsla (1962), is the system of activities evolved by communities for changing the behavior of other states and for adjusting their own activities to the international environment. The communities here are states within the comity of nations.

Foreign policy in its holistic approach is centered on achieving national interest and state’s objectives. The national interest often referred to by the French expression *raison d’Etat* “reason of the state” is a country’s goals and ambitions whether economic, military, or cultural (Church: 1973). The concept of national interest has attracted different scholarly analysis, where Duada (2010) believes it is divided into core or vital and non-core or non-fundamental interests. According to Nweke (1985: 11) vital interests include territorial integrity; political and economic independence; and socio-political organization of the state. In the same vein, Aluko (1977: 265) succeeded in presenting six elements of national interest which are include:

- i. Self preservation of the country.
- ii. Defence and maintenance of the country’s independence.
- iii. Economic and social well-begin of the people.
- iv. Defence, preservation and promotion of the ways of life, especially democratic values.
- v. Enhancement of the country’s standing and status in world capitals especially in Africa.
- vi. Promotion of the world peace.

It is also from the above itemization that Frankel (1973) attempted to explain the concept of national interest using different perspectives: the aspiration, the operational and the polemic. At the aspiration level, according to Frankel, “the concept refers to the vision of the good life, some ideal set of goals which the state would like to realize if this were possible.” However, any identifiable goal of the state needs to achieve within a reasonable period of time. The ideal goal could be a long term objective such as rapid socio-economic development in most third world countries. At the operational level, Frankel (1973) has argued that the national interest refers to “*the sum total of interest and policies actually pursued by a particular state.*” At the polemic level, Frankel (1973) argued that this national interest refers to:

The use of the concept in political argument in real life to explain, evaluate rationalize or criticize international behavior. It is used less to describe or prescribe than to prove ones self-right and ones opponent wrong.

In agreement with Frankel's perspectives, Adeniran (2007: 301) also believed that:

*When state men, and bureaucrats are required to act in the national interest...
What is meant is that they are being called upon to take action on issues that would improve the political situation, the economic and social well-being, the health and culture of the people as well as their political survival. They are being urged to take action that will improve the lot of the people to domination by other countries...policies which are likely to make them unable to stand among other nations.*

From the above analysis, it is obvious that no nation on earth is isolated in the game of formulating and implementing her national interest. According to a popular proverb "Charity begins at home" Nations would do all within their power to safeguard and preserve these cardinal vital interest. For example, the Federal Military Government of General Olusegun Obasanjo Nationalized British Petroleum in 1979, General Buhari in 1983 drove away the Chadians invading forces, who occupied a territory of Nigeria; General Sani Abacha was proactive when he responded to threat posed by the Bakassi issue with deployment of Nigerian troops to preserve Nigeria's vital interest within Bakassi.

The regimes of Goodluck Jonathan and Mohammadu Buhari has equally played active role in fighting the menace of Boko-Haram members who have vowed to temper with Nigeria's core national interest. Some of the territories seized by the Islamic militants were recaptured by the government security forces in 2018. The Nigeria civil-war of 1967 was primarily fought between the aggrieved Biafra side and the Federal government, the later would do all within its might not to allow the Biafran forces to secede, doing so was against the national interest, which the military saw itself as the custodian of the nations constitution vowed to preserve.

THE LINE BETWEEN NATIONAL INTEREST AND INTERNATIONAL INTEREST

By International interest we mean obligation, duties and some set of objectives states entered bilaterally or multilaterally with other states or international organizations which are ratified through treaty. In other words, beyond the territory of states there exist an international community, which is a community of nation-states, and non-state actors as key players in this community, just like state, there is an interest similar to the national interest of states. Michael (2000) argues that "there are those (John Bolton and Paul Stephen among them,) who worry that international law poses something of a threat to the United States national interest. They argue that the U.S should disengage from international law and institutions, that to the degree the United States involves itself in Foreign Affairs it should favors unilateral over multilateral action.

Following Nigeria's refusal to yield to the threat of Western nations, especially the Obama-led government warning to cut off aid and the assistance to Nigeria government in an event that Nigerian senate goes ahead to sign a bill discriminating against Gays and Lesbian Community (Mohammed, 2011). A Nigerian Lawmaker said, "We have a culture. We are black people. We are not white, and so the United States cannot impose its culture on us. Same sex marriage is alien to our culture and we can never give it a chance. So if (Western nations) withhold their aid to us, to hell with them." Maku (2011) stipulated that Nigerians deserve the right to make their own laws without apologies to other countries.

There is a huge cultural gap between Europe and America, and Africa. Some of the things that are considered fundamental rights abroad also can be very offensive to African culture and tradition and to the way Africans live. Mark (2011) argues that "No country has the right to interfere in the way we make our own laws because we didn't interfere in the way others make their own laws".

Similarly, the recent referendum in UK on whether the country should leave the European Union or not, a process often referred to as "Brexit" is a choice between National Interest and International Interest. It is clear that David Cameron and most members of the Conservative Party's Government are backing the remain campaign, While the far-right anti-immigration party UKIP and its populist leader Nigel Farage are backing Brexit along with other Far-right groups in the UK such as Britain First (Aljazeera : 2016). Those supporting the leave campaign are doing so with national interest in view. They are of the opinion that "an exit will actually boost the British economy."

The only way to have control over borders is to leave the EU and end automatic right of any EU citizen to move to the UK (Gove: 2016). Vote leave campaigners say that Britain can never control immigration until it leaves the EU, "because freedom of movement gives other EU citizens an automatic right to live in the UK" (Aljazeera: 2016). When General Ibrahim Babangida (1985 – 1993) went ahead against public opinion to seek the IMF loan, definitely the national interest was relegated to the abyss, in preference for International Interest dictates of the Bretton Woods system.

In the writings of Ibrahim (2016), "The government of IBB was simply put to an end in economic terms by the Structural Adjustment Program, an IMF baby which remains the foundation of Nigeria's problem." In his words "I enjoin President Buhari to learn from Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida's pitfall when he handed over the economy to the IMF by taking specific loan only for the economy to be destroyed with IMF's painful colonial conditionality's."

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It can be deduced that all states formulate their national interest according to their needs and aspirations, which may differ from others. Every state projects this interest through the instrumentality of its foreign policy. These interests are divided into core or vital and non-vital interest. It has been observed through the many examples given above that all states behave in similar ways in the sense that, they can go to any length to preserve such core-vital national interest as seen in the examples of Nigeria in 1967-70 (The Nigeria Civil War). The Americans also fought a war during the regime of Abraham Lincoln to preserve the unity and to prevent Southern secessionist states from leaving. Many good examples of states across the world abound on ways they respond or react when their vital interest is threatened by either internal or external forces.

Through the findings, it has been seen that many states, though with few exceptions would prefer their national interest over international interest. States should always look at humanity at large and support their national interest with that in order to make the world a better place for all human race and communities. States must also put first in place the significance of international law which supersedes national laws in fulfilling international political moralities and pay respect to such laws for the betterment of the entire mankind not a section of it.

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