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Conceptualising National Interest and National Security in Nigeria: A Strategic Perspective

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Abstract

The maintenance of a nation's sovereignty and territorial integrity, survival, self-preservation, prosperity, as well as the protection of its core values and norms against internal and external dangers, is subsumed under the rubrics of national interest and national security. This study holds the view that the concept of national interest is linked to, and is often defined with national security because the latter is viewed as the hallmark of government policy that projects the creation of national and international political conditions favourable to the protection of vital national values against existing and potential adversaries. In conceptualising national interest and national security in Nigeria, this study posits that, since survival is the first law of life, the first duty of a nation, therefore, is to ensure the security of its citizens, and the continued existence of the country as an indivisible entity. Consequently, the strategic perspective of Nigeria's national interest and security presented in this study, involves a proper perception of threats, the utilization of the country's national power to ensure that such threats do not materialize, the national will to utilize the armed forces and economic power to deal with potential and recurring threats and, most importantly, the utilization of national resources and influence in order to ensure and maintain a regional, continental or world order conducive to the realization of the country's constitutional objectives.

Introduction

Nigeria is a conglomerate of various ethnic nationalities. This is why the country is governed by a system of government that operates in accordance with the provisions of a Federal Constitution that has as its main objective, the security of the country as one indivisible and indissoluble Sovereign State. Evidently, the fundamental objectives and directive principles of State policy as contained in the 1999 Federal Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria are embodiments of the country's national interest and security.

In reality, however, the objectives of the States policy do not clearly specify the mechanisms, institutions and the modus operandi for the realization of Nigeria's national interest and security.

The difficulty inherent in the conceptualisation of the national interest and national security in Nigeria is further derived from the fragmentation of Nigeria's politics. The observable trend in Nigeria is that political leaders and the military oligarchy often pursue their individual selfish and sectional interests, which in most cases hinder the successful implementation of the national interest.

In spite of the haziness associated with the conceptualisation of the national interest and national security in Nigeria, there is however, a consensus among strategic/security analysts e.g., Briggs, (1990), Ukpabi, (1986), and Nweke, (1985) that the nation's survivability, ability to further secure the country's territorial integrity and provision of welfare facilities for the citizenry, constitutes a motivating force behind the emphasis placed on threat perception and analysis and the consequences of improving the nation's military

capabilities. Accordingly, the pursuit of national interest over the years presupposes that a nation preoccupies itself with the provision of security, both military and economic, for its citizenry. It further follows that nation-states prepare in one form or the other their military capabilities for the purpose of preventing any obstacle to the realization of their national interests.

In the strategic perspective presented in this study, we share the view that, whatever method a leader may select, the agreement is that most leaders execute policies aimed at creating and preserving an international environment favourable to their nation's position and generally, to the larger mutual interests they share with each other.

The main issue therefore, is that where the national survival of a nation is at stake, then, statesmen have no choice but to reflect the national interest of the nation under such circumstance. This statement is in line with the notion that national interest is not only a legitimate but also a fundamental cause for national policy. It is therefore futile to expect governments to act continuously on any ground other than the national interest (Padelford and Lincoln, 1962: 234). Consequently, the study posits that national interest is a working principle and policy directed to the promotion of demands ascribed to nations rather than individuals or sub-national groups. As such, emphasis is on the superiority of national interest over all other possible interests. Although one can question what is meant by a nation's interest at a particular time, nonetheless, it is believed that no matter the self-inclinations of national leaders, the general interest of the State almost and always takes precedence over all other interests.

Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to define and conceptualise the concepts of national interest and national security in Nigeria. By so doing the focus will be on the linkage between national interest and national security, and how the two concepts have been employed in maintaining Nigeria's territorial integrity and sovereignty. The strategic perspective adopted in the study also attempts to link the achievement of national security with Nigeria's relationship with her neighbours and other countries within the African continent. Significantly, the strategies that could be adopted by the Nigerian armed forces in defending Nigeria from external aggression and securing its borders from any form of violation are also highlighted.

Conceptual Clarification of National Interest

The concept of national interest is an abstraction and one of the most universal and frequently used expressions in international relations. National interest stands for the whole gamut of interests, which are the common concern of policymakers and often change in relative importance over time. Elements of national interest include such public issues as posterity and the international prestige of the State itself, national security and the maintenance of cordial and valuable relations with other States. The concept commands such obeisance that to claim an act to be in the national interest immediately, if sometimes spuriously increases the acts acceptability and so groups in all polities endeavour to identify with the concept, that is, the interests which the groups exist to serve (Reynolds, 1994: 39).

National interest can also be defined from two major perspectives, namely, the general and restricted points of view. In a general sense, the concept is a very useful tool in explaining the actions and behaviour of States in the international system. It involves ensuring the military security of the nation's territorial integrity and the defence of its values (Rosenau, 1970). Similarly, national interest involves such State affairs as, the preservation of a nation's territory, national prestige, independence, and other goals and objectives that a nation deems fit in a particular set of circumstances. On a more restricted level however, Rosenau, (1970: 30-34) opines that the concept of 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 refer to what is best for a national society.

The ultimate goal of the national interest is the preservation of the community against those who would threaten it externally or internally. Essentially therefore, national interest does not only ensure the survival of a group of people, but it also enhances greatly the promotion of self-determination and democracy. Evidently, the pursuit by statesmen of the values, goals and aspirations of the people hinge on the survival of the State. Hence, the most important values of a nation are the defence, security and survival of the individuals within the State (Morgenthau, 1958).

Summarily, in spite of the various order or levels the concept might be subjected to, the fact remains that the immediate pursuit of any national interest remains the sustenance of the nation's core values. According to Goulet (1992: 27), the values consist of:

- a. Providing and ensuring of life sustaining needs like housing, food, shelter and minimum education.
- b. Maintaining the country's self esteem. This has to do with the feeling of self-respect and independence, as well as the ability to have power and influence to conduct relationship with other countries on equal terms.
- c. Guaranteeing the freedom of the individual that is, freedom from want, ignorance and squalor, which will enable the people to determine their destiny.

National Security

Security is a dynamic condition. It involves the relative ability of states to counter threats to their core values and interests. The security so concerned with by States is multifarious. It might be military, economic, ideological or cultural. Accordingly, the security of any state embodies a notion of order, or of the conditions necessary to maintain the smooth functioning and reproduction of an existing society (McGraw, 1988). National security is closely related to, and in fact, has evolved from the idea of national interest. The tendency, therefore, is to equate or juxtapose both national interest and national security. This attitudinal orientation became necessary because, according to Wolfers (1968:249):

Since we are living in an era of constant crisis, conflicts, competition, rivalry and threats of external aggression, the formula of national interest has come to be

practically synonymous with the formula of national security.

Significantly, the definition of national security connotes two trends of protection from external dangers, i.e., one, the preservation of independence and sovereignty of nation-states by the military (tagged the "strategic view") and second, the economic non-strategic view which is concerned with both the maintenance of the vital economic resources and the non-military aspect of national security (Abdul-Monem, 1985). Fundamentally, of course, the focus of States interaction in world affairs is practically the emphasis upon national security.

It is important to note that national security is a multidimensional concept. Basically, the military aspect of national security is emphasized over all other things. The concern for national security is manifested in the establishment of the military and the attendant costly investments in military outlays. Consequently, most governments have by their policies and actions defined security in military -strategic context. Indeed, Toose, (1988:100), opines that:

The meaning of the concept of security is one defined in national military terms, with consequent military-based policies and responses. The continued dominance of a military conception of security derives from the structure of international politics as well as the structure of foreign and domestic policy processes, in that actual physical survival comes before other values and tends therefore to predefine most security problems. The result is that military aspects of security are clearly and conventionally identifiable and evoke institutional and procedural responses, while non military aspects of security such as ecological threats are intellectually and politically more difficult to define and respond to. Moreover, governments found it politically more rewarding to focus upon military security, as it is normally easier to achieve a domestic political consensus on the evaluation and response to military security threats. For these reasons, security has been defined and operationalised by most governments primarily, though not mostly in military terms.

An inference that can be made from the foregoing exposition is that the military aspect of security is undeniably closely tied to the strength of a nation. This is evidenced in the attempts made by States in mustering effective and enough military capabilities to deter enemies and more paramount, to counter attack on a potential enemy.

As important as the notion of national security is, the concept also has its limitations. An obvious constraint on the effectiveness and universality of national security as a concept is the polychromatic nature of the concept. Interpretation of national security varies from country to country and from time to time, assuming a particular meaning in a specific historical context. The different interpretation associated with the concept has resulted in the vagueness and ambiguous quality of the term. It is the nebulous nature that permits everyone to label whatever policy it desires with an attractive and deceptive name - national security (Wolfers, 1968).

In spite of its inadequacies, nations concern themselves primarily at any given time with national security; that is, self-preservation, interpreted as the right to live as one deems fit. From the foregoing, one could conclude that States view national security as their vital

concern. Consequently, future threats and possible attacks are in most cases evaluated and speculated upon. Hence, it can be logically inferred as suggested by Wolfers (1968:246), that:

It is understandable why it should be readily assumed that a quest for security must necessarily translate itself into a quest for coercive power. In view of the fact that security is being sought against external violence, coupled perhaps with internal subversive violence, it seems plausible at just sight that the response should consist in an accumulation of the same kind of force for the purpose of resisting an attack or of deterring would be attackers . . . The resort to power of resistance, has been the rule with nations grappling with the serious threats to their (national) security.

Nigeria's National Interests

There are difficulties in locating the precise definition of Nigeria's national interests. The inability to properly define the nation's national interest has been attributed largely to the lack of a consensus among political leaders in the country as regards what constitutes the national interests of the nation. This situation is further compounded by such factors as political instability, chronic ethnic antagonism, religious strife, cyclical economic crisis and lack of national priority in the face of an external threat (Nweke, 1985). Despite the lack of a precise definition of national interest, there is, however, a consensus among Nigerians that the country's national interests should be seen from the perspective of those values which are best for the nation and which are conducive to its continued survival and security, the prosperity of its people, and the unimpeded development of its institutions" (Ukpabi, 1986:150). According to Nweke (1985:10) Nigeria's national interest can be categorized as follows:

- a. Self preservation that is, maintaining the country's territorial integrity.
- b. Defence and maintenance of the country's independence.
- c. Economic and social well being of the people.
- d. Preservation and promotion of the ways of life especially democratic values.
- e. Enhancement of the country's standing and status in the world especially in Africa.
- f. Promotion of world peace.

The point must however be made just as Nweke expounds in his analysis, that the first three categorisations above represent Nigeria's vital interests. These interests, he argues, are not likely to be compromised except in extraordinary cases in which the national capacity for achieving them is constrained by forces generated by internal and external environments. More importantly, Nweke (1985: 10 - 12) sees the irreducible core of Nigeria's national interests as national unity and security possessing three fundamentally interrelated dimensions, namely:

- a. The ability to perceive and utilize the capabilities to provide, support and shape the means of national integration, and the defence and preservation of national independence, resources and territorial integrity.

- b. The actual protection of national unity, survival and independence at any moment they are threatened both from within and from outside the country involving the full utilization of our military and economic strength.
- c. Other interests are socio-economic development, welfare and equality of the people. African unity, human equality and justice as well as world peace and security.

One must stress here that the 1999 Federal Constitution made a serious attempt to codify Nigeria's national interest. Chapter II, Subsection 19 of the Constitution itemizes the Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy (interpreted as the national interest). According to The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999, Chapter II, some of the policies are listed as follows:

- a. The security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government.
- b. The conduct of Government affairs shall be carried out in such a manner as to reflect the Federal Character of Nigeria and need to promote national unity, a sense of belonging and also to command national loyalty among all the peoples of the Federation.
- c. The fostering of national integration and a feeling of belonging, to the end that loyalty to the nation shall override sectional loyalties.
- d. The promotion of a planned and balanced economic development, and harnessing the nation's material resources while ensuring its distribution as best as possible to serve the common good.
- e. The promotion of a social order founded on ideals of Freedom, Equality and Justice.
- f. The directions of State policy towards ensuring that there are equal and adequate educational opportunities at all levels.

Evidently, the preceding analysis shows that national unity on the one hand seems at both theoretical and empirical levels, to occupy a prime position on the list of Nigeria's national interests. On the other hand, it is also obvious that patriotism and nationalism are the foundations of the Nigerian State. Equally observable is that Nigeria's national interest is defined in terms of power. Interestingly, in as much as power is the principal instrument for the realization of national interests, then, one may argue that economic strength, military power and political cohesion thus become the three major bases of Nigeria's vital national interest (Nweke, 1985).

Having identified the components of Nigeria's national interests, one may then proceed to examine the strategic issues involved in the realization of the enumerated values. Firstly, an observable trend, although a major issue in this regard, is that in the pursuit of Nigeria's national interest, neighbouring countries, (mostly French-speaking), feel especially threatened by the dominant posture of Nigeria. The fear is exacerbated by Nigeria's economic, military and political strength as well as the unflinching commitment of various Nigerian leaders to the country's national objectives. Secondly, the realization of the country's foreign policy objectives is another controversial aspect of Nigeria's national interests. This is so because national interest manifests itself as national ideology, which represents the key concept in foreign policy. Consequently, from a strategic perspective, Nigeria's foreign policy is aimed at the protection of the nation's national interests, the

survival of the people, security of the nation, and the maintenance of her territorial integrity.

The emphasis on foreign policy as a mechanism for the realization of Nigeria's national interest is succinctly stated in the 1999 Federal Constitution. In the document it is categorically stated that Nigeria's foreign policy objectives shall be among others, the Promotion and Protection of the national interest and the Promotion of Africa Integration and Support for African Unity (1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria: Chapter II, Subsection 19). These objectives one may contend, are in tandem with the foreign policy objectives as enunciated by the then Military Head of State, General Olusegun Obasanjo on the 29th of July 1976 in a national radio and television broadcast, which according to Yahaya (1981:94), stated as follows:

- a. Defence of our sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity.
- b. The creation of necessary political and economic condition in Africa and the rest of the world which will facilitate the defence of the independence and territorial integrity of all African countries while at the same time fostering national self reliance and rapid economic development.
- c. The promotion of equality and self-reliance in Africa and the rest of the world.
- d. The promotion and defence of social justice and respect for human dignity especially the dignity of the black man.

These foreign policy pronouncements, in our view, are diametrically opposed to some interests, particularly neighbouring Franco-phone countries that perceive the national objectives as Nigeria's attempt to dominate them. France for instance, view Nigeria's foreign policy objectives as threats because they undermine her interest in perpetually keeping her former African colonies under her whims and caprices. It is in the light of the impingement of interests that the Nigerian Armed Forces are encouraged to examine and analyse the possibility of an external threat being generated as a result of these foreign policy pronouncements.

Admittedly, since the protection of a nation interests and foreign policy aspirations and pronouncements are dependent upon the wealth and military power that it can muster, then, the realization of Nigeria's foreign policy objectives must be backed with an enormous economic, military and political power. This is necessary because Nigeria's "enemies are likely to employ all means at their disposal to undermine the realization of the country's foreign policy objectives. In addition, Nigeria's national interest and foreign policy objectives need to be backed up by both credible military capabilities and realistic defence policy.

In view of the direct bearing of the nation's defence policy on its foreign policy pronouncements, it has thus become imperative that the Nigerian Armed Forces be modernized to curtail the various external threats to the security of the nation and much more to sustain and maintain, in the long-run, the country's leadership role in Africa. So, to be able to achieve these tasks, the Nigerian defence policy must have as its objectives the preservation of the territorial integrity of the nation, ensuring the security of the African continent and contributing toward peace and stability in the world at large. These objectives,

one must note, have been (and are still being) rigorously pursued by various Nigerian leaders both military and civilian.

Hence, in assessing the threats to Nigeria's national interests, the Armed Forces must come up with various defence strategies directed toward protecting the vital interests of the nation. To be able to accomplish this function, members of the Nigerian military must be ready to undertake an in-depth analysis of Nigeria's strategic circumstances and the enduring features of the nation's national interest and its trend. Also, the armed forces must be able to identify the degree of threat, which the nation is likely to encounter at any point in time. Through these evaluations, it would then be worthwhile to plan the structure, size and the characteristics of the military in a way that will make the defence of Nigeria's territorial integrity and sovereignty more effective (O'Neil & Horner, 1981).

In summary, one could posit that the 1999 Constitution attempted to conceptualise the national interest. Nowhere in the same document or any other though, was an attempt made to define Nigeria's national security. Security matters are treated as highly confidential and they are the exclusive preserve of the armed forces. However, effort is made in this study to break down in an acceptable format what is otherwise regarded as a highly sensitive matter.

Nigeria's National Security

A country's national interest must be protected and upheld by an effective national security policy. National security and threat to that security constitute major reasons why the military capabilities of nation-states are continually being improved upon. Significantly, Nigeria's national security embodies the continued and actual existence of the nation as a sovereign and an economically viable geographical entity within the world community (Aduwo, 1983).

One can also extend the analysis by positing that national security in the Nigerian perspective is the most vital part of our national interests. Nigeria's national security in our view therefore, involves a proper perception of threats, as well as the utilization of the country's national power to ensure that such threats do not materialize. In addition, it entails the national will to utilize the armed forces and economic power to deal with potential and recurring threats. Accordingly, Nigeria's national security does imply the utilization of national resources and influence in order to ensure and maintain a regional, continental or world order conducive to the realization of the country's national security and national interest (Ukpabi, 1986).

Implicit in this study is the definition of Nigeria's national security in terms of her ability to pursue her core values without internal or external hindrance. National security viewed from the perspective of threats reveals the existence of certain historical, cultural and psychological fears that are rationally difficult to counter. Hence, it should be restated that countries prepare their military for anticipated future-armed attack by other States. Nigeria's national security, therefore, like that of other States within the international community, depends to a large extent on the correct readings of the intentions and capabilities of countries with which it may come into conflict (vice versa) (Briggs, 1990).

In view of the foregoing (Omagbemi, 1974) posited a national security programme for the country. Based on these programmes, Nigeria's national security objectives have been expanded to include the following (Ukpabi, 1986:154):

- a. Self-preservation or survival of the entity known as Nigeria.
- b. Security of the nation's vital and core interests.
- c. Prosperity and economic well being.
- d. Good international image or prestige.
- e. Protection of the nation's resources as well as its investments at home and abroad.
- f. Protection and promotion of national ideology.
- g. Peace-implying the absence of the use of armed forces in conflict over interest, or a state of affairs from which armed conflict is absent.
- h. Power, in which international politics may be defined as ability to affect the actions, thoughts and feelings of others.
- i. Bringing about a conducive political and economic situation in contiguous countries which can best serve our national interests, the total liberation of Africa from colonial domination by outside powers and of neo-colonialism from our continent. However, despite the objectives enumerated above, one could still argue that her immediate neighbours have all too often threatened Nigeria's security. Hence, during the past few years, there have been serious concerns over threats to our national security by Nigeria's immediate neighbours. These countries not only incessantly encroach on Nigeria's border villages, but their citizens forcefully collect taxes from Nigerians living in the border areas: they also engage in illegal smuggling and piracy on Nigeria's territorial waters. These activities, according to our research findings do not only seriously undermine Nigeria's security, but also have substantial negative impacts on the nation's economy, as well as its political and social life.

Conclusion

National interest and national security are useful concepts employed by policy makers and Political executives to achieve a State's objectives and fundamental principles of which principally, is the protection of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the nation, self-preservation and prosperity of the nation and its citizenry. In Nigeria as explored in the study, even though the national interest and national security objectives and policies are not explicitly codified into a single document, there is, however, a consensus that the maintenance of Nigeria as a single indivisible entity remains paramount as the national interest. The imperatives to keep Nigeria one in spite of the multiethnic composition of the country, is derived from some other attributes and identities which enable her to play a definite role in world affairs.

The location of Nigeria within the West-African sub region of the African continent, in addition to her large land mass, high population, and abundant natural resources, characterizes her as one of the dominant powers in the region. In addition, Nigeria's coastline which enhances her accessibility to other parts of the world for trade and for procurement of armaments and strategic materials, not to talk of assistance to her less

endowed neighbours such as Cameroon, Republic of Benin, Equatorial Guinea, and particularly Chad and Niger, which are landlocked.

Most of her neighbouring countries depend on Nigeria for the transit of their goods and other services to and from their entities, makes the imperative of clarifying and stating explicitly her national interest and national security policies and programs an immediate priority.

Recommendations

In order to come up with a credible policy of national interest and national security, the following are hereby recommended:

There should be a well-codified document that explicitly states the goals and aspirations of Nigeria's national interest. The current Federal Constitution is defective, as it does not state precisely the procedures and mechanisms of achieving the national interest. The government therefore needs to develop a procedure of specifying purposes, appraising opposition, formulating strategy, allocating resources and reconciling ends with means.

Political leaders in the country should endeavour to formulate and implement policies that are beneficial to the majority of the masses. Policies such as the ban on imported vehicles above five years old; privatisation of state owned enterprises; non implementation of viable poverty eradication and employment opportunity programmes; prevalence of crime and the inability of government to protect individuals and their properties from criminals and armed violence among others, do not reflect government commitment to the national interest. People-oriented policies and programmes are needed to fulfil government fundamental obligations of providing security and welfare for the people.

In coming up with a sound national security policy, strategic planners should endeavour to analyse critically the various threats posed to Nigeria's territorial integrity. To achieve such objectives cognisance should be taken of the following:

- a. An analysis of the challenge posed by the military build-up of our contiguous states and other African countries, with particular reference to the Republic of South-Africa, Libya, Egypt, and all other Franco-phone countries within the West Africa sub region.
- b. An examination of the various forms of instability existing in the sub region, with special attention to neighbouring countries and bearing in mind the possibilities of the role of external powers in exploiting internal differences to create conflict and antagonisms within the West-African sub region.
- c. An analysis of the potential disruption of Nigeria's economy and its crippling effects such as the destabilization of the ECOWAS and the economic well being of Nigeria.

In addition to the foregoing, the Federal government must ensure that the Nigerian military develop and incorporate into their operations an effective military doctrine and effective intelligence and communication networks. Military doctrine enables military leaders to plan effectively and take rapid decisions in times of emerging international crisis. To achieve this feat, Nigerian defence planners should note that the nation's defence policy must flow from her strategic circumstances, prominent of which are the economic, the political, the military and their trends, with greater emphasis on the perception of threats to

the nation's security, intelligence assessment of foreign activities and other enduring feature of Nigeria's national interest. Through analysing these strategic circumstances, it would then be possible to plan the force structure, size, and other characteristics of the armed forces.

Finally, one must stress the need for extensive intelligence activities necessary to attain a high level of national security preparedness. Specifically, there is the need to initiate courses of action that would reflect the characteristics of flexibility and continuity in intelligence operations. To accomplish this task, the federal government should establish a special squad of undercover intelligence personnel, whose activities would include the collection of data on various foreign nationals and nations, whose activities are likely to constitute threats to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Nigeria.

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