

Nigeria's National Interest and Interventions in West African Conflicts: A Critical Analysis

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Abstract

It is obvious that the concept of national interest has always been considered as a leading factor in the formulation of foreign policies of sovereign states, including Nigeria. It is therefore recognized that the main policy in the conduct of foreign policy is invariably the promotion and pursuit of national interest. The issue of what constitutes Nigeria's national interest has however been a subject of debate among scholars. While some scholars believe that Nigeria's interventions in conflicts in West Africa is in line with her commitment to maintaining peace and security in the West African sub-region, others have argued that Nigeria's political ideology and national interest in the West African sub-region is vague, and that the country has no justifiable reasons to intervene in conflicts in the sub-region. They have maintained that from the economic point of view, such interventions are not necessary because at the end of the conflict that Nigeria intervened, there is no tangible economic interest at stake. Many Nigerians are in support of the above argument considering the enormous funds Nigeria spends in military interventions in Africa, especially in West Africa, while almost all the domestic sectors are yearning for attention, and the living standard of many Nigerians is grossly inadequate. This paper examines the rationale for Nigeria's intervention in conflicts in West Africa, considering the high rate of insecurity and declining economy at home. The paper also investigates if Nigeria's national interest is at stake to warrant her interventions in these conflicts.

Keywords: National interest; Foreign policy; Security; Conflict; Intervention.

Conceptualization Of National Interest

There is no general consensus as to the exact meaning of the term “national interest”. The general consensus however, is that national interest is the reason why states and statesmen behave the way they behave in their international interactions in order to preserve the stated objectives of the state. National interest is generally considered a controversial concept in foreign policy analysis. In view of the multitude of prevailing personal, class, group and sectional interests in a state, scholars have asked at many fora if there is anything that can be called national interest. The reason is that there is no definitive measure or a common platform that can be used for streamlining all the conflicting interests in the state. Hence, some view the national interest of any state as the interest of the leadership or the ruling class of that state who may have been constitutionally or traditionally empowered by their leadership position to decide for the rest of the citizens in the state (Rosati, 2006). National interest often creates the smokescreen for the justification of parochial individual, class or group interests by the leadership of the state.

Even though there is no universally accepted definition of national interest or what measures should be adopted by statesmen for the realization or maximization of national interest, there is a general agreement among foreign policy experts that “national interest” is the most important motivating factor of foreign policy. “National interest is considered the simplest means of understanding or explaining how and why nations do what they do when they engage in international action” (Eminue,2013:67-68) While Henderson (2005) sees national interest as the collective aspiration of a state in her interaction with other states in the international system, Hans Morgenthau (1973) conceives of national interest in terms of power. According to him, “statesmen think and act in terms of interest defined as power” (Morgenthau, 1973:242). Morgenthau went further in his writing to demonstrate how, “a foreign policy guided by moral abstractions, without consideration of the national interest is bound to fail”(Morgenthau, 1973:33-34).

Rosenau (1969:167) who identified national interest as “the key to any explanation of goal-seeking behavior” concluded that “its use in politics will long continue to be a datum requiring analysis”. In Obiozor’s (1999:69) view, “national interest evaluates not only the worth of foreign policies but also explains why nations do what they do when they engage in international affairs.” What Obiozor is saying here, is that national interest explains or rationalizes states’ behavior in international relations.

According to Sondermann (1979) cited in (Emimue 2013:68),

the concept of “national interest” is predicated on two assumptions: (i) there exists an objectively determinable collective interest which all individual members within a given society share equally; and

(ii) that this collective interest transcends any interest that a particular sub-set of these individuals may share with individuals in other societies.

National interest as a concept, therefore, underscores the fact that the primary interest of a state is to obtain or retain an optional position on world affairs. This they do by taking 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 their people rather than pursue policies that will subject the people to domination by other countries." (Adeniran, 1983: 191).

Asogwa (2009) reviewed the concept from two perspectives, the political realist perspective and the Marxist perspective. He posits thus:

From the political realist perspective the concept of national interest has been used to refer to the prudent use of power by a country to promote its vital interest abroad. The assumption was that a country's national interest was usually fixed and unchanging and that national decision-makers discover what this was. (Asogwa, 2009:33)

Differentiating the views of the Marxists from that of the realists on national interest, Asogwa (2009) asserts further:

On the other hand, from Marxist view point, concept of national interest serves no useful purpose in the analysis of foreign policy except to mystify the narrow class interest of the dominant social class. According to the Marxists therefore, the concept of national interest in concrete terms refers to the class interests of the dominant social class. From this point of view, we understand that no interest in any society is national in character as every interest represents the particular interest of the class that determines it (Asogwa, 2009:33-34).

Asogwa's analysis shows that the Marxists do not agree with the realists' conception of national interest.

From his analysis of the concept from the point of view of the Marxist, national interest can therefore be defined in terms of class interest, that is the interest of the dominant class in the society; it is what the ruling class in every society perceives as national interest that the state pursues to achieve in her relation with other states. The interest of a few are deceitfully portrayed as the interest of the entire nation or state.

Generally, national interest is a state's goals and ambitions in her relation with other states in the international system. These goals could be political, economic, military or cultural. Although we have seen that various attempts made by scholars and practitioners in international relations to define national interest differ in their ingredients and emphasis, these attempts converge on one point: what constitutes the national interest of a state is the foreign policy perception of the leaders of that state. Thus, in Nigeria, under the government of Sir Abuakar Tafawa Balewa there was emphasis on good and

cordial relations with Africa. The government promoted and supported efforts to decolonize Africa and laid emphasis on non-alignment, and respect for the dignity of all Africans anywhere they are. Under the banner of “human dignity,” the Gowon administration in the late 1960s and early 1970s advocated morality in the treatment of black people all over the world. Under the Murtala/Obasanjo regime, Nigeria’s national interest was hinged on the defence of the country’ sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity, and the promotion of equality and self-reliance in Africa and the rest of the developing world. From the regime of Ibrahim Babangida to the current regime of Muhammadu Buhari, emphasis has been on economic and citizen diplomacy.

We cannot ignore the fact that often times, the type of government a state has may determine to a large extent, how such state’s national interest are defined. While governments of Western-style democracies, for example, often take into account the wishes and desires of various interest groups that wield domestic political power, autocratic and dictatorial governments define their national interest with less concern for inputs from domestic interest groups. However, within a state whether democratic or autocratic, different individuals and different groups define the national interest of the state in different ways. Even though national interest is a concept that does not have universal meaning, scholars agree that it is a useful concept that provides them with a tool with which they can understand the goals of nation states in their interaction with one another in the international system. This is re-enforced by Eminue (2013:67) who stated that “national interest is considered as the simplest means of understanding or explaining how and why nations do what they do when they engage in international action”. Since “nations do what they do in order to satisfy their best interest, it is maintained that by describing national aspirations so satisfied, analysts could use the concept of national interest as a tool for explanation or analysis” (Rosenau, 1968:35). Rosenau observes further that “no list of the problems involved in analyzing foreign policy goals would be complete without mention of those which inevitably attempt the use of the concept of national interest” (Rosenau, 1968:168)

Nigeria’s National Interest

Every state in the international system, irrespective of size, economic status, ideological orientation or culture, has some form of interests or goals defined as national interest. Scholars and political analysts have different perceptions of the concept of national interest in line with their understanding of the subject matter. There have been debates among scholars over who determines the national interests of states. Is it the leadership or the citizens that determine a state’s national interest? It is the responsibility of the leadership of the state to control the affairs of the state for positive change and good standard of living, while the citizens in that state are directly affected either positively or negatively by the derivable of national interest. National interest is seen by Morgenthau, (1989) as an aim to promote the image, prestige and aspect of a state both at home and abroad. On his part, Olukoshi (1992) identifies what constitute the core of national interest to include: national security, political independence, territorial integrity, promotion of economic interest of the state and world peace.

Inherent in the above perceptions is the strong and enthusiastic desire by nations to secure and maintain national and territorial integrity, self-respect and economic interest that will enhance the standard of living of the citizens of the state. Amoda (1988) views national interest as the ideal goals or objectives upon which the domestic and foreign policies of a state are hinged.

The issue of what constitutes Nigeria's national interest has however, remained a matter of intense disagreement among scholars. During Balewa's administration at independence in 1960, some major foreign policy goals which include, decolonization and eradication of racism, Pan- African solidarity, national economic development and world peace were identified. After the Nigerian civil war, foreign policy was seen as an integral part of national programme for social and economic development (Eze 2010). Nigeria would also pursue a dynamic policy of non-alignment based on the consideration of national interest whose elements were seen as political unity, economic growth, national security, as well as the promotion of African interest. The above elements were captured in the 1979 constitution. Section 19 of the 1979 constitution stipulates that:

The state shall promote African unity as well as total political, economic, social and cultural liberation of Africa and all other forms of international cooperation conducive to the consolidation of universal peace and mutual respect and friendship among all peoples and states, and shall combat racial discrimination in all its ramifications.

Nevertheless, the framework provided by Aluko (1981), Olusanya (1986) and Nweke (1986) gives a fairly comprehensive detail which is beyond argument on aspects of Nigeria's national interest. Aluko (1981) states three elements which he refers to as vital elements of Nigeria's national interest. These according to him are self-preservation of the country, the defense and maintenance of the country's independence, and the economic and social well-being of the people. He further identified some other elements as not constituting core or vital elements. These are, "preservation and promotion of way of life of Nigerians, especially their democratic values, enhancement of the country's standing in the comity of nations and the promotion of world peace" (Aluko, 1981:265). For Olusanya and Akindele (1986), Nigeria's national interests are:

The defense of the country's sovereignty, independence and integrity, the restoration of human dignity to black men and women all over the world, the creation of relevant political and economic conditions in Africa and the rest of the world, the promotion and improvement of economic well-being of the Nigerian citizens and the promotion of world peace and justice (Olusanya and Akindele, 1986:135)

To Ogunbambi (1986:162) Nigeria's national interest includes:

Political stability, security, export promotion, access to external resources and technology, foreign aid, protection of its citizens abroad, the cultural and moral expressions for Nigeria and a fair, effective and rigorous presentation of Nigeria's points of view on regional and global issues.

The interests advanced by these scholars as this study finds out are embedded in the principles and objectives of Nigeria's foreign policy. A lot of similarities exist in the analysis of these interests but they change from one regime to the other. Some of these interests were vital or core in some regimes, while in others, they were not. The actual issue about Nigeria's national interest is the lack of a coherent strategic approach to its realization. Nigeria's national interest as postulated by these scholars mentioned above and others finds justification on certain principles which have informed Nigeria's foreign policy since independence, and which successive governments, whether military or civilian, have maintained and pursued, albeit with varying degrees and commitment.

Nigeria's foreign policy has been largely Afrocentric in posture since independence in 1960. In an official statement made by Prime Minister Tafawa Balewa on August 20, 1960, two months before Nigeria's independence, the Prime Minister stated that "Nigeria was adopting clear and practical policies with regard to Africa; it will be our aim to assist any country to find solution to its problems." Prime Minister Balewa's position was further reinforced by General Aguiyi Ironsi when he stated that, "in the whole sphere of external relations, the government attaches great importance to our African policy" (Al-Hassan, 2008:1).

It is under the above foreign policy directions, among others, that Nigeria ventured into the complex theatre of Afrocentrism. This can be appreciated when we consider the fact that successive regimes in Nigeria both military and civilian accorded significant attention to Afrocentric foreign policy. However, a panoramic review of extant literature on the various engagements made by Nigeria towards an African agenda in areas of decolonization, conflict resolution, peacekeeping operations, as well as other bilateral and multilateral aid she rendered in the continent, to a very large extent showed that the ominous nature of the principle of Afrocentrism may not have served the country's national interest in a commensurate measure. As Ola (1999) argues, the direction of a state's foreign policy is always informed by the core value of her national interest. These are interests which states cherish and sacrifice a lot to realize. In the context of the Nigerian state, this is appreciated in her Afrocentric foreign policy on one hand, and on the other hand, by her national interest predicated on internal security, political stability, economic development which the country realizes can be attained within the context of regional peace and harmony, economic development and wellbeing of her citizens. This policy of brotherhood with African states, especially those of them in the West African sub-region informs the nature and dimension of Nigeria's Afrocentric foreign policy. Considering the fact that Nigeria is a power to be reckoned with in Africa and the most powerful nation in West Africa, her regional responsibilities and commitment appear very huge.

It is the understanding of Al-Hassan (2008) that Nigeria's foreign policy in the West African sub-region seeks to achieve her national interests which are anchored on national security, national welfare and prestige. Probably, this understanding informs Adebo's (1968:287) view that:

Because of the cold War and its dangerous prospects for humanity and because of Nigeria's desire to base all considerations of foreign policy on Nigeria's national interest, the makers of Nigeria's foreign policy stressed the necessity for world peace, the main idea being that peace within Nigeria would be strengthened if there is peace in the international system.

This view was reinforced by Ofoegbu and Chibuzor (1980:121) who stated thus: Nigeria's foreign policy makers perceived Nigeria's national interest in terms of values, which could be meaningful and easily understandable to the Nigerian people. These were expected to be related primarily to the political integration, socio-economic advancement and general well-being of the people of Nigeria.

Nigeria's political leaders believe that committing Nigeria to a foreign policy that encourages and promotes peace, security and development in the West African sub-region would enhance her national interest. Thus, Nigeria's national interest of domestic peace and regional responsibilities placed heavy commitment on her. This corroborates Wale and prey's (2010:19) position that "Nigeria's strategic location, national interest, assumed responsibilities and status in West Africa informed its commitment to regional politics."

Nigeria's big brother role in Africa has had very serious implications for the country's foreign policy in Africa. Scholars like Alade (2000) and Shaw (1987) have argued that Nigeria's Afrocentric foreign policy posture is actually beyond her capabilities. Alade points out that "sheer size, population and resources do not make a leader; regional leadership is not only a function of geography and resource endowment, but more importantly, of the capability to convert and utilize them to advantage and command respect of regional peers." (Alade, 2000:36). Alade's view aptly represents the position of another radical scholar in the person of Shaw (1987) who believes that Nigerian statesmen gave the country a "grandiose regional policy," which has drained her development resources, and has failed to maximize the objectives towards the realization of her national interest.

Oil and gas have been a denominator of Nigeria's foreign policy making. Nigeria made oil and gas readily available to some states in West Africa, while she also provided steady electricity supply to others. Soremekun (2003:87) however, believes that the "primacy of oil in Nigeria's foreign policy engineering has given Nigeria's foreign policy makers a false ego to engage in messianic pretensions, which has made them to fritter

away precious resources meant for purposeful internal development.” Soremekun’s assertion agrees with Shaw’s (1987:40) position on Nigeria’s commitment to Africa. According to Shaw, “Nigeria exaggerated its potentials and overrated its capacity, thus over-doing things in the name of commitment to Africa and relevance in the world.” Aluko (1981:56) on his part cautioned against two particular errors based on economic and psychological misperceptions, as he stated that:

To cast for Nigeria a role in world affairs that is clearly beyond our means and the psychological error made by most Nigerians in and outside government that because of the size, population, and agricultural and mineral resources in the country we are destined to lead Africa.

Even though Aluko may be right on the thesis of error of judgement, there are some Nigerians in and outside government who continue to pride Nigeria as “Giant of Africa” because of these fortunes of nature; they remain essentially boosted by these factors as they articulate national interest. Yet few scholars like Akinyemi (2005), Mier (2002) and Soyinka (1997) share the sentiment that the “Giant of Africa” mentality is self-imposed, undeserved and laughable because the glory has faded with the plethora of domestic problems and downslide in the economy. Many Nigerians both at home and in diaspora believe that such sentiments harbor the fear that the desire of Nigerian leaders to showcase Nigeria as a “Giant of Africa” at all costs may have been responsible for the stretching of the economy to its elastic limits which has done more harm than good to Nigeria’s national interest. No wonder Onyearu (2008:65) advised that “Nigeria should rather face the home front, revitalize the economy, pursue a citizen-based diplomacy in Africa and naturally re-earn her place of pride.”

It is Adaramola’s (2001) contention that because of Nigeria’s over-concentration on African issues, her foreign policy outside continental Africa is “vague and not anchored on principle that would confer on Nigeria robust political and economic advantage. According to him, Nigeria’s ability to attract investments from many industrialized nations of the world has been vitiated by her Afrocentric foreign policy leaning. Reuben Abati, presidential spokesman to President Goodluck Jonathan also observes that Nigeria has been extraordinarily naive by restricting her foreign policy to Africa as its cornerstone. He believes that Africa as the centerpiece of Nigeria’s foreign policy no longer suffices. He advocates for a broader perspective. Reuben Abati and other scholars and writers like Onyaru (2008), Ajayi (2006) and Adaramola (2001) believe that Nigeria’s domestic policies have not provided an enabling environment to support her Afrocentric foreign policy posture. These scholars have criticized the adoption of Afrocentric foreign policy because, according to them, Afrocentric foreign policy negates economic diplomacy which thrives on multilateralism.

However, there are some liberal scholars like Moyosore (1990), Hoffman (1996) and Obiozor (1996) who believe that Nigeria’s Afrocentric foreign policy objective of regional peace is largely achieved despite her limited capabilities and negative consequences on domestic development. They argue that the development at home

should not be analyzed within the context of Nigeria's foreign policy. Lack of development at home should rather be seen as the consequence of the visionless Nigerian leaders who failed to articulate and vigorously pursue development objectives in line with domestic aspirations and national interests. These scholars believe that Nigeria achieved the objective behind her financial, human and material commitment in Africa. Hoffman (1996) expressed that Nigeria's overwhelming financial, human and material resources commitment to Africa is a manifestation of political realism, that is, her ambition to become recognized as a regional power. Hoffman's argument is in line with the thought of Moyosore (1990) and Obiozor (1996) who contend that Nigeria's natural and historical endowments, coupled with the intense contributions and sacrifices for Africa's progress since independence have naturally earned the country honour and leadership position in Africa.

Nigeria's Role in Conflict Resolution in West Africa

Africa has remained the centre-piece of Nigeria's foreign policy since her independence in 1960. In prosecuting these cardinal foreign policy objectives, successive Nigerian governments have committed enormous human and material resources. Within the West African sub-region, Nigeria has, with the instrumentality of ECOWAS and other bilateral and multilateral arrangements managed inter-state relations with other states in the sub-region, especially her immediate neighbours. Convinced that economic development and regional integration cannot be promoted in an unstable region, Nigeria has therefore, made the promotion of peace and security a primary consideration in her foreign policy in West Africa. Restoration of democracy and relative peace witnessed in recent times in countries like Sierra Leone, Liberia, Cote d'Ivoire, Sao Tome and Principe etc. would not have been possible without Nigeria's immense contribution at huge human and materials costs under the frame work of OAU (now AU) and ECOWAS.

Even though Nigeria is not free from domestic conflicts ranging from devastating civil war, oppressive governance under successive military regimes, the Niger Delta crisis and the current Boko Haram insurgency, the country has not wavered in her commitment to conflict prevention and resolution in Africa in general and West Africa in particular. Various regimes since independence in 1960, whether military or civilian democracy have committed huge resources (both human and material) to conflict resolution and prevention in Africa, especially in the West African sub-region.

Having championed the establishment of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in 1975, Nigeria remains at the fore front of conflict resolution in West Africa (Adebayo, 2005.) The creation of ECOWAS Cease Fire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) which facilitated the resolution of the Liberian and Sierra Leone conflicts and the restoration of democracy in both countries and other countries in West Africa was Nigeria's idea. Under the sub-regional hegemony of Nigeria, according to Akinbobola (2002), ECOMOG was formed and deployed to some of the conflict zones as regional peace keeping and intervention force. ECOMOG's conflict resolution mechanism has involved mostly the monitoring of implementation of peace agreements reached between warring parties. In the area of conflict mediation, diplomacy and peace

agreements, Nigeria had made much contributions in addition to her role in ECOWAS' efforts in resolving conflicts in West Africa. (Gana, 1989). Furthermore, scholars like Gambari (1983) and Guba (2007) believe that Nigeria has played a prominent leadership role in the West African sub-region through her commitment of substantial military capacity, notably in supplying the leadership and majority of troops for ECOMOG, the ECOWAS sponsored peacekeeping force in Liberia and Sierra Leone. ECOMOG's operations in those two countries were viewed as success with armed conflicts stopped and elections held in the two countries. During General Abacha's administration, Nigerian troops were stationed in Sierra Leone to protect the country's borders from incursion of Liberian rebels. Nigeria also confronted a Sierra Leone military junta that overthrew an elected civilian government. Mazrui (2006) however, considers Abacha's action as ironic, given the origin and nature of Abacha's regime.

After military take-over in countries like Guinea-Bissau, Cote d'Ivoire, Sao Tome and Principe and Mali, just to mention a few, Nigeria exerted efforts to ensure that democratic governments were restored in these countries. According to Imobighe (2002), it has been speculated that Nigeria has so far spent over US\$10 billion in conflict resolutions and peacekeeping operations in the West African sub-region, excluding men and women of the Nigerian Armed Forces who paid the supreme price in search of peace in the sub-region.

Onyisi (2011) observes that Nigeria's intervention in conflict zones in West Africa was facilitated by various protocols endorsed by Heads of State and government which provided effective institutional framework for the resolution of disputes. These protocols as listed by Onyisi are; (i) the ECOWAS Mechanism for Conflict Prevention; (ii) the Plan of Action for the Implementation of the Programme for Coordination and Assistance for Security and Development (PCASED, 2002); (iii) the Protocol Relating to Mutual Assistance of Defence (1981); (iv) the Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance (2001). All these are mechanisms for the resolution of both domestic and regional conflicts. Some of these mechanisms gave impetus for Nigeria's intervention in many of the conflicts in West Africa, especially in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea-Bissau and Cote d'Ivoire (Roland, 2003). With the refusal of the United Nations, the United States of America and the rest of the international community to intervene in Liberia, Nigeria quickly responded to contain threat to law and order, using the instrumentality of ECOWAS. The country's action in Liberia was replicated in other parts of West Africa engulfed in one conflict or the other (Adeola, 2002).

Given her contributions in conflict resolution in West Africa as demonstrated in the aforementioned countries in the sub-region, it is therefore not out of place to conclude that Nigeria is a hegemon in the West African sub-region. The country has been responding to conflict situations in West Africa the way she does, because her leaders saw the noble role the country was playing in ending conflicts in the sub-region as a way of reasserting her influence and showing indispensability which she hoped might persuade the international community to appreciate her leadership role in the sub-region. According to Osaghae (2010:16), "the strategy worked fairly well in order to show the international community, initially reluctant to get involved in the complex West African

conflicts that, no matter how bad the situation was in Nigeria, her role in West Africa and Africa could not be ignored.”

Critical Analysis of Nigeria’s National Interest and Interventions in West African Conflicts

Questions have been asked by Nigerians on Nigeria’s involvement in the domestic conflicts of states in West Africa when there are numerous unresolved conflicts at home, including the Boko Haram insurgency in the Northern part of the country. These Nigerians have questioned the rationale behind Nigeria’s commitment in men, money and materials in the resolution of conflicts in the West African sub-region at the expense of the country’s development and welfare of her citizens.

Hassan (2008) argues that even though Nigeria’s intervention in the conflict in Cote d’Ivoire and other states in West Africa is desirable, these interventions have cost Nigeria enormous financial and human resources. According to him, “the historic contributions of Nigeria to regional peace and security which has cost the country so much money, not to mention the gallant men and women of the Nigerian Armed Forces who paid the supreme sacrifice, are hardly acknowledged by the international community in general and the African continent in particular.” (Al-Hassan, 2008:2).

Taking cognizance of these contributions made by Nigeria towards African peace, security and development, Eke (2009:138) raised one fundamental question: “Upon all the enviable roles and contributions which Nigeria made in the continent, can the nation continue to pursue African agenda at such monumental cost without visible tangible benefits to the country’s national interest? In line with Eke’s question, Al-Hassan (2008:3) observes that “Nigeria is making too much contributions in Africa without corresponding positive outcome.” He believes that the centrepiece of any country’s foreign policy ought to be that country itself if it seriously considers itself a rational actor in the international system. Every single action taken by Nigeria in Africa generally and West Africa particularly, according to him, must reflect Nigeria’s national interest.

Although Nigeria is endowed with mineral resources which earns her enormous wealth with which she funds her involvement in African conflicts, the scale of such funding affects her domestic development and the welfare of her citizens negatively. The above scenario is graphically captured by Idumange (2011:2) who states that “Nigeria is characterized by mass poverty, grave insecurity, dilapidated economic and social infrastructure, which has triggered the forces of corruption, marginalization, ethnicity and prebendal politics.”

Oyetunde (2002) agrees with the above scholars when he remarked that Nigeria’s foreign policy is static, unprogressive, and it is not benevolent to a large segment of the Nigerian populace.

Idumange (2011) advocates a more pragmatic approach to Nigeria’s foreign policy that will promote her national interest. “While it may be asserted that Nigeria’s national interest tends to promote the core values and objectives of her diplomacy in principle, there is an urgent need to forge a more pragmatic approach to issues rather than engage in

populist and unrewarding ideological loyalty and nebulous diplomatic permutations” (Idumange, 2011:2).

There is a consensus among radical scholars whose works were reviewed above (Al-Hassan, 2008; Eke, 2009; and Idumange, 2011) that Nigeria’s foreign policy is unprogressive and not beneficial to majority of Nigerians because of the inability of the leadership of the country to define what constitutes Nigeria’s national interest. These scholars believe that, since foreign policy is an extension of domestic policy, Nigeria’s domestic environment does not support her frequent interventions in African affairs that cost the country monumentally in terms of financial, material and human resources. They maintain that Nigeria exhibits false generosity outside the shores of Nigeria in order to create a wrong impression that the country’s political economy is healthy. As a result of the inability of the country’s leadership to define her national interest, her frequent involvement in conflicts in Africa, especially in West Africa at the expense of her domestic development and welfare of her citizens is viewed with mixed feeling by Nigerians.

Williams (2008) is one of those who believe that the associated widespread poverty, unemployment and insecurity in Nigeria are responsible for lack of public support for Nigeria’s frequent interventions for peace and security in West Africa. He queries the rationale for Nigeria’s frequent interventions to maintain peace and security in the sub-region when “Nigeria is enmeshed in insecurity going by cases of seeming intractable sectarian crises, particularly in its northern region. Yearly, there is outbreak of ethno-religious conflicts with tragic consequences fuelled by huge population of willing, hungry, desperate, unemployed youths seeking avenues for expressing discontentment over under-performing governments at every level.” (Williams, 2008:309).

Lending his voice to this line of argument, Adebajo (2010) argues that Nigeria’s foreign policy adventures vis-à-vis interventions in conflicts, especially in the West African sub-region, face strong opposition because of the failure of successive Nigerian governments to apply the principle of “Responsibility to Protect” domestically. He believes that the internal situation in Nigeria calls for greater attention as the country continues to suffer all manners of security challenges, ranging from widespread robbery to kidnapping, ethno-religious conflicts, and now terrorism (Boko Haram insurgency). This must have informed Soremekun’s (1997:12) positions that “in a situation where a country’s foreign vision and assumed roles impact negatively on its domestic affairs, its foreign objectives must be re-examined and refocused.”

Soremekun’s argument here is that, in the atmosphere of growing domestic instability and declining economy, Nigeria’s frequent interventions to resolve conflicts in West Africa should be reviewed. How can Nigeria spend enormous resources in promoting peace and security in West Africa when both peace and security are absent at home?

From the economic perspective of Nigeria’s national interest and interventions in the West African sub-region, the views of scholars like Williams (2008) and Idumange (2011) is that Nigeria’s interventions in the sub-region cannot be justified. They argue that such interventions are not necessary because at the end of the conflict that warranted

Nigeria's intervention, there seem to be no tangible national economic interest at stake, "unlike the gulf war of 1991 in which the Allied Coalition Forces fought to keep the oil lanes open to the Eastern and Western users." (Williams 2008:309) At the end of the conflict in which Nigeria committed a lot of financial and material resources, including men and women who lost their lives, neither the Nigerian government nor Nigerian business men benefited from such interventions. Using Sierra Leone as an example, Williams (2008) and Idumange (2011) note that at the end of the conflict, Lebanese and Indian businessmen flooded Freetown doing one business or the other instead of Nigerian businessmen, considering the fact that the resources that could have been used for Nigeria's domestic development was used for the resolution of the Sierra Leone conflict.

Their views have been shared by many Nigerians who argue against Nigeria's frequent interventions in conflicts in West Africa. Agwu (2009:12-13) observes that:

Nigeria's foreign policy has witnessed enormous costs without any corresponding dividends. For instance, Nigeria has been a party to many peacekeeping operations at the sub-regional, continental and global levels with so many sacrifices, yet no explicit or implicit post-policy dividend has ever been derived from such military exertions. Policy analysts have resultantly not misjudged in their observation that Nigeria does not benefit maximally, anything near proportionately from United Nations peacekeeping funds or even jobs and positions.

Agwu further observes that when the United States of America and other Allied Coalition Forces invaded Iraq and overthrew Saddam Hussein, "American companies like Halliburton and the entire defence sector promptly revved up and readied themselves for the post-conflict reconstruction in that country. In the case of Nigeria in Liberia and Sierra Leone under ECOMOG, no such post-conflict reconstruction engagements ensued to the benefit of the Nigerian state, the private sector or any segment of the civil society". (Agwu, 2009: 13)

Based on this fact, Bassey (2004:101) articulated Agwu's (2009) view more precisely when he captured the mood and verdict of many Nigerians:

The Nigerian military intervention in Liberia and Sierra Leone has been the most traumatic and economically wasteful experience in the forty-three years of independence. Against the background of collapsing industrial communication infrastructure, moribund health delivery system and educational institutions, widespread poverty, cascading debt burden and prostrate manufacturing sectors, many Nigerians have wondered and shouted aloud in the electronic and print media how we got into the cauldron of Liberia and Sierra Leone.

Obadiah, cited in Al-Hassan (2008:5) believes that “every single action shall be adjudged by how much it advances our national power and influence, and how much it advances our interest, objectives and purposes.” These Nigerians have advanced their argument against Nigeria’s intervention in African affairs after taking into consideration the enormous funds Nigeria spends in military interventions in Africa, especially in West Africa, while almost all the domestic sectors are yearning for attention, and above all the standard of living of many Nigerians is grossly inadequate.

In contrast to the views of Williams (2008) and Idumange (2011), whose arguments are based on just national economic interest, Akinyemi (1987) identifies the achievement of national security interest as one of the justifications for Nigeria’s intervention in African conflicts, especially in the West African sub-region. He contends that Nigeria has always been at the forefront of conflict resolution in the West African sub-region in order to maintain peace and security in the sub-region. Akinyemi acknowledges that Nigeria’s peace initiatives in West Africa are done on the belief that conflicts do have spillover effects which at times destabilizes other regions or states by promoting insecurity, poverty and political instability. He believes that Nigeria’s conflict resolution initiative within West Africa is premised on the notion that Nigeria’s security is inextricably tied to the security of West Africa.

Conclusion

Since her independence in 1960, Nigeria has aspired to occupy the centre stage of African affairs using her resources, influence and power to achieve this aspiration and further national interest, especially in the West African sub-region. In Nigeria’s existence as a sovereign state, the influence the country wields through the instrumentality of foreign policy which seeks to promote and protect her national interest can better be assessed within the context of regional and continental leadership aspiration.

Apart from playing prominent role in West Africa through the commitment of her substantial military capacity and financial resources, Nigeria has also been instrumental in most of the conflict resolutions and peace agreements in almost all the conflicts in the West African sub-region. This is evidenced in her championship role in the signing of many peace agreements between many governments and rebels in West Africa. The country has provided desired leadership in the sub-region in conflict and crisis situations through the instrumentality of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

It is however believed that Nigeria’s leadership role and her interventions in conflict situations in West Africa is not based on a clearly-defined national interest. In dear terms, there is no strong national consensus on the utility of Nigeria’s interventions in conflicts in West Africa. ~~uwKlqfvd~~ the magnitude of leadership failure at home. There has been national outcry over the manner successive leaderships in Nigeria have intervened in conflicts in West Africa at great cost to the nation without any tangible

benefits, while the country- continues to face serious socioeconomic and security challenges at home. Since her independence in 1960, Nigeria has aspired to occupy the centre stage of African affairs using her resources, influence and power to achieve this aspiration and further national interest, especially in the West African sub-region. In Nigeria's existence as a sovereign state, the influence the country wields through the instrumentality of foreign policy which seeks to promote and protect her national interest can better be assessed within the context of regional and continental leadership aspiration.

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It is however believed that Nigeria's leadership role and her interventions in conflict situations in West Africa is not based on a clearly-defined national interest. In clear terms, there is no strong national consensus on the utility of Nigeria's interventions in conflicts in West Africa, considering the magnitude of leadership failure at home. There has been national outcry over the manner successive leaderships in Nigeria have intervened in conflicts in West Africa at great cost to the nation without any tangible benefits, while the country- continues to face serious socioeconomic and security challenges at home.

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