



## National Interest and Nigeria's Foreign Policy: Discourse of Rethink

<sup>1</sup>Douglas Chidi Ndidigwe

<sup>1</sup>Department of Political Science, Federal University, Lokoja, Kogi State

*Corresponding Author's Email: [douglas.ndidigwe@fulokoja.edu.ng](mailto:douglas.ndidigwe@fulokoja.edu.ng)*

### Abstract

The paper examined the symbiotic relationship between the concepts of national interest and foreign policy, stressing that a well grafted foreign policy is dependent on a well thought-out national interest which remains a guide to a nation's foreign policy formulation and implementation. Nigeria's foreign policy over the years has been touted to be guided by the country's national interest which studies in the past revealed is obfuscating. Nigeria's national interest and her foreign policy in the past and the present, which is said to be at variance with what is obtained in other climes. In order to achieve the objective of this study, the paper adopted the theory of state capture as our guide. The paper employs the qualitative content analysis approach and relies mainly on secondary sources of data such as textbooks, journal articles, periodicals, conferences papers and the internet, etc. The study finds that there is disconnect between Nigeria's national interest and her foreign policy objectives. Previous studies had been on Nigeria's foreign policy and national interest without corresponding benefits to her development, but rather predicated on parochial and jaundiced sentiments. It is within this gap in foreign policy analysis literature that this paper investigates the need for a rethink on a well thought-out and robust national interest as a sine-qua-non for a nation's foreign policy formulation and implementation. In addition, instead of addressing issues raised by various studies on the unmitigated asymmetry between national interest and foreign policy objective, government are always adamant and chose to maintain the status quo. The study recommends that there is urgent need for reforms that will ensure a well defined and structured policy, for effectiveness, efficiency and transparency.

**Key words:** National interest; Foreign policy; Realism; Rethink

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## Introduction

There is a nexus between a country's national interest and her foreign policy as such any disconnect between the two important concepts will affect such a nation's relation in the international scene. In Nigeria since her independence in 1960, successive governments' have claimed that her interaction beyond her shores has been predicated on her national interest which formed the bedrock of the nation's foreign policy. Most times the much touted national interest of such countries is treated with levity as such tantamount to mere perturbation which explains the reason Folarin (2014) describes Nigeria's national interest as being ambiguous. Dan-Fulani (2014) was on the same page with Folarin on the absence of national interest as the basis of realist foreign policy in Nigeria. The questions this paper intends to answer are as follows: is Nigeria's foreign policy actually driven by her national interest? Can you say that Nigeria's national interest is people oriented? What has the nation gained in her relation with others since independence? What went wrong in the pursuit of her foreign policy?

The paper in part examines the concept of national interest and foreign policy with a view to ascertaining the basis for Nigerian foreign policy objectives in a world that is globalizing which the ultimate end is improvement on a country's socio-economic well-being. What could be deduced from Nigeria's experience is profligacy and bad statesmanship in all her interactions in the international scene, beginning from Africa where it has been professing "afrocentrism" and "big brotherism" to the detriment of development to the nation: that is giving out what they don't have, which in most cases have boomeranged because most of the policies they tend to advance and pursue beyond her shores were not sustained because of limited capacity and lack of capability, seasoned by bad initiative to achieve such goals. What can you say of the anti-apartheid war in South Africa that Nigeria's task payers' money was expended and the two peacekeeping adventures embarked by Nigeria in Liberia and Sierra Leone without a corresponding impact on the country; instead they had negative effects on the socio-economic fabrics of the nation (Warner, 2017). This ECOWAS philosophy, Dan-Fulani (2014), opined has not yielded commensurate gains for Nigeria is the country's ECOWAS philosophy. Nigeria solely financed the peacekeeping operations in Liberia and Sierra Leone and contributed 95% of the troops that executed the mission. To date, the precise amount spent on the mission has not been published – classified military information perhaps – but



estimates show that millions of dollars were spent for this venture which had no strategic or economic interest to Nigeria.

### **The Concept of National Interest**

An ideal foreign policy contains a systematic formulation of national interest in which inconsistent interests are weeded out, and such interests weighed in the balance against one another in terms of priorities, and also the interests as a whole, budgeted against the power of the state to achieve those interests. Once this process of molding national interests into an overall foreign policy is consummated, the state is presumably ready in its dealings with other states, to pursue a logical and consistent foreign policy.

Even though the foundation of a rational foreign policy is said to beset with difficulties, a nation must have some clear conception of the policy goals it desires. If its direction is foggy and adrift, it will not reflect on the goals it set to achieve on the international scene. The first task to be taken in the formulation of foreign policy is to identify the goals to be sought, which is national interest. The concept of national interest has been conceptualized differently by different scholars of foreign policy analysis. Against this background, the concept is said to be nebulous, one that lacks a universally acceptable conceptualization. Rosati (2006) contends with the view of the possibility of having anything being referred to as “national” in view of the multitude of prevailing personal, group, class, sectional and public interest in a state. This is because there is no definitive measure for the streamlining of all these conflicting concepts to a national interest (Rosati, 2006 cited in Folarin, 2014:38).

It could be inferred that interest refers to whatever positives that impact the general well-being or fulfillment of a purpose, of an individual. While Hobbes on the other hand, situates interest with self-preservation, a view embedded in a philosophy founded on a materialist view of human nature. According to this view; self-preservation is the underlying motivation of all human actions in relation to other human beings. Different scholars therefore have various perceptions of the concept vis-à-vis their understanding of the subject-matter which explains Frankel’s (1969) view that national interest is characterized by its non-specific nature, but by a degree of continuity and by its connection with political action. More crucial in various attempts is the problematic issue of determining who actually determines national interest. Is it the leadership or the citizens of the nation? The leadership has the responsibility



of protecting the people as well as providing them the good life and controlling the affairs of the state for positive change; while the citizens of the country are directly affected either positively or negatively by the drive of the country's national interest. Hence, the national interest of a state aims at promoting the national development and by extension image, prestige and respect both at home and abroad. Here one major ambiguity arises from the use of the concept in different contexts without sufficient clarification. For instance, the objectivists assert that national interest determines the contents of what nations do at home and abroad. On the other hand, convinced that national interests and aspirations are reflected in the actions of a nation's policy makers, the subjectivists maintain that the national interest is whatever officials of a nation seek to preserve and enhance. That is to say whatever the nation's decision makers decides to do stands as its national interest, even when such policy is at variance with popular interest.

In the views of Hans Morgenthau (1978), one of the proponents of the Realist Theory of International Politics, "national interest" is defined as "one guiding star, one standard of thought (and) rule for action" which statesmen must follow as they set national goals and embark on international relations. Morgenthau captured it more forcefully in this manner:

*"The main signpost that helps political realism to find its way through the landscape of international politics is the concept of interest defined as power. Statesmen think and act in terms of interest defined as power and the evidence of history bears that assumption out" (Morgenthau, 1978:5).*

On his part Dyke (1972), defines national interest as a shorthand expression of the sum total of the objectives and goals of a nation –state. In a similar vein, national interest can be viewed as the ideal goals upon which the domestic and foreign policies of a state are predicated. The concept of national interest therefore, has continued to play a significant role in the foreign policies of a sovereign state. A state's foreign policy is not operated in isolation. The main policy instrument in the conduct of foreign policy is invariably the promotion and pursuit of national interest. Thus, national interest can further be illustrated to mean the totality or the aggregate of interests of individuals and groups within a given nation-state (Folarin, 2014; Asobie, 2007). Here national interest by these scholars is defined as aggregated interests of people, but the same cannot be said of Nigeria. In reality it means only an insignificant number of elite lords their interest over the whole nation. Viewed from its classical sense, national interest encompasses the various strategies employed in the international interactions of states in order to ensure the preservation of the stated goals of society.



Generally, therefore, national interest is a channel to the formulation of foreign policy. It is not an end in itself, but a means to an end. Adeniji (1992) agrees with the realist view that the concept of national interest, despite the controversy it generates, is central to foreign policy formulation and implementation. National interest to Palmerston is the state of affairs valued solely for its benefit to the nation (cited in Chandra, 1979). In like manner, Adeniran(1983:191) argued that:

*When statesmen and bureaucrats are expected or required to act in the national interest....what is meant is that they are being called upon to make 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 rather than pursue policy that will subject the people to domination by other countries.....policies which are likely to make them unable to stand among other nations (Adeniran, 1983: 191).*

Adeniran's conceptualization of national interest captures vividly the main essence of the concept, which presupposes that, it is for the benefit of the country, however, the people remains the main target, but in Nigeria the reverse is the case. In advanced West, their foreign policy is couched within the rubric of their national interest which is people centred. The same cannot be said of Nigerian foreign policies that lack a clear cut definition of her national interest, which has put a question mark on the nation's interaction and relation in the international scene over the years.

### **Theoretical Compass**

This paper adopted the theory of state capture as its theoretical compass. State capture is a type of systemic political corruption in which private interests significantly influence a state's decision-making processes to their own advantage. The term was first used by the World Bank, in the year 2000, to describe the situation in some Central Asian countries making the transition from Soviet communism. Specifically, it was applied to situations where small corrupt groups used their influence over government officials to appropriate government decision-making in order to strengthen their own economic positions; these groups' members would later become known as oligarchs (Crabtree, & Durand, 2017:1)

The classical definition of *state capture* refers to the way formal procedures (such as laws and social norms) and government bureaucracy are manipulated by government officials, state-



backed companies, private companies or private individuals, so as to influence state policies and laws in their favour (Hellman, etal.2000). State capture seeks to influence the formation of laws, in order to protect and promote influential actors and their interests. In this way it differs from most other forms of corruption which instead seek selective enforcement of already existing laws.

Hellman & Kaufmann (2001) stress that by recognizing the dynamics of state capture we gain a much clearer understanding of the factors underlying the persistence of corruption in many transition countries. Although corruption has usually been seen as a symptom of weak state institutions, their analysis highlights the powerful forces that have a strong interest in fostering and maintaining these weak institutions. Any reforms to improve the institutional framework, which might undermine these highly concentrated advantages, will be strongly opposed by captor firms that have the political influence to derail such reforms. Consequently, tackling the problem of state capture is a prerequisite for reforms to improve governance and strengthen the legal, judiciary, and regulatory environment. But once the capture economy has become entrenched, how can the country break out of the vicious circle? Yet it is clear that the causal links between capture and reform run in both directions, which makes breaking out of the vicious circle so difficult.

According to Kaufmann & Vicente (2005), state capture is not necessarily illegal, depending on determination by the captured state itself, and may be attempted through private lobbying and influence. The influence may be through a range of state institutions, including the legislature, executive, ministries, and the judiciary. In transition economies, it is said that corruption has taken on a new image—that of so-called oligarchs manipulating policy formation and even shaping the emerging rules of the game to their own, very substantial advantage. We refer to this behavior as state capture because the input of the citizenry does not count. Though this form of grand corruption is increasingly being recognized as the most pernicious and intractable problem in the political economy of reform, few systematic efforts have been made to distinguish its causes and consequences from those of other forms of corruption. Moreover, there have not been any deliberate attempts to measure this specific type of corruption and to compare it across countries (Hellman & Kaufmann, 2001).



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This concept was further developed in 2017, by a group of South African academics in a report on state capture in South Africa, titled "Betrayal of the Promise Report"(Swilling, et.al. 2017). The analysis emphasised the political character of state capture, arguing that in South Africa a power elite violated the Constitution and broke the law in the service of a political project, which they believed unachievable in the existing constitutional/legal framework. This state capture thesis is not peculiar to South Africa alone, but prevalent in most Third world countries.

That being said, the theory of state capture is appropriate to this study because it tries to highlight the challenge and failure of states to pursue robust policies that are peoples' driven, ditto the foreign policy in an environment that the system has been undermined by few individuals to their advantage. It is agreed that foreign policy must take in to cognizance the national interest of the country.

### **Nigerian National Interest and Foreign Policy: An Overview**

There is a congruent between a country's national interest and her foreign policies. States in the international system contrive their foreign policies in a manner that they put in serious consideration on the likely effect such policies might have on their national interest. All states have a conception or an idea of what their national interests are. Thus, nation-states conceive their foreign policies, and act in the international system in such a manner that their national interests are not jeopardized. That being said, the national interest is paramount to nation-states during foreign policy formulation and implementation. An action by any state in the globe cannot be explained without considering the national interest of such a state which motivates her to act in the way she did. In this light foreign policy could be seen as an inter-play between the inside and the outside of a state. In line with the above definition is that of Akinboye (1999), who defines foreign policy as a dynamic process involving interaction between the domestic and the external environments.

On the other hand, Morgenthau (1989) ties the goals of a nation's foreign policy to what he calls national interest, which is a guide to the formulation of foreign policy. In sum and from the numerous definitions of foreign policy given above, one could state generally, that, foreign policy represents an attitude of the state towards the international environment. This is to say that, the state takes into consideration, not only its own objectives, interests, aspirations



and problems, but also those of other states. This therefore suggests that, no nation can have a true guide as to what it must do and what it needs to do in foreign policy without accepting national interest as a guide. The principles of Nigeria's foreign policy have been somewhat consistent since they were initiated at independence in 1960 (Ashiru, 2013), while its national interest, in the views of Olukoshi (1992) and Eze (2010) since independence to the present, has been very difficult to fathom or define. However, the result may be the reason for multiple diplomatic variations and notions adopted by Nigeria over the years. Studies over time, has shown that some foreign policy analysts believe that Nigeria has no clear-cut national interest. But it is interesting to note that like every other sovereign country of the world national interest guides their foreign policy formulation. In Nigeria it could be said that its national interests have been largely determined and defined by the various leaderships that have over the years ruled the country (Ashiru, 2013; Eze, 2010). From 1960, some of Nigeria's foreign policy goals have involved decolonization, Pan-African solidarity, and world peace.

Another attempt was made to define Nigeria's foreign policy in the 1979 and 1999 Constitution, which includes promotion of African Unity as well as total political, economic, social and cultural liberation of Africa and other forms of international cooperation. Under Babangida's administration, national interest was simply national security. The 1999 Constitution and the Vision 2020 document also elaborated on what was meant by national interest in the context of foreign policy. The Vision 2020 document gave an overview of Nigeria's foreign policy, pointing to the changing nuances of the global system. Upon the various efforts made at conceptualizing Nigeria's national Interest, the following broadly constitutes Nigeria's foreign policy objectives: Promotion and protection of the national interest, promotion of African integration and support for African unity, promotion of international cooperation for the consolidation of universal peace and mutual respect among all nations and elimination in all its manifestations, respect for international law and treaty obligations as well as the seeking of settlement of international disputes by negotiation, mediation, conciliation, arbitration and adjudication, and promotion of a just world order (Agreen 2010;Eze, 2010).





Foreign policymakers and framers may perceive Nigeria's foreign policy as promising, but experience over the years has shown that the country's foreign policy over the years is not predicated on her national interest as the realist ideologues expounded. Corroborating the above assertion, Mailafia (2010) and Dan-Fulani (2014) surmised that national interest which is the guiding principle of the realist foreign policy has no doubt, been absent in Nigeria's foreign policy pursuit since 1960. Dan-Fulani (2014) notes that the country's membership of many bilateral and multilateral agreements at both the sub-regional and regional levels have reduced the country to "a beast of burden" enamored with responsibilities that have no empirical bearing on the country's national interest in this ever evolving world.

According to Agree (2010), while it is difficult to define the national interest of Nigeria, it is even more difficult to redefine it because of the variegated diplomatic permutations and ideologies Nigeria adopted over the years. Foreign policy experts are of the view that Nigeria has no clear cut political ideology and national interest. Eze (2010) averred that part of the policy oscillations is attributable to the fact that foreign policy is inextricably linked to its domestic policy.

The reason from the foregoing observation is that since independence, Nigeria's national interest has more often than not, been defined by the leadership at the top and their collaborators at all levels dominated alliance with few elite. That being said, the process of the formulation and conduct of Nigeria's foreign policy from the onset is dominated by the President or the Head of State relying on the advice of the foreign affairs ministry and other relevant arms of the federal bureaucracy. Essentially, the trends and pattern in Nigeria's foreign policy indicates that its national interest have not been very stable over time, but full of grandstanding, nevertheless, it has always assumed the minimal core elements of national interest to wit: protection of sovereignty and territorial integrity and the security of the country thereby deliberately excluding the core which is the well-being of the populace.

Since Nigeria's independence, it was only on three occasions that members of NGOs, International Relations experts and representatives of the organized private sector were formally involved in the process of defining Nigeria's national interest. They were so involved in 1961, 1986 and 1988, yet it yielded little or no impact because the leadership had their way by pursuing policies that tends to be personal and not for the benefit of all. This



observation resonates with the state capture thesis that opines that a few oligarchs pursue their interest at the foreign scene. These attempts to get individuals and groups outside the bureaucratic system in the process of determining Nigeria's national interest revealed a huge gap between the perspectives of the ruling class and that of the masses. Since independence, the definition of Nigeria's national interest has primarily reflected the realist perspective. It has also occasionally mirrored the behavioural and Marxist political economy paradigms.

In the early 1960s, under the first civilian administration of Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, Nigeria oscillated between realism and idealism: the four principal foreign policy goals of Nigeria then as already alluded in this paper include: decolonization; Pan-African solidarity; national economic development; and world peace. To the Balewa administration, four major challenges coincided with the four foreign policy goals that confronted Nigeria.

- The first challenge was the nature and methods of African unity.
- The subsets of this challenge could be framed in questions such as, “how can we bring the peoples of Africa together to achieve the feeling of oneness?” “Should we tackle our problems in Africa sub-regionally or continentally?” “Do we aim at achieving immediate political union of all African states or do we start from economic and cultural relations?”
- The second challenge was on the issue of decolonization. The questions centred on issues such as how to assist the remaining dependent territories in Africa to attain full independence within the shortest possible time; and how to tackle the problems of territories where minority European settlers lived.
- The third challenge bordered on the strategy for economic development. The questions were the strategies to tackle the shortage of capital and technical skills needed for economic development, especially to be free from the contending ideological blocs then.
- The fourth challenge concerned world peace. The central issue was what Nigeria could do to contribute to world peace. Nigeria has played and is still playing important role in Africa and the West African sub region. Nigeria spent billions of dollars to restore peace in Liberia and Sierra Leone without any concrete benefits economically, socially or politically to the country (Ade-Ibijola, 2013: 570). Instead, Nigeria displays a hearty profile of peace keeping experience, yet at home the word “peace” is far from being a reality.

However, Nigeria's false charity and penury at home are evidence that her world is full of pretenses. How will you explain the gift of 10 numbers of Toyota Land Cruiser SUV vehicles



to Republic of Niger by the President Buhari on the 28 of February 2022, at the cost of N1.1billion(Lambo et.al.2022). This was a period when there was disquiet in the educational system, the Academic Staff Union of Universities(ASUU) were on strike and the harsh economic realities that bedeviled the country; the government chose to embark on spending jamboree and frivolities at the detriment of the nation. Again as a corollary to the above, it was also discovered that the Buhari administration has been taking unilateral decisions and actions when it concerns the country's foreign policy as revealed by an online report that \$1million dollars was donated to Afghanistan in 2022 and this was shrouded in secrecy if not for the statement by the Secretary General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Hissein Brahim Taha appreciating Nigeria for its magnanimity (Tribune editorial 2022, April 4). In a similar vein, Omolaoye (2022) faulted Buhari for his unilateral decision. In reality, Nigeria, over the years has overstretched its elasticity which Bassey (2004), stressed is a bad statesmanship, as it relates to maintaining peace in other countries, while at home it is obvious that all is not well. This explains the social and economic decadence prevalent in the country. As observed by Bassey (2004), that only few Nigerians will contest the fact that next to the civil war, the Nigerian military intervention in Liberia and Sierra Leone has been the most traumatic and economically wasteful experience since independence. This is against the background of collapsing industrial and other infrastructure, moribund health delivery system and educational institutions; widespread poverty and rural anomie, cascading debt burden and prostrate manufacturing sectors.

It is noted that despite efforts by successive administrations in Nigeria to redefine the nation's national interest, such a colossal waste was allowed by the leaders of that time who were mainly military czars, which explains the submission by scholars that the nation's national interest is nebulous and reflects the interest of the few ruling elite (Agreen, 2010). In the present democratic dispensation the 1999 constitution and Nigeria's National Interest was silent on the issue. The 1999 constitution (as amended) does not explicitly define what Nigeria's national interest is or should be. It only included the "promotion and protection of the national interest" as part of Nigeria's foreign policy objectives without defining what Nigeria's national interest really is. As has been seen, several attempts have been made to redefine Nigeria's national interest. Some of these attempts involved the participation of



selected elite. Interestingly, the outcome of such national consultations hardly made an impact in re-directing Nigeria's foreign policy or re-formulating Nigeria's national interest.

The reason is that national interest is not shaped in the course of seminars and debates as posited by Asobie (2001). Rather, national interest emerges in the process of contestations among contending socio-economic groups, with divergent interests, struggling for dominance in the economy and society for the control of state power. Thus, what is described as the national interest of a country is more often than not (although not exclusively) the interest of the dominant socio-economic group. More fundamentally, Nigeria's foreign policy according to Akinterinwa (2004) has never reflected the needs of the ordinary citizens; rather elitist considerations inspire its formulation, articulation and implementation. Thus, the needs of the cream of the society – the business class, bureaucrats, military and civil rulers are reflected in the country's foreign policy. Corroborating this view, Adeniji (2004) submits that the common citizen in Nigeria has not been the focus of policy. The law, he notes, has been the focus, not the people. The people who made the law must always be placed above it in order of importance and defending a state whose citizens are worthless is equally useless. Of course, there is disconnect between the public and foreign policy formulation process in Nigeria as the common man are left out in the decision-making process. On Nigeria's policy of Afrocentricism, the country has always seen itself as the regional hegemon in Africa, to the extent that the quest for Pax-Nigeriana has been a motivating factor, to varying degrees, of every Nigerian administration since independence, especially the regimes of 1960–1993 (Nuamah, 2003). To this end, Nigeria's aspiration for continental leadership since independence is critical to understanding some basic planks of Nigeria's foreign policy.

Analysts and scholars alike stressed that Nigeria's Afrocentric disposition was largely responsible for its dogged fight in dismantling apartheid (Adeniji, 2005). Nigeria viewed the issue as an international one and made a huge financial commitment to fight the socio-political menace. The robust economy of the 1970s contributed to the respect and credibility accorded Nigeria as the most populous black nation on earth and a credible voice for Africa. This no doubt made the world to accept Nigeria's proposal to establish anti-apartheid committees in both the OAU (now AU) and the UN with the country having permanent chairs on the committees (Gambari, 1997). Nigeria successfully convinced countries to boycott the



13th Commonwealth games and sanctioned countries and companies that continued to deal with the apartheid government (Hamil&Spemce, 1994). Equally, Nigeria played an active role in the liberation of Southern African countries and the eradication of apartheid and colonialism, as well as supporting needy African countries with financial, material and technical aid over the years (Adeniji, 2005). Similarly, Osuntokun(2005) commenting on the role Nigeria played in African decolonization efforts stated: “[Nigeria] ... sacrificed the good will of the West and economic development in order to see to the total liberation of Africa.” In the same vein, Garba asserts:

*Nigeria... made enemies of erstwhile friends – all on account of their attitude towards the South Africa question. We have formulated economic policies that have sometimes been detrimental to our development because of our commitment to the eradication of apartheid (Garba, 1987:101).*

In attempt in playing a prominent role in African especially in the Southern African region, Garba stressed that the country lost a humongous sum of \$45 billion over a period of 15 years for its embargo on what is the interaction between national interest and foreign policy in Nigeria, and does this myopic interest of the few represent the aspirations of its citizens? Going by the state capture theoretical framework, which this study is built on, the obvious answer is No! Because the reason being that the country is under siege by the oligarchs that their personal interests supersede whatever might have been the national interest of the country, because their personal ego is at stake. Against this backdrop, it was discovered that the Nigerian public has developed “policy apathy” towards government policies even as it relates to the foreign policy of the country (Uhomoihi, 2012). Here, it is observed by the citizenry that their say and contributions makes no difference.

Notwithstanding, it may be argued that certain degree of successes might have been achieved; commenting on the Afrocentric policy, Amao&Uzodike (2015) averred that:

*Regardless of these successes, this Africa-centred foreign policy concentration has not been without flaws. These flaws were soon to become evident in the downturn experienced by the country in its hitherto strong and viable economy and in the neglect of its domestic responsibilities, specifically the fulfillment of the social obligations expected of a government to its people. The resultant effect of this has been a steady decline in the nation’s oil revenue owing to a culture of poor maintenance, corruption and the extensive projects executed by Nigeria in other African countries (Amao& Uzodike.2015:10).*



Nigeria's international generosity has never been predicated on a clear vision of national interest (Mailafia, 2010). From our findings here, what is much stated to be the interest of Nigerian is seen as the interest of a few and this trend has been sustained by these exclusive ruling elite since independence to the present. The Buhari government affection for the Afgan government attests to this fact, like wise others before him in the past. As we alluded in this paper, past leaders engaged in needless engagements at the detriment of the citizens; this depicts leadership that treats it people with disdain, however, reflecting the capture nature of the state. Again the country's interventionist role to achieve peace and security, protect democracy, offer grants, feed needy countries in the region and offer technical assistance has not yielded any noteworthy "dividend" to Nigeria or Nigerians in terms of investment opportunities from these benefitting countries nor has it enjoyed local support at home (Dan-Fulani, 2014; Jega, 2010). The focusing of Nigeria's foreign policy on Africa at independence has constituted a huge source of controversy to scholars, analyst and students of international politics. Only a few reckon that it is a noble course considering the reality and imperatives of the 1960s (Gambari, 1997). Agreed that the nation was at its infancy in the 1960s and the 1970s, what then could be said of the 1990s and the present? I could be seen that the same trend is being towed and followed by successive Nigeria's regimes in Nigeria; because they felt that maintaining the status-quo suits their capricious whimsicality and their ostentatious and profligate life style without accountability as their birthright, because the Nigerian state is a captured one. Notwithstanding, some scholars submit that it is a diplomatic blunder by a newly independent country whose leaders were unskilled in foreign policy articulation (Akinboye, 2013; Mailafia, 2010). These scholars, in line with the realist outlook on international politics, believe that nation-building should have been accorded utmost priority through involvement of all and sundry for the country's prosperity and development.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

As adumbrated and articulated in the introductory part of the paper, the central thrust of the article revolves around the challenges of Nigeria's foreign policies over the years without a well-defined national interest that are supposed to be people centred; but what obtained and has been in practice over the years is the reverse, where a few elites has dictated the tune of the nations' national interest and foreign policy formulation and implementation, which is



their personal interest and is at variance with the realist postulations on national interest. This observation explains the nations' foreign policy behaviour in the past that has been criticized by analysts and scholars as not being robust and worthwhile. The study demonstrated it was a deliberate effort by the ruling elite to stifle the polity through state capture thereby maintaining the status quo at the detriment of the mass public. Simply put, there is disconnect with what constitutes Nigeria's national interest and her foreign policy objectives and this has made development farfetched. It is a fact that for any country to achieve its developmental stride all and sundry must be involved, but it is not so in Nigeria, where the ruling elite are anti-people.

The paper recommends the following:

1. There is urgent need for reforms that will ensure a well defined and structured policy, for effectiveness, efficiency and transparency as well as accountability of those in position of implementation. The assistance of those of policy bodies like the NIIA and NIPSS among others should be elicited
2. The government should be more proactive and responsive, both in words and deeds, to the predicaments of its citizens as the nation gravitates to the people-first approach diplomacy. Nigerians everywhere must see sincerity in their government to protect and enhance their welfare. A rethink and reprioritization of Nigeria's national interest with the people as the main focus is a desideratum and the involvement of all in the formulation of the country's foreign policy are critical to the nation's advancement and development,
3. The Nigeria state should jettison the state capture mien and embrace reforms at all levels to restore confidence among the people, instead of her hitherto anti-populist posturing. Every country in the international system that is worth her onion build their foreign policy around this fact that is worthy of emulation by all, and Nigeria must not be an exception,
4. Efforts should be made to bridge the communication gap between the general public and policy makers, There is urgent need to identify, define, codify and document Nigeria's national interest and the pursuance of such objective is paramount in engineering change in the somewhat damaged image of the country, in the international scene.



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