Nigeria’s National Interest and Her Foreign Policy: Costs and Dividends

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Abstract

This paper examines Nigeria’s national interest and her foreign policy: the costs and dividends. The decision making approach was used as a theoretical underpinning. The approach is one of the approaches to the study of foreign policy objectives. The paper further analyzes the costs and dividends in foreign policy. It reveals the costs of foreign policy to involve, human, material, financial commitment adopted in fulfilling the goals of foreign policy among others. The dividends of foreign policy is the benefits or achievements a country and its people get from implementing and executing foreign policy objectives. It sees Nigeria’s role in the establishment of a continental body, i.e., the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and a sub-regional body, i.e., the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) as some of the achievements of Nigeria’s foreign policy thrust. One among the financial costs of Nigeria’s foreign policy is her involvement in international peace support operations across the globe since independence in 1960. It suggests that Nigeria’s foreign policy should be geared more towards developing her domestic environment.

Keywords: Costs, Dividends, National Interest, Foreign Policy, Administration.

Introduction

In both national and international settings, the concept of national interest has meant different things to Heads of State, Statemen, the press and the general public. Broadly speaking, national interest expresses core socio-economic and political ideals, values and aspirations which are well defended at home and pursued or promoted or defended beyond national boundaries. Operationally (in practical), national interest expresses manifesting public serving policies which make for, or promote core values held high and proud by the people. The impression, therefore is that national interest is not defined by what happens at the domestic setting only but the sum total of interest pursued or projected, or defended in the international setting. Based on this, we logically classify national interest into three broad issue areas: (a) primary interest: specifically, primary interest of any nation state, expresses those policies which make or promote to defend rights to territorial sovereignty and independence; (b) secondary interest: here a nation expresses policies which seek to promote and defends ‘nationals’ interest abroad; (c) general interest: A nation’s ‘general interest’ expresses policies which seek among others to promote world peace and security (Mbachu, 2011:29-34).

An effective foreign policy depends largely on the stability of the domestic political order, the strength, resilience and diversification of the national economy, the military might available for use if the situation arises, the level of industrialization of the economy and the
quality of political and administrative leadership at home. The conduct of foreign policy must, therefore pay attention to these domestic factors (Akindele, 1996:93). Foreign policy is the promotion and protection of a country’s national interest in the international arena (Abagen and Tyona, 2019). To Gubak (2015:634-635), foreign policy and national interest are inseparable concepts in international relations, and a state’s foreign policy is her national interest which in turn directs the course of the foreign policy. Therefore, this paper seeks to interrogate the costs and dividends of Nigeria’s foreign policy since independence.

Theoretical Framework
This study is anchored on the decision-making approach. A decision is a choice of goals, or of the means of attaining some objective, usually selected from a range of options or alternatives, as a means of responding to the requirements of some complex situation in the present or likely to arise in the future. Research and studies based on the theory of decision-making seek to find who makes political decisions; whether such decisions are rational; whether such decisions are irrational; the impact of rational and irrational decisions on political decision-making. The theory accepts fully that only a few, an elite group, are involved in decision-making. It assumes that the decisions of this group are product of conscious effort based on adequate knowledge and guided by skill and training. It also assumes that decision-makers are aware of the responsibilities which they possess, and the obligations which they have to operate in a relatively closed or controlled society (Mbachu, 2011:17). Therefore, the elites involved in decision-making of different governments in Nigeria have different ideologies and political orientation. This explains why there will be differences in their concepts, formulation and execution of Nigeria’s foreign policy. These decisions make impact on Nigeria’s national and international interest.

Costs and Dividends in Foreign Policy
Costs
The cost of foreign policy according to Adeniji (2005:24) entails the human, material and financial sacrifice made in implementing the strategies adopted in meeting the goals of foreign policy, as well as the administrative cost of maintaining the machinery for the formulation and practice of foreign policy. In our experience, one example of the former is the cost of interventions to restore or maintain peace in areas or regions of strategic value to the country’s national interest. It also entails the cost of gifts and grants to foreign states or organizations for the sustenance of good neighborliness or goodwill if considered necessary to the national interest. The administrative cost refers to the personnel and project cost of maintaining foreign policy establishments like, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and it affiliate arms or missions abroad. The cost entailed in the execution of foreign policy may increase, decrease or be totally removed through a process of prioritization of foreign policy. On the other hand, the administrative cost is always there and must be incurred, if the country is to have a foreign policy.

The immaterial and non-financial cost of foreign policy comes about through the undiplomatic taking of sides or alignment on international issues, especially in conflict areas. It brings about loss of goodwill or antagonism from either side in a conflict situation. That was why most developing countries pursued the policy of non-alignment in the confrontation between East and West during the Cold War. Open support for the West was likely to pitch a country against, and cost it the friendship and goodwill of the Eastern bloc and vice-versa. In the present situation, open support for one China policy and rejection of
overtures from Taiwan would cost a country Taiwanese goodwill and friendship. This is why it is always advisable to toe a middle path or be adroitly diplomatic if a country must support or reject any of the parties in a conflict situation. Diplomacy has been aptly described as the art of learning to say ‘No’ to a friend without incurring his wrath (Adeniji, 2005:24-25).

Dividends

Dividends of foreign policy, refers to the achievements of the goals of foreign policy. In the light of the understanding of foreign policy as defined earlier, sovereign nations set for themselves, and pursue certain core objectives in their diplomatic interactions. These objectives are formed or dictated by ‘national interest’ which are in turn a reflection of domestic policies, circumstances and prevailing values of the state. The national interest is also an image of a peoples common outlook with respect to the wide range of issues confronting the world at large. It becomes the duty of respective administrations or governments to strive to harmonize the yearnings of the people for security, stability, development and prosperity and evolve policies to actualize them in diplomacy. In practical terms therefore, the dividends of foreign policy translate to the benefits the citizen’s derive from it (Adeniji, 2005:25).

Nigeria’s Foreign Policy Since Independence: The Costs and Dividends

Nigeria gained her independence on October 1, 1960 and was admitted as the 99th member of the UN on October 7, 1960 at the Plenary of the 15th Regular Session of the UN General Assembly in New York where the country’s Prime Minister, Sir, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, acknowledged that peace and security are very vital to Nigeria’s foreign policy. His address further asserts: it is the desire of Nigeria to remain on friendly terms with all nations and participate actively in the work of the UN; (b) Nigeria a large and populous country of over 35 million has absolutely no territorial or expansionist intention; (c) we shall not forget our old friends and we are proud to have been accepted as a member of the British Commonwealth. Nevertheless, we do not intend to ally ourselves as a matter of routine with any of the power blocs. We are committed to uphold the principles upon which the UN is founded; (d) Nigeria hopes to work with other African States for the progress of Africa and assist in bringing all African territories to a state of responsible independence (Abagen and Tyona, 2018a:282-283).

One of the remarkable achievements or dividends of Nigeria’s foreign policy during the Balewa administration was Nigeria’s commitment to further promote the central tenents of her foreign policy objectives of peace and security was in the forefront of the establishment of a continental body, i.e., the Organization of African Unity (OAU) formed in May, 1963 (Abagen and Tyona, 2018a:283). The Balewa administration became a key player in the international system and the Balewa’s government centered her foreign policy on Africa. In 1961, she broke diplomatic ties with France, over the testing of nuclear weapons in the Sahara desert (Abagen and Tyona, 2018b:43). The foregoing assertion is another dividend of Nigeria’s foreign policy during the Balewa’s era. The Balewa administration was swept away with a bloody coup d’ etat of January 15, 1966, led by Major Kaduna Nzeogwu. This coup ushered in General Aguiyi-Irons in as the Head of the military junta.

The General Aguiyi-Irons government according to Ademoyega (1981) pursued essentially the same objectives that characterized Nigeria’s foreign policy from independence. To Fayomi; Chidozie and Ajayi (2015), this was based on General Ironsi’s
world view and perception of the hierarchy of Nigeria’s interests, in relation to the concepts of solidarity and national interest as the philosophical building blocks of Nigeria’s foreign policy. In all, it can be argued that the timid and moderate foreign policy that became the hallmark of Balewa’s regime equally persisted under Ironsi’s regime.

General Ironsi was overthrown in a military coup on July 29, 1966 and ushered in General Yakubu Gowon as the new Head of State of Nigeria. According to Adeniji (2005:28-29) in this segment of the development of Nigeria’s foreign policy, Nigeria was involved in a civil war. While the cardinal principles remained the same, the focus of government policy was the defense and protection of the country’s territorial integrity, cessation of hostilities and peaceful resolution of the conflict. The Nigerian civil war and its management posed completely new challenges for foreign policy. The experience acquired in prosecuting the war and eventually restoring peace brought dividends in terms of lessons which affected the country’s foreign policy. For instance, the ambivalence and uncomplimentary role played by Britain and some Western countries, especially France, in supporting the Biafran secessionists reaffirmed the need for self-reliance and continued and unabashed neutrality or non-alignment.

In fact, the support of the Soviet Union and her allies for the Federal Government’s wartime efforts obliterated the fear and suspicion that had hindered closer relations with the Eastern bloc countries, and ushered in an era of cooperation and assistance agreements with these countries. In the African continent, the importance of the OAU as an instrument for the peaceful resolution of conflicts became manifest and appreciated. The existing policy of good neighbourliness, though at great lost, paid off tremendously with many countries in the West-African sub-region supporting Nigeria in her efforts at preserving her territorial integrity, independence and sovereignty. However, this, together with the negative role of some other countries, brought to the fore the need for greater sub-regional cooperation (Adeniji, 2005:29).

The foregoing assertion laid the foundation of Nigeria’s foreign policy thrust to pursue for the establishment of a West African sub-regional body, as Tyona (2015) wrote:

The Nigerian Head of State, General Yakubu Gowon and his Togolese counterparts, Gnassingbe Eyadema toured the sub-region in support of the integration idea. Thanks to the drafts that emanated from their efforts as they formed the basis for the emergence of the Treaty of Lagos, Nigeria on May 28, 1975 which birthed the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

General Gowon’s regime came to an end, two months after ECOWAS came into being. The former was overthrown in a bloodless putsch on July 29, 1975 and, then, General Murtala Muhammed became Nigeria’s Head of State.

General Murtala Muhammed brought dynamism and activism into Nigeria’s external relations. The administration’s interest in foreign affairs was demonstrated by the setting up of Adedeji Commission to overhaul the entire foreign policy machinery of the country. Based on this, the Murtala regime made far reaching impact and achieved significant feat in foreign affairs. The most often cited was the Nigeria’s dramatic and timely intervention in the Angolan-independence crisis in 1976 which remarkably illustrates the dynamic and action oriented Afrocentric policy of the administration (Anyaele, 2003; Akinboye, 1999, Dibie, 2008 cited in Gubak, 2015).

Another achievement of Nigeria’s foreign policy under General Murtala Muhammed regime was its decision to review the sitting of the newly established ECOWAS Headquarters
at Lome, Togo. It was for this purpose that Brigadier J. Garba, the then Nigeria’s External Affairs Commissioner was sent to see General Gnassingbe Eyadema, then Togolese President on the issue. Eyedema was unhappy when Garba told him that Togo would not retain the ECOWAS Headquarters after all. The position of the Nigerian government was that, Nigeria being the Chief Financier of ECOWAS budget, needed to have the ECOWAS Headquarters in its territory.

Again, according to Mbachu (2011:127) another issue that came up in the West African sub-region, was the discussion that was coming up in Paris in December, 1975, about the impending North-South dialogue on economic cooperation. When Murtala Muhammed learnt of it, he insisted that Nigeria must participate and this led to the eventual withdrawal of Ivory Coast that had earlier been nominated to represent the sub-region and replaced by Nigeria. This development did not go down well with the Ivorian’s, but the Nigeria diplomatic goal had been achieved.

After the assassination of General Murtala Muhammed on February 13, 1976 following an abortive coup, General Olusegun Obasanjo continued with the same policy as laid down by Murtala Mohammed. Indeed, what Obasanjo did was to consolidate Murtala’s effort, and Nigeria’s voice continued to be heard in international community. One of the most outstanding things done by Obasanjo was the punitive measures applied to British companies following British unacceptable policy in Rhodesia and Apartheid South Africa. The British Petroleum was also nationalized in 1979 by the Obasanjo regime as means of hastening the Lancaster’s conference that was to usher in Zimbabwe’s independence. The partial nationalization of Barclay’s Bank and the taking over of British Petroleum because of their links with Apartheid South Africa were no doubt practical demonstration of Nigeria’s Afro-centric and no-aligned policy. Government also pursued with vigour its decolonization policy and provided financial and logistic support for the liberation movements particularly those in Southern Africa (Anyaele, 2003; Akinboye, 1999; Dibie, 2008 cited in Gubak, 2015).

General Olusegun Obasanjo handled over power to a democratically elected government of Alhaji Shehu Shagari in October, 1979, and he became the first Executive President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. To Mbachu (2011:144-147) under the Shagari foreign policy, the relationship between Nigeria and its neighbours have been further fostered by commerce and the common desire for development and cooperation with the Republic of Benin, Nigeria cooperative efforts extend to the establishment of joint industrial projects, such as cement works, and an integrated sugar complex. Other bilateral relation with neighbours have resulted in the establishment of the Niger/Nigeria Joint Commission for Economic Cooperation, the Lake Chad Basin Commission and the River Niger Commission. Relation between Nigeria and Cameroon have been mutual in the promotion of trade, movement of persons and cultural exchange despite Nigeria’s tremendous internal requirements, she has subscribed the sum of N50 million to the African Development Bank, for giving loan to African countries. An analysis of the Shagari foreign policy reveals that Europe occupies an important position in Nigeria foreign policy relations in terms of investment, trade, transfers of technology and facilities.

General Muhammadu Buhari toppled the civilian government of Shehu Shagari in December, 1983 due to the deepening economic crisis. According to Fawole (2003:130 - 132) the first major foreign policy issue that the new Buhari regime had to deal with was actually an outgrowth of domestic
policy i.e., revamping the ailing national economy. This was because it inherited a severely damaged economy and its main objectives were to put it back on track. It also inherited the proposal to seek International Monetary Fund (IMF) bail out facility of the tune of $ 2.2 billion from its predecessor, Despite the badly needed economic relief; the Buhari regime did not access the IMF bailout facility, because of disagreement over the conditionalities that the lending institution attached to the loan facility.

Equally, relations with immediate neighbouring States in West and Central Africa were also badly affected by the regime’s domestic economic revival policies and programmes. These include prolonged border closure, expulsion of illegal aliens, and currency change. These policies had severe adverse effects on the politics and economies of the neighbouring States. Again, one significant African problem that got prominent attention and nearly caused a split in the OAU was the lingering problem in former Western Sahara. In line with its support for African liberation and independence, Nigeria suddenly recognized the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) against the objection of Morocco and its supporters. Morocco has laid claim and forcibly held on to the territory since the Spanish left the country in the 1970s to the chagrin of the OAU and the international community, especially after the World Court declaration that Morocco had no rights to lay claims to the territory. Sensing that Nigeria could no longer continue its fence sitting in the face of overwhelming cry for self-determination, the Buhari government decided to rescue the OAU from imminent collapse by announcing its recognition of SADR on November 11, 1984 at the 20th OAU summit in Addis Ababa. Nigeria’s bold action permitted SADR to take its seat at the summit. Morocco, feeling humiliated by Nigeria’s action, staged a walkout at the summit (Fawole, 2003:133-140).

General Buhari regime was terminated in August, 1985 in a palace coup that led to the emergence of General Ibrahim Babangida. One of the first things he did was to directs his Foreign Affairs Minister, Professor Bolaji Akinyemi to organize an “All Nigeria Conference on Foreign Policy” in order to examine the various perspectives of the country’s foreign policy. The conference came up with the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) and on the external plan, the regime adopted economic diplomacy as the thrust of its foreign policy. However, the SAP failed to restructure the Nigerian economy in a manner as to reduce its independence on the West. Thus, rather than reducing the nation’s economic problem, it has exacerbated. The Babangida administration however made its mark in projecting the country’s image as a regional power in the West African sub-region. Nigeria’s leadership role in Liberian and Sierra-Leonean crisis clearly underscores ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) which was set up in 1990 at the instance of the Nigerian government under General Babangida successfully brought peace to the war-torn Liberia. The peace keeping force on which Nigeria has expanded enormous human and material resources has also succeeded in achieving the same equal in the crisis-ridden Sierra-Leone. This era launched Nigeria back to the forefront of international relations (Anyaele, 2003; Akinboye, 1999; Dibie, 2008 cited in Gubak, 2015).

General Ibrahim Babangida step-aside as Nigeria’s military President in August, 1993. He put in place an illegitimate government known as the Interim National Government (ING) headed by Chief Ernest Shonekan. The ING lasted for three months and was swept away in a palace coup led by General Sani Abacha in November, 1993. Abacha claimed in his broadcast that Shonekan had resigned. General Sani Abacha became the Head of State of Nigeria on November 17, 1993. To Fawole
(2003:213) it is only by understanding Abacha psychological makeup that one may be able to unravel his policies. He saw the world from his own peculiar conceptual lenses, and reacted to it the way he saw in his own way. He expected absolute obedience to his authority and was willing to kill to ensure compliance. Besides, it was also clear that he never was really moved so much by international opprobrium, as he promptly sought new friends and allies from Iraq, Iran, North Korea etc., once the Commonwealth, the European Union and other civilized countries of the world began treating his regime with the contempt that it deserved.

Abacha carefully cultivated the friendship of fellow pariah dictators like Muammer Gaddafi of Libya, Mainassara Barre of Niger Republic and Yahaya Jammeh of Gambia. He tried to reach out to President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe and Yoweri Museveni of Uganda through financial inducement. He allegedly cultivated the support of Ghana’s Jerry Rawlings with five million dollar bribe that became a scandal after his death. Those foreign leaders whom he could not cultivate were also framed up like his domestic opponents, for example, the US, South Africa and Zimbabwe, were accused of coordinating an international effort to destabilize and topple his regime. Nigeria was suspended from the Commonwealth. The UN investigated Nigeria for human rights violation, and other countries imposed varying sanctions against Nigeria and its citizens. Canada and Nigeria broke diplomatic relations outright. All manner of economic and technical aid and assistance to the country were suspended by various countries, even the Commonwealth scholarship that Nigerians had enjoyed for decades were no longer available. It is difficult, if not impossible, to classify the Abacha era’s foreign policy as a success story in any meaningful way. No matter what it attempted to do, and no matter the domestic and international circumstances it had to contend with, General Abacha left Nigeria’s image and standing in the world worse than he had met it in November, 1993. The inescapable conclusion is that the Abacha regime did not bequeath a healthy foreign policy legacy to its successor (Fawole, 2003:213-215).

According to Abagen and Tyona (2018b:45) following General Abacha’s death on June 8, 1998, General Abdulsalami Abubakar emerged as Nigeria’s Head of State. He initiated a ten months transition programme which brought on board, Olusegun Obasanjo as Nigeria’s President on May 29, 1999. In order to redeem Nigeria’s image and re-integrate her in the international system, President Obasanjo embarked on shuttle diplomacy. This approach to foreign policy saw Nigeria re-admitted into the community of nations. His shuttle diplomacy equally brought high profile return state visits from countries like, Russia, United States of America, Canada, South Africa, France, and Japan among others.

Subsequently, Nigeria assumed leadership of several multilateral organizations, like Chairman of the African Union (AU) , elected Chairman of the G-77 in 2000. She was elected the eight-member Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) for the first time as well as hosted the Commonwealth Heads of Government, summit in December, 2003 in Abuja, Nigeria. The Obasanjo democratic rule also played a prominent role in transforming OAU into AU as well as leading force in the creation of the New Partnership for Africa Development (NEPAD). Equally, the administration brought on board the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS). The policy thrust of NEEDS was aimed at moving Nigeria’s economic fortunes forward through capacity building for sustainable development in building/creating a competitive private sector that can take advantage of the abundant
opportunities in the domestic, continent and global market. Thus, the Global System of Mobile (GSM) came into being in Nigeria under Obasanjo’s democratic era (Abagen and Tyona, 2018b:45).

Obasanjo handled over power to the democratically elected government of Umar Musa Yar’ Adua on May 29, 2007. Gubak (2015:637) notes that, “the records of President Yar’ Adua has been mixed. Nigeria continues to rank high on international corruption indexes. A cease fire has been brokered with the Delta insurgents, but inter-confessional instability had increased in the North. Nigeria has appeared on international terrorists watch lists, in the wake of thwarted 2009 ‘Christmas Day Bombing’ and series of bombings”.

Unfortunately, the ailing President Yar’ Adua died in office and was succeeded by his Vice, Dr. Goodluck Jonathan. Studies have it that the foreign policy thrust of Jonathan’s administration was generally seen as a continuation of the foreign policy thrust of Yar’ Adua. Therefore, it warrants no serious reflections. The Jonathan era witnessed a lot of domestic insecurity, especially the terrorists activities carried out by Boko Haram sects in Nigeria. There was also high level of corruption by top ranking government officials. These among others dent Nigeria’s image internationally.

Muhammadu Buhari emerged as Nigeria’s President on May 29, 2015 after a successful democratic power transition from Jonathan. The Buhari administration launched a fight against corruption, Boko Haram. In fact, the Buhari administration rescued the chibok girls abducted by the Boko Haram sects during Jonathan administration. To sum Nigeria’s foreign policy thrust under the current President Buhari administration, therefore, Abagen and Tyona (2018b:46) writes:

It is worthy to note that President Buhari democratic rule has successfully brought into being domestic security in Nigeria. He has tackled to a splendid level the Boko Haram insurgency, fighting the corruption malady and has collaborated with other nations to recover and retrieve Nigeria’s stolen funds stocked abroad. There is now more military training or exchange and sales of arms and equipment to Nigeria.

In addition, to further promote Nigeria’s foreign policy objective of support for African peace, unity and progress, President Muhammadu Buhari alongside with other African Union (AU) leaders on April 15, 2019 gave the Sudanese newly formed Transitional Military Council (TMC) fifteen (15) days to handover to a civilian government or face sanctions. But, after a serious plea from the TMC for more time, the AU reconsidered its earlier decision, and, on April 23, 2019, it then gave the TMC in Sudan exactly three (3) months to handover to a democratically elected government. It could be recalled that recently, the Sudanese Military took over power from the democratically elected government of President Omar al-Bashir in a palace coup in early April, 2019. This act by the Sudanese Military is, therefore contrary to the AU Agreement.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Nigeria’s national interest is a very important aspect of its foreign policy thrust. It entails strengthening of her military capabilities, economic development, socio-political development among others, so as to stand fame and glorious in the international arena. Nigeria was seen as the giant of Africa, especially with the oil boom in the late 1970s, she extended financial and technical support to many African countries. The Nigerian government established the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) in the early 1990s and was its chief financier. ECOMOG was used to bring peace and stability in some conflicting West African States. These costs
the Nigerian State billions of dollars. These huge sums of money could have been used for Nigeria’s internal development. Nigeria has derived little benefits in terms of her foreign policy engagements compared to her inputs. This does not tell well for a developing nation like hers. Therefore, the paper recommends that the Nigerian foreign policy should be more focusin developing her domestic setting, so as to meet up with the global changing times, while she still meaningfully contribute its quarter in the international arena.

References


