

# National Interest and Nigeria's Foreign Policy: An Evaluation of Goodluck Jonathan's Administration, 2011-2015

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**Abstract** - Foreign policy is a projection of a nation's national interest and domestic demands. Premised on the fact that the world has become a global village and that no nation can survive in isolation, Nigeria as a country has and must continue to interact with other countries of the world. Consequently, Nigeria as a sovereign nation must ascertain the goal(s) it desires to achieve in the course of its interaction with other nations of the world. This desire(s) must revolve around its domestic demands also known as national interest which include national security and the welfare of its citizens. The study was therefore tasked with a critical appraisal of Nigeria's Foreign Policy under President Goodluck Jonathan's administration (2011-2015) in line with the nation's national interest. The study examined the link between Nigeria's foreign policy and her national interest under Goodluck Jonathan's administration; to find out if Nigeria's foreign policy engendered national development in Nigeria under his administration; and finally, to ascertain if Nigeria's domestic politics influenced Nigeria's foreign policy within the period under review. The study made use of documentary method of data collection while relying on secondary sources of data collection. The study was guided by the systems theory as a framework of analysis. In the light of the research findings, the researcher recommended among others: Nigeria should reposition its Afrocentric foreign policy from the standpoint of prestige and status to reflect its national interest. In other words, they should continue to invest in African countries but in a way that will guarantee the return of investment; economically and otherwise.

**Keywords:** National Interest, Foreign Policy, Diplomacy, Goodluck Jonathan's Administration

## I. INTRODUCTION

Nigeria as a sovereign state has continued to interact with other nations of the world since her independence in 1960. This interaction is guided by her foreign policy objectives as succinctly outlined in the past and present constitutions of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. To effectively pursue these objectives, the ministry of external affairs was created with Jaja Nwachukwu as the first substantive minister of this institution, thanks to the former prime minister Alhaji Tafawa Belewa who also served in that capacity until he relinquished the mantle to Jaja Nwachukwu in 1961. Upon the attainment of Independence in 1960, Nigeria was faced with the current realities that plagued the international system most especially the African continent and

therefore must take its stand in the way of its foreign policies. As a matter of fact, Nigeria took the stand of not aligning with any of the power blocks, decolonization of the African continent and eradication of racial discrimination which informed its decision to champion the fight against Apartheid in South Africa, committed to peace and security in Africa and the world at large as evident in its numerous peacekeeping operations, especially in the African continent. Against this backdrop, Nigeria's foreign policy from Tafawa Belewa's administration till date has been underscored as Afrocentrism. The paper therefore seeks to ascertain if Nigeria's foreign policy under Goodluck Jonathan's administration was a reflection of Nigeria's national interest.

## II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The goal of every nation in its interaction with other states is to satisfy its domestic demands or national interest. In other words, the objective of a nation's foreign policy is a derivation of its national interest on which it is anchored (Ude-Umanda 2011). For this reason, states enter into diplomatic ties in a bid to secure the cooperation and support of other states and international organizations across its borders. However, since Nigeria's independence in 1960 till date Nigeria has carried out diplomatic missions abroad, and as such these missions are guided by the visible contours of Nigerian foreign policy objectives as stated in section 19, chapter 2 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amend). The first objective of Nigerian foreign policy is captured as "promotion and protection of national interest". Although these foreign policy objectives are enshrined in the constitution, each administration has its peculiar approach to actualizing these objectives as contained in the constitution. There is a need to understand Nigeria's foreign policy under Goodluck Jonathan; determinants, successes and failures. The research will also seek to find out the extent to which the foreign policy under Goodluck Jonathan's administration reflects Nigeria's national interest as a major objective of Nigeria's foreign policy.

## III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objective of the study is:

To establish if there was an effective link between Nigeria's foreign policy and its national interest under the Goodluck Jonathan's administration.

To determine whether Nigeria's foreign policy engendered national development under Goodluck Jonathan's administration.

#### IV. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

##### *IV.1 The Concept of National Interest*

National interest as a concept connotes the aggregate needs or interest of a state which also include the pressing needs of individuals and groups within its domain. These interests or needs formed the basis for the formulation of foreign policy objectives which the state pursues in their interaction with other states in the international system. In the words of Padelford and Lincoln (1976), national interest are centered on core values of the society, which include the welfare of the nation, security of its political belief, national way of life, territorial integrity and self preservation. Similarly, Imoukhuede in Ude-Umanta (2011), opines that national interest is the sum total of the goals of sovereign state, it is the primary motivation for foreign policy formulation and implementation as a guide for actors and policy makers. Thus, national interest is seen as a meeting point between local demands and international politics as state actions are generally seen by the realists to be motivated by their selfish interest. As acknowledged by Garingalao (2006), realists are also concerned the calculation of forces and the state as a self-interested, rational actor in pursuit of security. He went further to state that nations strive to maximize national power to achieve and preserve their national interest. To this extent, Brooking Institute (1953) stated that national interest above all other things is the general and continuing ends for which a nation acts. National Interest therefore, refers to those things that states could do or seek to do, to protect or achieve in their interactions with other States. In affirmation to this, Adeniron (1983) noted that national interest have often been regarded as the objectives towards which foreign policy is executed. According to him, it is the main determinant of what nations do especially through their leaders.

Nevertheless, it is important to separate the personal interest of the leader from national interest as noted in Ude-Umanta (2011). This is owing to the fact that the state is permanent and the individual or political party in government is temporal and as such their interests should not be mixed together with that of the state when the interest of the later is in contrast with the former. e those in power try to privatize and personalize the state, thus using its apparatus for personal ends. As Ude-Umanta rightly pointed out, there have been cases of leaders who have been accused of compromising the interest of the state in an attempt to protect their personal interests or that of the government, which they led or served.

##### *IV.2 The Concept of Foreign Policy*

Foreign policy literally refers to a guideline to action or a principle that guides states in their interaction with one another. Conceptually, foreign policy is viewed as an instrument for the conduct or management of interactions between states. Foreign policy is therefore a guideline to action or set of principles a state formulates to define and thus guide a state in its relations with other countries, groups of countries, or international organizations. According to Holsti (1962), foreign policy refers to the conscious behavior of a state towards the external environment. Modelski (1962) however maintains that foreign policy is the system of activities evolved by communities for changing the behaviour of other states and for adjusting their own activities to the international environment.

According to Wittkopt, et al (2003) as cited in Okolie (2009), foreign policy embraces the goals that nation's officials seek to attain abroad, the values that give rise to those objectives and the means or instruments used to pursue them. Foreign policy deals with the relations between sovereign actors in the international system. From the forgoing, Foreign policy therefore guides the motives or aspirations of a nation amidst its interaction with other actors at the international arena. According to Adeniron (1983), foreign policy consists of three (3) basic elements: The overall orientations and policy intention of a particular country towards another; the objective that a country seeks to achieve in its interactions with other countries of the world; the means of achieving those chosen objectives.

Foreign policy is thus a continuation of domestic politics which translates to the national interest of a state to be pursued at the international system. The accomplishment of national interest or domestic demands which primarily centers on national survival or security of the state and economic welfare of its citizens largely depends on the state's foreign policy. Ude-Umanta (2011) acknowledged that both domestic and foreign policies of a country are interrelated, or perhaps more accurately stated, are more inter-penetrated. This gives credence to Northledge's conception of Foreign policy as country's response to the world outside or beyond its own frontiers, boundaries, responses which are products of external environment (Northledge, 1968). However, this response may be friendly or aggressive as Ude-Umanta continued, it may be causal or intense, simple or complex, but it is always there. It comprises many elements – Diplomatic, Military, Trade, Economics, Social, Cultural, Educational, Sporting etc. and it varies in form and focus according to the circumstance.

##### *IV.3 Theoretical Framework*

Theoretical framework is a device or scheme for adopting or applying the assumptions, postulations and principles of a theory in the description and analysis of a research problem which involves linking the problem or phenomena under investigation to the assumptions, postulations and principles

of a theory (Obasi, 1999). Theoretical framework is therefore to a research what rhythm is to music (Chukwuemeka, 2000). It's a guide to systematic investigation. In other words, It describes, analyzes, interprets and predicts an event or phenomena within a given circumstance.

However, this study is anchored on system theory as a framework for discussing and analyzing Nigeria's foreign policy in connection with its national interest under Goodluck Jonathan's administration. A system is an abstract construct to represent what goes on in the real world for purposes of analysis. It is a pattern of stable relationship among the parts, which make it up.

Systems theorists assume that political phenomena can best be analyzed by viewing them as part of systematic whole. Nigeria can be seen as part of the global system with defined objectives and seeks survival and welfare of its citizens. For the Nigerian state to survive or attain its goals, it must interact with other parts which translate to other states and entities beyond its borders in mutual interdependence even as it aims to achieve its national interest. The theory thereby presents the world as a system which is evidenced in the present globalization where an event in any part of the system (world) is felt by the other parts and in turn affects the whole system. This interaction or relationship could be symbiotic and mutual or parasitic, but whichever side, its impact is felt by the system. For instance is the issue of terrorism or the migration issue going on currently, one may ask why people prefer to die in the Mediterranean Sea in an attempt to migrate to another country with better standard of living. The quest to escape poverty may not be far from the answer as proposed by dependency theorists. (Ake, 1981).

## V. DATA ANALYSIS

### V.1 *Goodluck Jonathan's Rise to Power*

Goodluck Jonathan was born three (3) years prior to Nigeria's independence in Bayelsa state, Nigeria. Prior to 2007 before he became the vice president of Nigeria, the name Goodluck Jonathan was a strange one at the national level, hence his emergence as the president of the self acclaimed giant of Africa was a surprise to everyone both locally and internationally. As his name connotes, he happened to be one of the luckiest politicians in the history of Nigeria. He started his career as a deputy governor to Alamienseigha in 1999. Amidst their second tenure in 2005, he succeeded his boss who was impeached to become the governor of Bayelsa state following corruption allegations. In 2007, he became the vice president of Nigeria under Yaradua, thanks to Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, the outgoing president as at then. Consequent upon the ill health of Yaradua and his eventual death on May 26<sup>th</sup> 2010, Goodluck Jonathan was sworn in as the president of Nigeria.

### V.2 *Strategies and Achievements of Goodluck Jonathan*

Following his assumption of office, he was faced with the full responsibility of overseeing the affairs of the country both

domestically and abroad through its foreign policies. While he tried to address the domestic issues he also sought for foreign cooperation and support to do this successfully. Like his predecessor Obasanjo, he also embarked on diplomatic shuttle abroad in an attempt to renew Nigeria's relationship with other countries of the world. His first major move was a visit to the United States of America aimed at delisting Nigeria from U.S terrorist watch list on an account of the unsuccessful Christmas day bombing by a Nigerian teenager in 2009.

Considering the welfare of the Nigerian citizens, Goodluck Jonathan adopted an economic policy called vision 20:20. The programme according to Blessing (2015) was an attempt at a holistic transformation of the Nigerian state. In other words, it was a comprehensive approach to Nigeria's economic welfare. Its major goal was to make Nigeria one of the twentieth largest economies in the world by the end of 20:20. His efforts paid off when Nigeria recorded a growth rate of 7% in 2014 with a GDP of \$510 making it the number one in Africa

After Goodluck was re-elected in 2011, he quickly directed that Nigeria's foreign policy be reviewed to reflect current realities which basically were issues of domestic demands. His administration thus drifted from the age-long Afrocentricism to economic diplomacy, this explains why he adopted Foreign Direct Investment as one of his key strategies. With this, he was able to attract a lot of investors into the country as its immediate impact was the establishment and resuscitation of industries in Nigeria, notably the automobile industry – Nissan, Peugeot, Hyundai etc.

Following the insecurity in North East Nigeria which threatened the existence of the Nigerian state, Jonathan's administration took some bold steps in making sure that insurgency is wiped out from the country. On different occasions he met with world leaders in this regard, and as a result, countries such as France, UK, Israel, China and the US pledged to assist Nigeria in making sure that insurgency is defeated in the country.

Under his administration, Nigeria considered Muamma Gadaffi a threat to Nigeria's unity following his suggestion that the country be divided along ethnic lines. To fight back, Nigeria moved to recognize Libya's National Transitional Council which was sought to overthrow Gadaffi.

Under his administration Nigeria's presence in the international community was obvious as Nigerians were effectively represented in some key international institutions. Nigerians were members of United Nation's Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), member of the United Nations Committee on the elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), member of the six judges of the International Criminal Court (ICC), member of the Executive Council of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) etc.

His administration maintained a good citizen diplomacy as it was interacted with Nigerians all over the world. His administration saw to the establishment of Nigerians in Diaspora Organization (NIDO) virtually in every country outside Nigeria. In pursuance of his citizens diplomacy his government reacted swiftly to the disrespectful deportation of 125 Nigerians in 2012 by expelling 56 South Africans from Nigeria. Bearing the interest of Nigerians in mind he ensured that Nigerians that were stranded in conflict infested areas were quickly evacuated, notably the airlifting of Nigerians from Libya and Egypt in 2011 and 2012 respectively.

Goodluck Jonathan stuck to Nigeria's national interest as against that of the Western countries when he dammed the pressure and threat of slashing of aid and went ahead to sign same sex prohibition into law in 2014.

## VI. CONCLUSION

As has been established so far in this discourse, Nigeria's foreign policy within Goodluck Jonathan's regime was significantly linked to Nigeria's national interest. In pursuance of her foreign policy objectives, Nigeria has been persistently committed to the objectives of the defense and protection of the political independence, territorial integrity and stability of not just its territory but also those of its immediate neighbors in the West African sub-region. In a bid to address the economic and poverty challenges in the country, President Goodluck Jonathan's administration adopted a policy that is intricately tied to Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), thus making Nigeria investment friendly as he also enhanced Nigeria's economic ties with other countries of the world. This foreign policy is termed economic diplomacy, and is believed to be an extension of Nigeria's domestic policy to alleviate poverty, create jobs and diversify the economy.

Among other things, the relationship between Nigeria and US continued to improve under Jonathan. This is most exemplified in the signing of the first US–Nigeria Bi-national Commission, in April 2010. This Alao (2011) noted, aimed to establish a mechanism for sustained, bilateral, high-level dialogue to promote and increase diplomatic, economic and security co-operation between the two countries.

Generally, Goodluck Jonathan's foreign policy was a reflection of Nigeria's national interest as it was directed to solve the domestic problems at that particular period.

## VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

Nigeria should reposition its Afrocentric foreign policy from the standpoint of prestige and status to reflect its national interest. In other words, they should continue to invest in African countries but in a way that will guarantee the return of investment; economically and otherwise.

A concrete integration of career diplomats and professionals in the field of international relations and diplomacy is highly recommended in the formulation and execution of Nigeria's

foreign policy. This is because they are more experienced and thus will be more proactive and tactical in their dealings.

Adequate funding of Nigeria's foreign missions abroad. Every foreign policy sector requires commensurate funds to be able to execute its policies. Failure to do this might lead to making compromise or concessions, thereby altering the original plan/objective.

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