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**MINISTRIES OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS IN PURSUIT OF NATIONAL INTEREST: A DIPLOMAT'S
CONTEMPLATION**

**ASIMIEA, MONIMA OPIRIBA
Department of History and Diplomatic Studies
Ignatius Ajuru University of Education
Port Harcourt**

And

**IKUNGA, S.A., PhD.
Department of History and Diplomatic Studies
Ignatius Ajuru University of Education
Port Harcourt**

Abstract

National Interest is among the first sets of interest that relates to the very idea and concept of a nation. It comes with the feeling of nationhood; the idea of belonging to a particular community and all its emotive connotations, however, these interests must be pursued in a continuous manner. It follows that policies must be directed towards the pursuit of predetermined goals in the international stage. However, foreign policies are not made in a vacuum. This is why a well-positioned Ministry of Foreign Affairs is imperative in formulating and implementing foreign policies in a continuous manner that will lead to the actualization of National Interest. Our present paper is based on the framework that Ministries of Foreign Affairs are potent forces in the attainment of National Interest therefore any postulation in the area of the pursuit of National Interest without digitalization and well positioned Ministry of Foreign Affairs will amount to exercise in futility because of the interconnectedness of both concepts.

Introduction

The twin concepts of Nationalism and Sovereignty were the direct consequence of the Peace Treaty of Westphalia, at the end of the Thirty Year War in 1648. The immediate outcome of this was the emergence of state entities. Thus, was the beginning of the nation-states system, which are today's subdivisions of the international community (Akadiri, 203, Rourke 2003, Orgugbani 2006).

President Yeltsin proclaimed that "the main goal of our foreign policy is the consistent promotion of Russia's national interest" (Rourke 2000). So also was the case when President Trump yelled "America First". Indeed, it is difficult to imagine a national leader announcing that he/she has taken an important decision that is contrary to the national interest, but in the world's interest. Even if such an aberration occurs, it is improbable that such a leader would remain in office much longer. It follows that the foreign policy thrust of governments all over the world is geared towards 'National Interest', and governments are at liberty to do anything,

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including inciting wars, or civil unrest and tacitly violate rules of international laws, provided these national interests are served. But, there appears to be the alternative scheme of global governance; and anyone (state) who is skeptical about international commitment today, is apt to be dismissed as an isolationist crank. The traditional concept of sovereignty has been systematically eroded because of this global governance. However, it would appear that, the more we drift towards central world government, the more dominant players use such forums to seek their national interest.

The international system is made up of subgroups. It is also true that the concept - National Interest inherently includes the assumption that if a collective world interest can be determined, then that interest supersedes the interests of subgroups, and individual actors in the international system. It is at this point that, we can be seen to be inching towards world peace, equity and justice in a world where Ministries of Foreign Affairs (MFAs) are increasingly digitalized to be repositioned to drive self-interests of nations. States have a variety of interests; many are common to all, and some are unique to each. Many core values and goals can be achieved primarily through domestic politics. But, in an era when societies are closely knitted and interdependence is taking on a new trend, many national interests – the reason d'être can only be achieved, or defended by manipulating, sustaining or altering condition in other countries. Furthermore, these ideas and actions geared towards influencing happenings in the international system must be carried out in a continuous manner. Here lies the significance of Ministries of Foreign Affairs of nations.

The paper sets out to x-ray the significance of Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the pursuit of National Interest, adopting mainly the desktop research methods. We begin by looking at what National Interest portends at the various levels and the need to pursue same in a continuous manner. In doing this, we traced the origin of Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the function of same in enhancing the actualization of national interest among others.

Nature and Concept of National Interest

National interest is among the first sets of interest that relates to the very idea and concept of a nation. It comes with the feeling of nationhood. The idea of belonging to a particular community and its entire emotive connotation generate peculiar interest to be pursued in the international space. It will be safe therefore, to describe national interest as the best of the best, and the most beneficial value to a nation, which gives it an edge per time. (Oche, 2011). Going by the above description, it can be deduced that national interest are a nation's most vital needs and goals.

Furthermore, whereas some elements of national interest coincide with that of other states when they co-occur in the area of security, economic, and sometimes ideological interest among others. National interests are capable of mutating overtime. Finally, it may be added that, whereas subgroups of a nation: states, province, districts – contribute in determining in one way or the other a nation's interest; the formulation and pursuit of same is ultimately the responsibility of the leadership of every nation. This is because a nation's foreign policy making and implementation fall squarely on the leader and a nation's interest determine its foreign policy.

Some earlier scholars have defined 'National Interest' from their standpoints. Take for instance, Morgenthau (1978) takes the position that National Interest is a survival strategy. To

him, it is the protection of physical, political and cultural identity against encroachment by other nations. The Brookings Institution sees national interest as 'what a nation feels to be necessary to its security and well-being. National interest reflects the general and continuing ends for which a nation acts. On his part Dyke (1982) sees national interest as that which states seek to protect or achieve in relation to each other. Simply put it is the desire on the part of sovereign states. Lerche and Abdul (1994) perceive National Interest to mean the general, long term and continuing purpose which the state, the nation and the government all see themselves as serving. However, in all the definitions, an element of importance that permeates all would appear to be that 'National Interest' is the focus, actions, and inactions of nations directed towards the international community to feed the ego of individual nation. We shall therefore, attempt to describe National Interest as the whole gamut of objectives that drive governments' actions and inactions in the international arena that bothers on, among other things, Self-perseveration which is the primary duty of being, military security and national wellbeing..

Some criteria for and classification of National Interest

Whereas certain criteria guide statesmen in determining National Interest, for instance, moral and legal criteria, ideological criteria, partisan criteria, foreign dependency criteria, racial criteria, class-status criteria, pragmatic criteria and bureaucratic criteria (suffice it to say that each criteria is suited to the prevailing circumstance in the milieu).Robinson (1997) has observed that national interest can be classified following several considerations, some of which may include: permanent interest, primary interest, variable interests, secondary interests, specific interests and general interests. However, to Frankel (2004) such classification should simply be described under the inspirational, operational, explanatory and polemical interests. Yet, the American Commission on National Interest has adopted the Vital Interest, Extremely Important Interests, Important Interest and the Less Important or Secondary Interests model of classification.

However, whatever our preference, the bottom line is that National interests and the intensity of attentions paid to it per time vary from nation to nation based on the time span for attaining same. In this direction, we are faced with constant interests that are perpetual and most stable in nature, or variable interest which can further be divided into long-term, middle-term and short term interests. Another criterion is based on the importance attached to each. Under this, national interests can be divided into vital interests that may include life and security of citizens, long-term stability of the political, economic and territorial integrity.

Extremely Important Interests

This may include the maintenance of national prestige; the ability to decide as a nation our model of development, the guarantee of important economic interest and of course, a favorable international strategic balance.

Just important interests

This may include interest pursued when obvious threats exist via developments in the foreign scene.

Less Important Interest

Which include developments that do not strictly affect strategic economic interest or national security?

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National interests can be further sub-divided based on the scope of interest: universal, partial or individual interests. Another classification of national interests under which several others are subsumed is Common Versus Conflicting interest. This usually comes under the nature of the interest. Points of consideration include; whether it is general or specific interest owing to its functions, whether the country in question operates capitalist or socialize politico-economic system, unified or supplemental interests; this relates to the relationships of one-interest to another. Essentially, national interests are classified scientifically or based on reasonability; judging from the content and nature of the issue at hand. The classification of national interests however, largely depends on the ruling trend of affairs in international relations.

Some approaches to promoting and securing National Interests

In our civilization so far, it would appear that, there are commonly adopted strategies for promoting and securing national interests. Some are briefly discussed below:

- i. Diplomatic negotiations which is by far the dominant approach by civilized nations. Here, foreign policies are geared towards achieving some measured national interests. It is the major tool in the pursuit of national interests. This however, involves several processes.
- ii. Coercive measures – which include all measures taken to arm-twist other nations to submission (gun boat or hard diplomacy).
- iii. Alliances and Treaties – These entail the coming into consensus of like-minds, and based on understanding for the common good of parties thereto.
- iv. Propaganda- which may include all manner of speeches and gesticulation in media by leaders to launder the images of their country before the outside world. It includes some times cases of blatant lies to send some messages directed to a particular audience; or targeted countries.
- v. Finally, economic means where wealthy nations use economic leverages or sanctions to tacitly coerce other nations into submission to their national interest.

The main vehicle for the actualization of National Interest is the foreign Policy of Nation-States. It is also a settled fact that, one of the germane functions of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs (MFAs) is the formulation and implementation of foreign policies. It is therefore, safe to suggest that MFAs is at the heart of the actualization and sustenance of national interest of a state. The staff and personnel of the ministry are at the centre of all activities aimed at driving the national interests; collecting, analyzing, observing and reporting of information that aid policy-making and implementation (Holsti, 1998, Orugbani, 2004, Goldstein and Penthouse, 2007). Furthermore, like every other ministries, the MFAs as a ministry is specifically saddled with mentoring development in the foreign scene, advises the president or head of State through the permanent secretary of the ministry appropriately on issues of utmost importance to the well-being and benefit of the nation, based on which policies are tailored, which must necessary lead to the actualization of some overall national interests.

We shall now turn to these Ministries of Foreign Affairs, how did they come about? Why are they necessary? What and how do they function? How are they useful in the foreign policy making process? These are some of the questions we shall try to address in the next section.

Origin of Ministry of Foreign Affairs

As an arm of the executive, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFAs) has evolved over centuries. Elements of today's Foreign Affairs Ministry could be traced back to the last historical states system, which essentially developed and functioned throughout the European continent in the years between the Treaty of Westphalia that terminated the thirty years war (1618-1648) and the end of the Napoleonic war. This period marked essentially the end of the 'old system' and ushered in massive changes (Akadiri 2003, 1995, Orugbani, 2006). The free cities, church properties, private holdings and local warlords of the medieval Europe gave way to a centralized political units conceived strictly as sovereign entities and in territorial terms. The isolationist tendencies of old China and India came under attack. Politics of the era were dynastic, but this dynastic concerns, extended to foreign policy as well.

By contemporary standards, the density and the different forms of interaction between the Princes of Christendom were limited. Communication was slow, and unreliable. The Europeans did, however develop one of the enduring institutions of international Relations; a professional diplomatic corps stationed primarily abroad; as opposed to the old practice whereby diplomats were dispatched as the need arose or on demand, or even periodically.

These agents were sent for the traditional purposes of negotiation, reporting and intelligent works. They report regularly to their home courts. It was in this period that the early predecessors of bureaucratized Foreign Ministries began to emerge (Holsti 1995. Orugbani 2004).

Modern Foreign Ministry

The first modern Foreign Ministry was established in France by Cardinal Richelieu, in about the seventeenth century (Akadiri 2003). Richelieu saw diplomacy as a continuous process of negotiation; arguing that a diplomat should have one master and one policy. He created the Ministry of External Affairs to centralize policy and to ensure control of envoy as he pursued the *raison d'être* (national interest) of the state. Moving away from the medieval practice, Richelieu rejected the view that policy should be based on dynastic, or sentimental whims of kings or rulers' wishes; holding instead that, the state transcended crown and land, prince and people and had interests and needs which must be separated from all as independent phenomena. The art of governance to him lies in recognizing these interests of the state and acting according to them in a continuous manner; regardless of the ethical or religious considerations. In this, Richelieu -enunciated principles that leaders world over now accept as axioms of state diplomatic services.

Still dwelling on France as a precursor to modern Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Ministers belonged to the council of state, and directed a small ministry and a sizeable diplomatic corps under King Louis XIV; who personally directed French Foreign Policy at the time. However, to counter the cost of King Louis XIV's several wars, the French Foreign Minister also stressed commerce and commercial diplomacy.

The French system was initiated in the 18th century as other major states established foreign ministries. As the European diplomatic norms spread to China and other areas in the late 18th and 19th centuries, so were the establishments of Foreign Ministries. The Russian Revolution of 1917, which produced a great power regime, rejected the views of the western world and changed the face of Ministry of Foreign Affairs; and the content of what the Ministry stood for. The communist government of the new Soviet Union, among other things,

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discredited the cozy dealings between rulers that had often taken place without regards to the interest or views of those they ruled. Therefore, the peoples Commisserate of Foreign Affairs (known by its Russian acronym, the Narkomindel) organized a bureau for international revolutionary propaganda and a press bureau; giving a different face to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This ministry was later to be an instrument to appeal openly to urban workers of other capitalist states to exert pressure on their government through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The communist international (also referred to as "The Third International) was established as a nominally independent entity that meddled in the politics of capitalist countries in ways no embassy could do (Holsti 1995).

Following the end of WWI and the replacement of the Leagues of Nations by the United Nations Organization which came in its wake with greater agitation for independence, more states especially in Africa gained independence. The result was that, the 51 member organization at inception in 1946 almost quadrupled in 1960.

These small new states, which achieved independence suddenly, were unable to conduct much diplomacy at first. Many of them accredited ambassadors only to their former colonial powers, a key neighboring state, and the UN for financial reasons, envoys often were sent only to the European Community (EC), the Common Wealth Secretariat, the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), or major powers that might extend military and financial assistance to them. Over time, the larger of the newly independent states built sizeable Foreign Affairs Ministries modeled after that of their former colonial masters or those of the similarly organized ministries of Brazil and India, which were not complicit in colonialism.

The Brazilian Foreign Ministry and Diplomatic Service are organized and staffed along European lines; they have long had reputations as the most professional of such organization in Latin America. The Indian Foreign Affairs Ministry, model on the highly respected Indian administrative service and initially staffed from its ranks, quickly emerged as a practitioner of competent diplomacy by a nonaligned, non-western potential great power (|Gurtov 2001). The microstates mounted a few tiny missions and experimented with joint representation and shared facilities, multiple accreditation of one envoy to several capitals, and meeting with foreign envoys in their own capitals.

A very few normally independent states had no Foreign Ministry and relied on regional powers to represent them. By 1960 the exponential growth in the number of states complicated diplomacy by requiring countries – specially the major powers- to staff many different diplomatic missions at once. As states, transnational, and quasi-diplomatic entitles proliferated so did the functions of foreign ministries. Although, leaders met often, there was more, not less for diplomats to do. Thus, the size of the missions of major powers increased enormously to the point where some US diplomatic missions were three times larger than the foreign ministry of the state to which they were accredited (Rourke 2003).

New topics of diplomacy also bounded, including economic and military aid, commodity-price stabilization, food, sales, aviation, and allocations of radio frequencies among others. Career diplomats tended to be generalists drawn from foreign ministries and specialists increasingly came from other agencies as attaches or counselors. Disarmament negotiations, for example required specialized knowledge beyond the scope of military attaches. Environmental abuse gave rise to a host of topics, such as the law of the sea, global warming,

and means of preventing or abating pollution. The complexity of foreign ministries increased accordingly. By the 1960s, for example, US missions had instituted country teams linking the ambassador and the heads of all attached missions, which met at least once each week to unify policy and reporting efforts and prevent different elements under the ambassador from working at cross-purposes under the Secretary of State (Cussel, 2003).

Not only were there new tasks for Ministry of Foreign Affairs to perform, but there was also a new emphasis on old tasks. The widening Cold War entailed more espionage, of which ambassadors were officially ignorant but which was conducted by attaches and chauffeurs alike; thus, large embassies appeared in small but strategic countries. Propaganda, the export of officially sanctioned information and so called “cultural diplomacy” – as typified by the international tours of Russian dance companies and cultural programs of the Alliance Francaise, the British Council, and various American libraries - expanded as well, creating ever widening burden on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Contemporary Ministry of Foreign Affairs

At the eve of the 21st century, three events happened in quick succession to set the agenda for international politics in the new millennium; the unification of Germany, the Persian Gulf War and the Collapse of the Soviet Union. These events combined to introduce sweeping changes in Diplomatic service. As White (2005) puts it “Diplomacy became more global, complicated and fragmentary”. One area of noticeable changes is perhaps the huge involvement of many new non-state actors. The end of the Cold War witnessed greater involvement of International Organizations, Transnational Cooperation (TNCs) and other international players.

The role of state actors changed in response to the rapidly changing international environment. The consequence of the above is that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFAs) must also change to take on more responsibility in statecraft and to be repositioned for the new entrants. It is also true that, one germane effect of these changes is that Diplomatic Service in the 21st century has taken on new roles in addition to the traditional roles of observing and reporting, communicating and negotiating among others. Today’s ministry of Foreign Affairs must contend with energy issues, environment, fiancé, economics, human rights, health issues, information and communication technology, organized crime, security issues and terrorism. In fact, as Akadiri (2003) puts it “Ministry of foreign Affairs is responding as it has in the past, to changes in character of both state and society”.

Considering the breath-taking development of events as a result of globalization, the ministry must be repositioned to take up the array of new issues; providing for personnel and adequate training to handle environmental, population, terrorism,, transnational crime, drugs in a sustainable manner.

More than the traditional roles of the Foreign Ministry, they should be prepared for wider responsibility to meet up with the ever increasing demands of other fields of human endeavor in the contemporary society or they will not only became sluggish but ineffective and obsolete.

Functions of Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Some of the primary functions of Foreign Affairs Ministry are gathering of information through various organs and agencies of the state, assist in providing and analyzing information

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for appropriate foreign policy formulation, and policy implementation among several others. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs collates requisite information on issues of importance, analyze same and forward to the President through the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry.

Based on information emanating from the foreign ministry, informed decisions are made according to the core value of the State, which forms the foreign policy, thereby serving the national interest.

Further, having arrived at a foreign policy, (which is essentially the State's core value) on an issue, the implementation process falls squarely on the purview of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFAs).

An instance is the much published xenophobic attack on Nigerians in South Africa. It is the responsibility of the Foreign Affairs Ministry to collate as much information as possible to aid government policy on the issue, to ensure that national interest is served.

In the line of duty, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs takes appropriate steps to implement the policy by coordinating other relevant government ministries and departments. In recent times, in response to wider responsibility, the foreign Affairs Ministries are also involved in covert and overt activities aimed at gathering information and fostering the achievement of national interest.

Conclusion

The immediate objective of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is to centralize policies and actions of the state in dealing with other governments, and to ensure control of agents of the state who by virtue of their engagement represent the state in international forums. In accomplishing this, information gathering and analyzing for foreign policy formulation and implementation is key. However, in recent times, globalization has introduced other elements which must be addressed in its strides.

We also noted that as a result of increased interdependence in the world stage, the role of Foreign Affairs Ministry would appear to be widening. However, the driving force of the Foreign Affairs Ministry is the *raison d'être* (National Interest) of the state. Further, an increase in the activities of the diplomat presupposes an increase in the responsibilities of the Foreign Ministry also. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs therefore, is the central processing unit of the state's foreign policy and actions aimed at achieving national interest in the international system.

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