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National Interest and Foreign Policy: Nigeria's Recognition of Libya's National Transitional Ruling Council

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Abstract

This paper considers Nigeria's recognition of Libya's National Transitional Council (NTC) through the perspective of the realist paradigm. Realism makes a broad assumption that nation-states are motivated by national interests sometimes camouflaged as moral concerns. Several factors act together to influence Nigeria's foreign policy positions. Nigeria's energy-producing role in the global economy influences her foreign policy position. The country's membership and commitment to several international organizations and its role at the regional level influence her foreign policy positions. With a population of about 150 million, it is regarded as a strategic nation of interest at the global level. Our guide is that although what informed Nigeria's response may not likely be exactly what it said informed the action, it would be fatally wrong to ignore its claims and self-projections. Using the methodological tool of content analysis, this paper identifies the basis of Nigeria's backing of the NTC. Our purpose is two-fold. Firstly, the paper provides a theoretically-grounded overview of national interest and explores some of the main challenges that make it an unsettled concept. Secondly, moving from theory to practice, the paper argues that pressure from the "international community" surely significantly slanted Nigeria's action. It tries to add a historical-realist perspective to serve as contextual analysis to justify its action. It concludes by drawing some key lessons from the dynamics which characterise diplomatic relationships: in international relations; a country's internal factors play major roles in shaping its foreign policy.

Keywords: African Union, ECOWAS, Foreign Policy, International Relations, National Interest, National Transition Council, NATO, Realism.

Introduction

In solidarity with the endangered Libyan masses who were experiencing a spike in their social misery index, prosecuting a war of communal survival and self-determination, Nigeria was moved by "compassion". The need for a quick resolution of the crisis, the need to allow Libyans decide their future (Adams, 2011) and Nigeria's "genuine" concern to prevent further loss of lives (Oji, 2011) informed its recognition of Libya's National Transitional Council (NTC). The turn of events in Libya and Gaddafi's bombing of his own people, declared the Nigerian state, created a picture of another Rwanda in the making; therefore, Nigeria was not prepared to allow genocide on the continent (Punch, 2011). What

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could be reconstructed from Nigeria's 'show of solidarity' above are: That it was wrong for Libyans to continue to be gripped by fear in their own country; that Gaddafi's regime had become either irrational or confused or was articulating an unintelligent mantra of Western imperialism as a cover to commit genocide; that Nigeria was understandably scandalised at the psychological siege and mental torture produced by the growing brutality perpetrated in Gaddafi's name. If we failed to act, we become complicit to such acts and we are no better than any other autocracy where the authority charged to serve and protect its people act in a way that is antithetical to the principle of democracy, Nigeria appeared to have said.

Compassion could be used to refer to a variety of contexts. For the avoidance of doubt, we would, in the context of this paper, state that if a single word was required to describe this "extraordinary courage" on the part of Nigeria to avert genocide in Libya, a word that gives force to, and clarifies, and connects the various elements of its concerns and actions, that word would be compassion. But Nigeria's empathy towards the marginal Libyans and its determination to circumvent another Rwanda constitutes a radical form of criticism. It announced that further loss of lives in Libya was to be averted and be taken seriously, that the abuse of human rights as well, was not to be perceived as normal Libya's internal affairs, but an aberrant and troubling condition of humanness. If Nigeria's reported empathy with the ordinary Libyans constituted legitimate grounds to justify its action, would it be proper to conclude that Nigeria's action was based purely on moral grounds? Answers to this question underscore the significance of the present exercise and will be clearer later as we progress.

Contextual Background

There is an interesting albatross of history regarding Nigeria's action. For a long time, Libyan diplomatic relations with Nigeria have been somewhat tenuous, though Gaddafi had in 1996, visited Nigeria during General Abacha's military rule. The fragile relationship sunk to a fresh low and deteriorated severely when in March 2010, Nigeria had recalled its Ambassador to Tripoli, Aliyu Mohammed Isa for "urgent consultations" due to Gaddafi's "irresponsible" and hurtful proposition. He had provoked Nigeria's ire when he proposed that Nigeria be divided into two along Muslim and Christian lines. Gaddafi's proposal that Nigeria be split into two displayed, in a flash of historical illumination, a seemingly troubled bilateral friendship between both countries. Partitioning Nigeria along the lines of India and Pakistan model in 1947, Gaddafi reckoned, would be a remarkable, fundamental solution that could remedy the country's unrealized goal of economic and political development, save the lives of millions of people, stop the bloodshed and burning of places of worship (BBC, 2010a). Nigeria found Gaddafi's suggestion unacceptable and the National Assembly requested the government to liaise with the UN to compel Gaddafi to stop calling for the division of Nigeria (Xinhua, 2010). The federal lawmakers also passed a motion urging the government to order an African Union (AU) investigation into whether Libya was supplying "infiltrators" to destabilize Nigeria (Reuters, 2010).

Nigeria's foreign affairs ministry described Gaddafi's suggestion as irresponsible before adding: His theatrics and grandstanding at every auspicious occasion have become too numerous to recount (BBC, 2010 b). He has, in the past, managed to upset Nigeria at the continental level. He was instrumental in the running of training camps for some Islamic militant terror groups on bomb making techniques and other terrorism-related skills which are used by militant elements in seeking to destabilize Nigeria (The Nigerian Voice, 2011). One of his gaffes outside the scope of international propriety was the positive encouragement he reportedly gave to sectarian groups during religious uprisings, terrorist attacks and even the post elections violence that engulfed the country soon after the 2011 presidential elections

(Vanguard, 2011). There is even more, in June 2006 when Gaddafi's Libya deported 11,000 Nigerians alleging that they were all involved in drug, fraud, armed robbery and prostitution. DNA evidence implicated him as one of the financiers of the savage Islamic terrorist rebels in Northern Nigeria threatening the nation with explosives and instability.

Self-importance and the delusion of omniscient power made Gaddafi appear like a shambolic character and a monstrous dynamo in the continent. His position in the continent was both paradoxical and weird. Just as he played a prominent role in the formation of AU - a body in which he wielded enormous influence because he was one of its major financiers, he was a kind hearted "brother leader" known for his unselfish backing for the struggle against the racist apartheid regime in South Africa. He supported pro-democracy causes in places like Zimbabwe; and supported a range of "revolutionary" causes as well. It is well known and documented that Gaddafi's obsessive interest to influence African affairs has left overlapping scars across the continent. Providing training, funding, logistics and arms, Gaddafi contributed to repulsions such as Charles Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), a rebel group that initiated and fought the first Liberian Civil War between 1989 and 1996 and the brutal Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in Sierra Leone.

Fighters he directly or indirectly trained, including Liberian mercenaries, instigated carnage in Ivory Coast over disputed election results between incumbent President Laurent Gbagbo and main challenger, Alassane Ouattara in 2010. By invading neighbouring Chad in the 80s, Gaddafi claimed territory for Libya after encroaching on Aouzou Strip in the South for years. The atrocious Janjaweed militia that committed genocide in Darfur were linked to Gaddafi- many were former Islamic Legion members, a mercenary army of feral underclass he created to fulfil his dream of a Pan-Arabism across North Africa. The ease with which Gaddafi was able to purchase billions of dollars' worth of arms since 1969, fuelled by Libya's massive reserves of oil explains his ability to hold on to power for four decades. From 1970 until 2009, and even with a long-term UN arms embargo in place between 1992 and 2003, Libya spent around \$30bn on weapons (Feinstein, 2011). While Gaddafi recanted, the fallout from the diplomatic row was still going on till August 23, 2011, when NTC forces, ably aided by NATO's superior air power overran Gaddafi's fortified Bab al-Azizya headquarters.

Conceptualising National Interest and Foreign Policy

We begin this section by analysing an inventory of representative ideas and bits of knowledge held by scholars. Consensus from relevant literature shows that no concept has been more contentious in International Relations (IR) than notion of national interest. Disagreement begins, for example, about whether a country's intervention or observation that another sovereign nation do things differently in times of political strife might mean the observing or intervening country is pursuing its national interest. Speculative uses of the concept have been employed to rationalize or criticise meddlesomeness by the "international community" that are antithetical to the principle of sovereignty that no nation has the right to invade or interfere in the internal affairs of another sovereign.

For Elman (1995: 211- 3), national interest could be likened to a trade-off between competing group biases. Jervis (1976: 324) made much the same point when he described it as the lowest common denominator where separate interests meet. While Elman and Jervis may disagree on approach, they made sense that it could refer to a concept in IR and literature that grapple with what benefits states in

bilateral relationships. From a realist perspective, Morgenthau (1956: 5) brilliantly offered that national interest could be defined in terms of power.

IR is an exciting and challenging field of inquiry and the new student of this interesting field of learning is often intensely animated by the concept of national interest. The excitement of the subject, however, is that IR is a field of inquiry that constantly lends itself to constant interrogation. Kegley (1993:134) animated the debate when he argued that turbulent times stimulate re-examination of orthodox theory and invigorate the search for reconstructed principles to guide thinking. The subtext of Kegley's thesis is that IR is a field of learning that require constant reappraisal, revision and /or confirmation of the myriad assumptions that are made in explaining interactions or bilateral relationships among nations in the 'anarchic international system'

In IR, the condition of anarchy is widely applied to describe the international political system where states are the units of analysis, each is fully sovereign, and no one is 'more equal than others'. Political realism, as stated by Schweller (1999:29) favour theories about the competitive state: how it can best advance its national interests in a self-help competition against other states. Thus, in the anarchic international system where there is no higher authority than the state, the state must take steps to ensure the security of its territorial boundaries (Bosley, 2008:47). This condition of anarchy makes IR more interesting and distinguishes it from other domains of politics. It also characterises it as a different field of study with unusual rules and patterns of exchange.

Weber (2001:55) amplified the need to spark intelligent perceptiveness and indicated that anarchy, which has characterized the international system, is not replaced by international community. But in the anarchical world, Weber continued, states can set aside their differences, unite for the greater good, and overcome international anarchy (2001:37). At the first glance, the objective of national interest seems well-defined, sharp and obvious: what benefits the nation as a whole in international politics and in domestic policies is in national interest. Yet, national interest lies at the very heart of the diplomatic issues and influences the articulation of a national strategy necessary to support foreign policies.

There are nearly as many versions of what constitutes national interest in the study and conduct of foreign policy as there are analysts on either side of what defines it. A significant insight that reinforces the above was provided by (Roskin, 1994:9). He argued that national interest may be difficult to define due to the warping effects of ideology, the global system, public and elite convictions, the mass media, and policy inertia. As an imprecise hypothesis, the concept of national interest is used to describe and advise foreign policy hence the considerable controversy about its real definition. A significant difference of opinion exists in all nations regarding what constitutes or what does not constitute the national interest. The difficulty with the analytical usage of the term is the absence of any agreed methodology by which the best interests of the nation can be tested (McLean, 1996:333).

The term is often used from the context of a complex assertion consequent upon those principles or standards that a nation values most- economic wellbeing, national security, power and freedom etc. These interests could be articulated in terms of political sovereignty, physical survival and economic prosperity. The list invariably is not exhaustive, and is obviously influenced by political discourse and subjective preferences. In foreign policy discourse, national interest invokes an image of the state defending its interests within the anarchic international system where dangers abound and the interests of the state are always at risk (McLean, 1996:333).

Nigeria's quick recognition of Libya's NTC dramatically draws attention to the place of national interest in the post-cold war era. After two visible historical incidents in the mid-1990s; 'the third wave of democratization in developing and transitional countries' (Huntington, 1991) and the 'collapse of the command economies' or end of the Cold War (Marquette, 2003:54), academic and policy debates about national interests in Nigeria and elsewhere took a new turn. As Ackerman (1999:117) convincingly argued, the end of the Cold War changed the balance of forces and removed any compelling need to support corrupt regimes for national security reasons. Constructing some analytical clarity to the argument, Mastanduno and Kapstein (1999) drew attention to how the end of the Cold War brought with it the emergence of new strategic dilemmas for nation states. After the Cold War, they noted, government began to calculate their national interests in the international environment and had to muster the needed resources to advance them (1999:1). Following the democratic transitions of the 1990s and the ebbing of the Cold War, democracy promotion became a key element of foreign policy and development assistance (Rakner et al: 2007:1).

It is a generally acceptable view that a nation's national interest is influenced by the core values, objectives and philosophy underlying the actions of the leaders. Although the ground norm offers a proper basis for the collective actions of leaders, the preferences and attitudes of leaders, the subjectivist and the objectivist schools of thought share divided opinions. The objectivists argue that "the best interest of a state is a matter of objective reality (Zartman, 1986). The subjectivists assert that national interest has direct diplomatic and foreign policy implications and is virtually equivalent to the 'will of the prince' or 'reason of state' in relation to the activities of states (Vincent, 1995:239). 'Will of the Prince' as used by the subjectivists relates the preferences of the leaders, their idiosyncrasies and priorities. For them, therefore, national interest is decisively connected to the leadership of a nation.

Throughout Nigeria's political history, defining national interest has varied reflecting very different approaches to foreign policy and the tensions between foreign and domestic policies in the framework of various administrations, with some deficient in coherent philosophical framework. For example, controversies trailed Nigerian-Israel relations, International Monetary Fund Loan, the Anglo-Nigerian Defence Pact, the Organisation of Islamic Countries (QIC) and the Charles Taylor asylum. Taylor's asylum became so controversial to the extent that it put the government on one side, two former foreign ministers on another, the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ) which even went to court to stop Taylor being granted the asylum and various elements of the civil society on the other. How did Nigeria get entangled with Taylor's foreign policy faux pas? To answer that question, we will need to revisit the circumstances surrounding the establishment of the state of Liberia (Amaraegbu, 2011a). The above contexts reinforce the debate that most times, it is more rather than less difficult to define national interests and to translate them into logical foreign policy intents.

In world politics, we learnt that the world is divided into discreet entities with borders between them and that each entity has a set of interests which it is the duty of decision-makers and the citizens to defend and uphold (Ringmar, 2007:193). Yet, policy and academic analysts who assume that Nigeria has a perceptible national interest whose argument should determine the country's relations with other nations have failed to clarify the recurrent failure to arrive at domestic consensus on foreign policy objectives. However, the present exercise is not and does not pretend to evaluate the controversies of both principles. Time, space constraints and the scope of this study will not permit us to do an in-depth analysis of both concepts.

Discoursing Nigeria's Action

The end of the Cold War, according to Kegley (1993:138), compelled states to engage in restoring a place for morality in foreign policy. We acknowledge Kegley's position as plausible but argue that states' co-operation with one another is driven more by political considerations than morality. While the human situation and its governing moral anxieties should not be lost into theoretical abstractions, we must reconcile with reality that in the context of global political dynamics, the one unconsidered factor defining bilateral friendships among nations is morality. Nations do not exist on the basis of moral passion or empathy. Therefore, we discourse Nigeria's action from the context of national interest and other political calculations rather than from a moral perspective.

It was Maslow (1954:80-106) who theorized the concept of the psychological need for man to pursue esteem, recognition, and love only after he has satisfied the basic human needs of food, shelter, and clothing. The Nigerian state may have proved awfully incapable of providing Maslow's "basic needs" but it is important, we think, to note that it is the responsibility of the government to first and foremost to preserve the state. Power contexts characterise the international political arena, and governments and nations that aspire for power and influence go to great lengths to realise these ambitions.

According to Waltz (1979), a general theory of international politics is necessarily based on the great powers. Given Nigeria's status as a developing nation therefore, critics are wont to argue that it may be an unfitting example for the application of mainstream IR theory. Like other developing nations, Nigeria is internally divided. Sectarian and regional conflicts are constant. States like Borno, Kano, Niger, Plateau and Yobe have experienced repeated rounds of ethno-religious violence. South- South region has remained perennially volatile. In the late 60s, efforts by the South Eastern region to secede escalated to a deadly three-year (1967 and 1970) civil war. More recently, the menace of Boko Haram, an Islamic militant group has become a serious security threat to the country. Given this instability and uncertainty, Nigeria may seem an unsuitable fit with conventional International Relations' (IR) unitary, internally hierarchic and orderly state model. Nevertheless, since independence in 1960, Nigeria has possessed a competent foreign affairs apparatus which has consistently remained under the exclusive control of federal government, despite various regime changes (Meierding. 2010). While domestic instability may be the primary character of third "world countries' divergent foreign policy behaviour, Waltz hypothesis lack universal validity and legitimacy. That the underlying concept of his thesis is flawed is beyond doubt. It failed to take into account, the constitutional and political parameters of interaction that guide the conduct of foreign policy. This is not, by the way, a question merely of how many IR theorists suggest that international politics is necessarily based on "the great powers," though that is in itself significant. Rather, it is a matter of the fact that the context in which such arguments can be routinely and widely fitting is a context that calls for our deep analysis. Therefore, the distinction between Nigeria's capacity to develop and implement foreign policies and the competencies of the "great powers" is a difference of degree and this is the essential point that we wish to make here. By and large, despite various ethno-religious tensions and other "irritations", Nigeria's federalist structure has not significantly limited the conduct and implementation of its foreign relations (Akindele & Oyediran, 1986:623).

With the reasons advanced by the Nigerian state, there is one train of thought that needs to be analysed. Exploring options for engaging Gaddafi's recalcitrant regime, Nigeria took advantage of the opportunity presented by the emergence of NTC. If Nigeria acted quickly on the intelligence and diplomatic fronts, it was probably meant to ensure the relative protection of its interests while assisting the NTC in containing Gaddafi. On Thursday, September 1 2011, with unconcealed glad triumphalism, Nigeria

announced that its recognition of the NTC as a legitimate representative of Libyans. It was either a courageous act of tactical bravery by Nigeria to pursue its national interest, or a political misstep motivated by a craven desire to appease what Adesamni (2011) referred to as *the masters of our world*, that is, the West. Nigeria could have seemingly invoked the clause of morality and protection of endangered Libyans, and voted in support of the Security Council's resolution 1973 to oust Gaddafi, but the morality argument was neither entirely true nor particularly interesting. Of more significance is that its benevolent argumental one was too pedestrian to counteract public scepticism that it was under intense pressure from the "masters of our world" to act. Those who were neither attracted by the pretext of the morality argument nor lured by its benevolent slant were of the view that the imperative of national interest, the humiliation factor (for Gaddafi), not morality, were very strong dynamics. There is little, if any, doubt that Nigeria's response, regardless of any elements of benevolence embedded therein, was ipso facto guided by political imperatives and exigencies of national interest.

On Friday October 7 2011, President Goodluck Jonathan was in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, stating his pride at Nigeria's action and called for protection against the harassment of Nigerians and other African Migrants trapped in parts of Libya. His appeal followed reports of black Africans being targeted by militia units hunting down — mercenaries loyal to Gaddafi (Agba, 2011). Nigeria's recognition of NTC did not come to many Nigerian's unexpectedly, it was perceived in many quarters as a threat to South Africa and a surprise to the African Union (AU). The fact that the "use of legitimate force" to prevent further loss of lives in Libya was a Western initiative, rather than an AU one, significantly weakened the continental body, which most African leaders had traditionally relied on as a counterweight to Western "meddlesomeness". The fact that the intervention was spearheaded by the West had other ramifications as well, not least a dispute over whether the African leaders could have used the platform of AU for dialogue, restoration of peace, monitoring and enforcement.

Indeed, South Africa criticized Nigeria for its hasty decision. Some analysts were of the view that Nigeria's continental and global profile surged because of the early recognition. The AU considered it a potentially lethal mistake to side with one conflict protagonist for whatever reasons in a war that was yet to be concluded. Still, Nigeria formally recognised the NTC just days after rebel fighters overran Gaddafi's home in Tripoli and drove him underground. The action generated a lot of reels of comments and reactions from some Nigerians and beyond. Why was opposition and AU's position unable to reverse Nigeria's policy? We attempt to answer this question from the simplest realist perspective and limit our analysis to the six principles that guide political realism as enumerated by Morgenthau (1978:4-15).

Morgenthau (1950) offered an attempt to sum up the bigger issues and put the foregoing into proper perspective. With an admirable clarity, Morgenthau (1950:844) offered a compelling deconstruction of the moralistic argument: A nation must not subordinate its security, its happiness, and its very existence to morality, to the respect for treaty obligations, to the sentiment of gratitude, to the sympathy with a kindred political system. Drawing inferences from Morgenthau's thesis, it was wrong for treaty obligations to directly override the principle of national sovereignty. Simply put, sovereign nations are entitled to make their own decisions without the arrogant intrusion of other states. Whereas Nigeria's action directed our attention to both country's troubled diplomatic ties during Gaddafi's rule, doing it just days after Tripoli was overrun by forces loyal to the NTC pointed us to what has been described as wise self-interest (Carr, 1940:54).

With a strong economy and a long history of cultural and political dominance, Nigeria prides itself as the undisputed political leader of its West African sub-region. It was the founding force for the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and supplies over one third of the organization's budget. In the 1990s, Nigeria initiated multilateral militarized peacekeeping operations in Liberia and Sierra Leone. Its leaders aspire to a permanent seat on a reconfigured United Nations Security Council. And, the country sits on sizeable oil and natural gas reserves; it vies with Angola for the title of sub-Saharan Africa's largest petroleum producer. For all these reasons, Nigeria has national interests that it would do anything to protect and preserve (Meierding, 2010:4-5).

Northedge (1968:15) stated that a country's foreign policy is influenced by environmental internal and external environmental factors. Viewed from whichever perspective, none can deny that Nigeria's triumphalist position would have been unlikely without a confluence of both considerations. The connection between Nigeria's 'wise self-interest', pandering to the whims of the "masters of our world," and seemingly acting in concert with NATO, whose military might turned the civil war in the NTC's favour to "jump the gun", drew attention to the cognitive and descriptive paradigm shift. Spurred on by Western arm and primitive ethnocentric savagery, NTC forces overran Gaddafi's last bastions of BaniWalid and Sirte, eventually smoked him out on the outskirts of Sirte where he was gruesomely slaughtered in a choreographed barbaric drama on October 20, 2011 (BBC, 2011).

Nigeria pursued its national interest and by its "magnanimity", took a first and bold step by "jumping the gun" (Ohia and Oyedele, 2011). By "jumping the gun", Nigeria was making a visible and radical deviation from the past where African countries, with silent consent and collusion, often looked unruffled in the face of transition and civil crisis in sister countries. Thus, the compassion that could be interpreted simply as a benevolent generosity is in fact, a criticism of the practices, forces and ideologies that perpetuate human rights abuses in the continent, and therefore a telling signal of its continental leadership aspiration. The fact that the marginal Libyans were suffering and that their plight may have attracted Nigeria's sympathy does not answer the hypothesis of this paper. Nigeria's benevolence must not be taken literally or as indicative of the essence of its response. But, moralistic argument aside, what does recognition of the NTS really mean to Nigeria?

Nigeria's Foreign Policy, National Interest and the New Libyan Political Leadership

Discounting the moralistic connotation, two main reasons could be said to have influenced Nigeria's action. First, given Nigeria's leadership aspiration in Africa, taking such bold political step would boost its image by increasing its international rating. Nigeria, in the words of its foreign affairs minister, had to act to reaffirm its leadership [role in the continent] and also demonstrate its commitment to the consolidation of democracy in Africa which is central to its new foreign policy focus (Adams, 2011). Secondly, foreign policy is meant to bring about economic and social development that would benefit the citizens. Thus, Nigeria may have ended up an "undistinguished giant of Africa" adrift at sea and with uninspiring leadership strength of character, its international political and economic reputation would diminish. National interest, from a realist point of view, would be based on a permanent set of principles involving the protection of the state's territorial, economic, and military interests, with survival as the underlying priority all closely linked to power and influence. It should be clear from the foregoing that national interest cannot be understood simply from political rhetoric or moral persuasion.

Nigeria's foreign policy objectives are derived from two main sources: the Nigerian Constitution and the actions of the leaders, which are dynamic and reflect the policy thrust of an administration. Constitution

of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999: Chapter 11: section 19). For Stephens (2006: 23), national interests are divided between 'vital,' which governments consider worthy of sacrifice and are prepared to back up with the use of force, and 'secondary,' from which they may decide to abandon. Russett and Stair (1992: 184-5) categorised it into core, middle range and long range objectives. Those foreign policy objectives that relate to the survival of the state and its citizens constitute the Core foreign policy values. As evident from the above, the protection of the sovereign and territorial integrity of Nigeria, the lives and property of citizens remain the core values its national interest. Economic development, social welfare, promotion of international cooperation, respect for fundamental rights and mutual respect among nations constitute Nigeria's Middle range objectives within the framework of its foreign policy. Nigeria's dreams and its (leadership) aspirations, including the aspirations to become influential in the international system are its long-range national interests and foreign policy objectives. Middle range and long-range objectives are subject change depending on circumstances, but core objectives are represent the country's cardinal national and do not change irrespective of change in administration.

Given the above analysis, it is alright to argue that a country's national interests are its specific and core objectives which determine bilateral relations or co-operation among sovereign nations. The absence of Nigeria's core national interest in the survival of NTC may explain why it did not come out openly at the early stage of the Libyan conflict. Arguably, genuine power is applicable only in cases where core national interests are threatened. Nigeria's foreign policy requires clear distinctions between immediate tactical problems and longer-term strategic threats because short-term political thinking about foreign policy cannot sustain its regional leadership aspirations. Some analysts may view Nigeria's recognition of the NTC as taking sides with the "new imperialism". But for the country's national security, its support of the NTC was justified.

When Nigeria announced that democratic Libya is in its national interest, it was merely stating that helping neighbouring countries to run effective and democratic government is a vital Nigerian national interest. Indeed, democratic Libya is in Nigeria's national interest because democracies almost never wage war against each other (Kegley, 1995:10). Basically, the role that Nigeria has assigned to itself (advocate for democracy) has produced two contradictory attitudes toward its foreign policy. Firstly, Nigeria will serve its values best if it demonstrates good domestic democratic credentials, without which its role as a beacon for the rest of Africa will be an exercise in contradiction. Secondly, Nigeria's self-assigned values impose on it, obligations to campaign for democracy across Africa, and indeed around the world. Torn between mixed feelings of its past, a rabid negative opinion about its uninspiring democratic records and craving for a perfect democratic future, Nigeria's value may be dithering between absurdity and commitment.

Contemporary thinking and international discourses on democratisation in the developing world is based on the following assumptions; that the protection of peoples' self-determination to choose their own government is the protection of the weak from the strong; that democracy releases the total energy of all citizens for development and; that democratic governance must be built on the foundations of rational, effective states that do not pose security threats to its neighbours. Democracy is the best form of government because it brings about, among other things, improved responsiveness of governance processes to public desires and expectations (Amaraegbu, 2011:213b). It is easier, Weber (2001:41) stated, to hold democratic governments to account because the voice of democratic sovereign states is viewed as collective voice of its people. Simply, Weber was arguing that the appeal of democracy, when

firmly established, lies in its pragmatism and legalism as a means of ensuring individual rights, interest and social justice. It sustains harmony within the society through consensus and agreement and it integrates communities. Therefore, restraining, curtailing, suppressing and oppressing people with associated authoritarianism breeds nothing but resentment among the citizens.

Albeit with a twist, Post 9/11 has given new significance to the dialogue on the promotion of democracy, especially in the developing world. In the current international political context, promoting democracy, have become intricately subsumed and even fused with foreign policy objectives. In principle, at least, democratisation in the developing world has assumed a crucial element of the global security agenda and, as such, has now become Nigeria's fundamental foreign policy objective. Before Nigeria came to define democracy as one of its crucial foreign policy objectives, America's President Bush, had in 2006 defined non-democratic, fragile and poorly-governed states as the most significant threat to national security (Cammack et al., 2006). Linked together, it has become evident that the goals of national security, promotion of democracy and state-building democracy now act in concert to define national interest. Alongside other foreign policy objectives, military force, exemplified by NATO's operation in Libya has been used to effect regime change. The NATO operation initially undertook the implementation of UN's NO-Fly Zone of Libya for the stated objectives of destroying Gaddafi's air capabilities and preventing his regime from using superior air power to whip the opposition into submission; but its unstated goals also included regime change in the form of promoting freedom and supporting democratic political system. Clausewitz (1976: 80-1) stated that all state behaviour is motivated by its need to survive and prosper. Nigeria's foreign policy towards the new Libya is not an isolated case as Nigeria's decision to back the NTC stood on the provisions of its foreign policy.

As long as countries have power, governments will always pursue national interest-based-policy and seek to co-opt the power they have for their survival and prosperity. By recognising the NTC away from the AU stance, Nigeria did not only "inject a new dynamism " into its foreign policy engagement, but took away South Africa's perceived leadership of Africa, whose perception of the events in Libya was blurred by the ruling African National Congress (ANC)'s continued gratification of the financial and military hardware and training support from Gaddafi during the apartheid era.

The ANC credited Gaddafi as a man who helped to cleanse the continent from the humiliation of apartheid racist rule; a bigoted system of government where a handful of supremacist whites were recognised by the "masters of our world" as the sole legitimate voice of South African citizens. Gaddafi's generosity was extended through financial assistance, granting aid donations to impoverished neighbours, for example Niger and oil subsidies to Zimbabwe. He spent considerable money and diplomatic capital in facilitating the provision of humanitarian assistance to Darfur refugees in Chad, contributed to efforts to forge a ceasefire between Chad and Sudan, and helped bring an end to the conflict in Darfur (US Department of State, 2011).

All the discontent that Nigeria's action caused across Africa notwithstanding, one thing was always very clear: as long as it served to promote issues of Nigeria's current interest, it was an action taken for the right reason. In his analysis of the subject of this paper, Morgenthau stated that no nation can afford to jeopardise its own interests by indulging in domestic political preferences and moral judgments of other nations. Paraphrasing Churchill, he stated that nations should make pact with the devil himself, if it was in the national interest to do so (2006:374).

As complex and challenging as the national interest of a state is, primary is the state's own survival and security. Morgenthau noted that it is not only a political necessity, but also a moral duty for a nation to always follow in its dealings with other nations but one guiding star, one standard for thought, one rule for action: the National interest (1951:241 -2). In the context that Morgenthau explained, there is little doubt that the political action that Nigeria undertook was directed towards the pursuit of Nigeria's survival, security, economic growth and even power given that a rational foreign policy is impossible (Morgenthau,2006:374). McLean (1996:333) stated that realists' use of the term, national interest in evaluating foreign policy focuses on national security as the core of national interest.

In a press statement released by the Nigerian High Commission, London on September 7, 2011, the foreign affairs minister demonstrated that his country's foreign policy was tilting towards a realist slant. Nigeria was alarmed by the possibility of a spill over from a prolonged Libyan civil war. Nigeria was petrified by the possibility of Gaddafi's menace posing a threat to Nigeria's regional prestige. Nigeria was aware that Gaddafi's Libya had in the past, supported civil wars in the region (Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Ivory Coast) which has threatened to undermine the stability of West African countries. The scenario depicted the deteriorating security situation in Libya as a cause for concern, especially as Gaddafi's attacks became more intense, coordinated, and deadly, and also that further instability in Libya could force the country to pull out of various continental obligations which would be significant because Libya remained a major benefactor to AU's existence.

A major plank of Nigeria's stance was informed by its support for democracy (Nigeria High Commission, 2011:1). Analysing the professional touch in the choice of words and language, assuming the statement, released by the Nigeria High Commission, reasonably reflected the feeling of President Jonathan and his government and that of critical institutions of the Nigerian State, then it represented a demonstration of the key argument of this paper: the singularity proposition (embodied in the words "Nigeria's national interest"). But the proof or validation of our position do not depend on official pronouncements. Of course, Nigeria has a key strategic interest in maintaining Libya's political stability but there is a need to go beyond such assertions and ask what the tools for accomplishing these national goals are. When the minister stated that democratic Libya was in Nigeria's national interest, he was only restating his country's mission to encourage the growth of democratic institutions in Africa and to rise up against and transform authoritarianism in the continent. Nigeria not only wanted a faster growth of democracy but also believed it was time to begin scaling back cooperation with autocratic leaderships in Africa.

In the press statement, we were being reminded about the philosophical hypothesis excellently developed by Rousseau. The people, he noted, are good and peaceful by nature, so democratic control of foreign policy tends towards decent and peaceful international relations (Morgenthau, 2006:373). Developing the building blocks of democracy seems the best way to secure stability, progress and prosperity, which may serve Nigeria's interests. These contexts reinforce the argument that a state will undertake certain actions while disregarding others (Ringmar, 2007:193). For Morgenthau (1951:8), interest and power are forces inherent in human power, but these interests are not fixed once and for all. He held that change occurs constantly and therefore, the environment plays a critical role in influencing the interests that define political action. For the change that Morgenthau talked about, Nigeria may have started rethinking more broadly; viewing the relationship between the political mechanisms within Libya and distribution of power in the country.

It is fitting that that Morgenthau re-asserted that only democracies can be trusted to keep their commitments and pursue peaceful policies, for autocracies are inherently untrustworthy and prone to deflect domestic discontent to foreign adventures and wars (2006:373). Morgenthau's thesis offers three distinct points; that an autocratic regime which does not derive its power from the people is an affront to the principles of "openness which underpin a modern democracy; that a democratic government which derived its legitimacy from the people will be more trustworthy and will most likely rethink its foreign policies for fear of domestic backlash. In the press statement cited earlier, Nigeria argued that democratic state building was an urgent component of her national interest.

Building on the wisdom of Machiavelli, Morgenthau (1985:5) argued that nations must not go to war or intervene in another nation just for abstract love of freedom and righteousness, but must intervene when their most profound national interests were threatened. International politics, he said, like all politics, is a struggle for power. Most objective observers would agree that it is possible that Nigeria's policy makers envisaged that the change brought about by Gaddafi's ouster could strengthen Nigeria's power bargain in African affairs and through ECOWAS, the country could seize the opportunity offered by Gaddafi's fall to promote its aims of improved regional political stability. For long, Libyan petro dollars and Gaddafi's manoeuvrings remained a big force to reckon with but Nigeria's financial and political influence in the continent could loom larger in a post-Gaddafi era, where Libyan oil wealth will no longer be what it used to be and no more Gaddafi's shenanigans.

Conclusion

The forms that Nigeria's inevitable break up with Libya's old regime took when the "Arab-spring" revolution chased Gaddafi out of power - its diplomacy and propaganda, its strategy and tactics - all depended on the character of the forces in power in Abuja and Tripoli. Debates on the larger subject from which our assumption emanates have been on-going for some time. But one impression we have ruled out completely as unhistorical and unscientific is that, given the events of March 2010, Nigeria chose to act based on moralistic impulse rather than national interest and political imperatives. Nigeria began by being condemnatory, articulating the average Libyan's suffering. According to its Foreign Ministry, Nigeria could not afford to fold its arms after Gaddafi declared war on his own people calling them rats and cockroaches (Thisday, 2011). Of course Gaddafi was a despot, but simply stating so deflects irritation from the bigger issues which play out in IR. An analytical study of Nigeria-libya diplomatic relations over the years convinces us that the former's quick recognition of the NTC was expected and almost inevitable.

In IR, national interest is used in two contexts. First, it connotes an assessment tool employed to identify the objectives of foreign policy and secondly, as a broad concept of political debate used to rationalize or defend particular policy choices (Frankel, 1970:15-6).

To Franel's observation, we have in our analysis, added the significance of the distinction between the fundamental elements that influence state policy regarding diplomatic relationships between states and in dealing with the international community. Foreign policy is the course of action pursued by a sovereign nation in its dealings with other nations, usually in pursuance of its national interest objectives. The national interest is a state's goals and aspirations and primary is the state's survival and security. It is an important concept in IR where the pursuit of national interest is the core of the realist thinking.

As Waltz (1979:117), whose contribution has been particularly significant in influencing the realist research agenda for over two decades put it, a nation's interest, not morality, provides its spring of action in the international environment. We would endorse Waltz's general evaluation. While it does not, however, validate our special submission, it goes to show that this paper is not so isolated in the use of the method and perspectives by which our analysis is based. At its most fundamental level, national interest seems to suggest that sovereign nation states seek to preserve their territorial integrity and political autonomy.

For Morgenthau (1954:4-10), it is a fallacy of realist tradition to apply universal moral principles to the actions of states. Political realism, he concluded, refuses to identify with the moral aspirations of a particular nation with universal moral laws. Nigeria's moralistic posturing flies in the face of the realist school. For Nigeria, it was becoming increasingly evident that if Gaddafi's callousness was not checked, the meaning of democracy and, indeed, freedom would be lost. Therefore, yielding to pressure from the "international community" against Gaddafi's threat against democracy, backing the NTC was an attractive and plausible goal.

However, the politics and strategic considerations that informed Nigeria's action may not necessarily be as a result of Western pressure, or as disrespect for its AU obligations. It could be a stand taken to show leadership in Africa where the continental organisation has been hijacked by anti-democratic forces and heads of state who exert questionable democratic mandates. To counter other states who expected that the tension could be resolved through open negotiations marked by goodwill to Gaddafi, Nigeria "jumped the gun" by putting the pursuit of specific national interests (promotion of democracy and sub-regional security) at the core of foreign policy and qualified that objective with a strong commitment to moral imperatives.

As arguments go, Nigeria's moralistic argument can at once be logical and pedestrian. It may well be true that Nigeria was responding to some moral imperatives, yet no one can deny the more obvious political subtext of the action. The sole fixation could not have been on how to ensure that another Rwanda did not happen. As critics have pointed out, moralist argument about humane considerations is collapsible because in IR, the state has higher interest, a national interest that seeks the preservation of the state definitely outweigh all other considerations. While a foreign policy based on realism has its drawbacks, a moralistic foreign policy, cannot adequately deal with a plethora of issues that confront the state in its relationship with the outside World (Okolo, 1988:69). Therefore, commitments with other nations could not be based on morality, but on the calculations of real or symbolic advantage.

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