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In the mid-2000s, contrary to du Plessis, van Nieuwkerk (2004: 91) argued that South Africa's national interest is neither debated nor known. He asks; 'what is South Africa's national interest(s). Who determines it? Can South Africa afford competing interpretations of the national interest? Or is contestation inevitable; in fact, a normal feature of democratic intellectual dialogue? Most of all, can the concept guide South Africa's foreign policy.'

Landsberg appears to agree with van Nieuwkerk when he laments the 'elusive' nature of South Africa's national interest. 'A failure to make operational a national interest paradigm is a weakness that has long characterised South Africa's foreign policy', (Landsberg 2010: 276). He concludes; 'what remains certain is that making a few grand proclamations on the national interest is no substitute for a thoroughly constructed national interest paradigm for South Africa' (Landsberg, 2010: 289).

The foregoing literature review raises a number of issues for further investigation and analysis which the study aims to interrogate. Firstly, the literature points to the importance of the national interest in guiding or informing foreign policy. The fact that a notion of 'national interest' occupies the thinking of foreign policy makers in part, proves the point.

Secondly, the literature points to a resurgence of the debate on the national interest in foreign policy circles, as well as in academia. Certainly, key national policy documents also point to this resurgence, the NDP and the Draft White Paper on South Africa's Foreign Policy are cases in point. Further, recent academic papers (see Landsberg, 2010 & Bohler-Muller, 2012) also point to this resurgence. The resurgence of the debate on the national interest points to the relevance and importance of the issue and, the fact that although it was prevalent and can be

extrapolated under Mbeki, it was and still remains underdeveloped in terms of policy and practice.

Thirdly, the literature indicates the limited number of scholarly contributions on the national interest. Arguably, the paucity of scholarship on such an important topic in foreign policy has serious implications for understanding South Africa's foreign policy in general, as well as it relates to Africa. Such a situation is untenable and requires intervention.

Fourthly, it also raises sharply the question as to whether a national interest 'doctrine' is a requirement and/or a necessity for foreign policy making and practice. Finally, to restate the two primary questions: (1) what is South Africa's national interest in Africa and (2), how does it manifest itself in the context of the 'Africa Agenda'?

What does the literature say on SA's relations with Africa – this is one of the pillars of investigation set out by the thesis so needs to be addressed.

As indicated above, in the South Africa literature, the subject of the national interest is yet to be addressed in a systematic and in-depth manner. There is no systematic study or treatment of South Africa's national interests in global terms or in relation to Africa. This study seeks to close this gap in literature. It is an attempt to systematically study and explore South Africa's national interests in terms of the country's foreign policy in Africa. No systematic study or thesis exists that treats the subject more directly or in so far as it relates to Africa or more specifically, the African Agenda. A systematic and in-depth study would be in the form of a research thesis, a book or an edited volume. No such works exist in the South African literature.

Whereas this is the case, a number of works with titles or reference to the African Agenda exist. These works serve as a basis for extrapolating the sub-themes of this study and they are widely used as evidence for the existence of the national interest in South Africa's foreign policy in Africa. Further, a limited number of articles have

been published bearing the title of the 'national interest' and invariably, discuss the African Agenda. The limited number of articles cited in the literature review below

### **Research methodology**

The study adopts a case study method of research (CSR). 'A case study can be regarded as an exploration or in-depth analysis of a 'bound system' (bounded by time and/or place) or a single or multiple case over a period of time...' (Creswell, as quoted in De Vos 2002: 275). Alternatively, it is an 'empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in-depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident' (Yin, 2009: 124).

'The case being studied can refer to a process, activity, event, programme or individual or multiple individuals. It might even refer to a period of time rather than a particular group of people...Where multiple cases are involved, it is referred to as a collective case study' (De Vos 2002: 275) or a 'multiple case study' (Yin, 2009: 92). The multiple case studies selected in the study focus on activity (practice) and programmes.

Using a collective or multiple case study method as defined above, the research will seek to understand the what, why and how of South Africa's national interest in Africa. Is what we see in the African Agenda a manifestation of the national interest? In this case, the descriptive elements of South Africa's national interest(s) may emerge. Why does South Africa act the way it does in the continent? And how does the national interest manifest itself in the continent? The latter two questions (why and how), typical of case study questions, will hopefully surface the explanatory elements and key features of South Africa's national interest(s). These questions are consistent with both the research method and the aims and objectives of the study.

The advantage of using the multiple CSR method is that it provides space to use the cases to generate a general theory based on common patterns or explain distinct foreign policy behaviours in the instance of contradictory manifestations of the

national interest(s). Further, it is better to observe the facts and then theorise, rather than impose predetermined theories on facts.

Africa is the larger context and the specific programmes of the African Agenda constitute the multiple case study under investigation. Through these foreign policy programmes, the study will evaluate what South Africa's national interest(s) are in Africa. In other words, the conclusion will be derived in retrospect – by studying South Africa's foreign policy behaviour or rather foreign policy practice. The multiple case study is selected from the core programmes that constitute the 'African Agenda', namely;

- Regional integration – promoting pan-Africa unity.
- NEPAD – promoting the implementation of NEPAD.
- African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) – promoting governance and democracy through the implementation of the peer review mechanism.
- Peace and Security – pursuing conflict resolution.

These case studies were selected because they constitute the core of what the Mbeki administration claimed to be the focus of the 'African Agenda'. Data will be drawn from both primary and secondary sources:

- Primary sources of data: official policy documents, pronouncements by relevant authorities, decisions and actions of the South African government, policy reviews, ruling party official policy, decisions of cabinet, and parliament.
- Secondary source of data: academic literature such as journal articles, books, book chapters, research reports, as well as policy submissions.

In order to allow the data to speak for itself, a deductive analytical framework is applied. The various IR theories and their positions on the national interest will be tested against the emerging data with the aim to prove or disprove the assumption that South Africa's foreign policy is guided by the notion of the national interest and how this manifests itself in practice. In the instance that the theories are proven wrong or insufficient by the data collected, the study seeks new conceptions of what

South Africa's foreign policy is about in Africa or suggest improvements of deficient theory(ies) and even policies.

### **Limitations of the study**

Limitations of a research study are often associated with the research method and design chosen. In this study a few limitations exist. Firstly, the scope of the study is the most obvious limitation, it focuses on South Africa's national interest in Africa and not in the global arena in general. However, it is hoped that by focusing the study on Africa, some general principles of application can be deduced so as to arrive at a generalised understanding of South Africa's national interest in general.

The second limitation also relates to scope but the specific chosen research method: the use of case studies. A case study method forces the researcher to widen his or her research on multiple areas. Again, this may cause the study to miss certain nuances. Future research could consider a focus on a single issue investigation. However, the method is largely suitable because the chosen unit of analysis, the African Agenda, has multiple elements to it.

Finally, the last limitation is more theoretical. Because of lack of research and scholar interest and/or works on the subject of the national interest in South Africa, the national interest has not been sufficiently theorised in the South Africa context and as such, the study could not draw on a more localised theory(ies) to better understand South Africa's unique abstractions of the national interest.

### **Ethical considerations**

As this is primarily a desk top study attention will be given to considerations of plagiarism in line with the University's policy on plagiarism. There are no human participants involved in this study and research will be based on publicly accessible documents.

### **Outline of chapters**

The dissertation is divided into 5 chapters and a conclusion which contains policy recommendations. Besides the theoretical chapter, the other four content chapters assess the national interest and the African Agenda programmes. Chapter two lays out the theoretical and analytical framework for the study. It looks at some of the major theoretical works on the notion of the national interest. Chapter three focuses on Africa's vision for development during the Mbeki years: NEPAD. The next chapter follows on the development theme by discussion regional integration. The fifth chapters discusses the APRM and its democracy promotion intent and the last of the four content chapters discusses peace and security. All of these four chapters explore the central question of the study: how were these four African Agenda programmes used to pursue South Africa's national interest in Africa. The final chapter makes conclusions based on the research, a general evaluation of the South African national interest in Africa and some recommendations for a way forward in terms of research, policy and practice.





## CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter lays out the theoretical and analytical approach to the study. It starts off by exploring various dominant IR theories and their conception and approaches to the national interest. And thereafter, it discusses the South African state's conception and approach to the national interest in the period under review: 1999 – 2008. In the end, it provides an assessment of the various conceptions and approaches and; suggests an analytical framework for the study. Whereas the theoretical treatment is much wider, just as it must, the focus of the research is a much narrower study of South Africa's national interest in Africa.

The question as to what motivates states to do what they do in the international arena, is what has informed much of the theoretical discourse in International Relations (IR) as a sub-discipline, as well as, foreign policy analysis (FPA). And for the longest time, the idea of the national interest as advanced by realists, has dominated the discourse as a unit of analysis for foreign policy behaviour.

Although 'there is no accepted definition of national interests among scholars' Nuechterlein (1976: 247), the idea of the national interest rests on the assumption that there is a common interest in the political community. Arguably, in its earliest version, the national interest finds its origins in Rousseau's conception of the '*general will*' (Rousseau, 1758) and Machiavelli's *raison d'état*, (Machiavelli: 1532).

From a research and scholarship vantage point, it is important to begin the study of South Africa's national interest by understanding some of the main contending theoretical traditions that have theorised about state behaviour in world politics. The intention is to lay out the broad theoretical framework of the concept and problematise its utility as a theoretical construct in international relations theory.

The concept of the national interest has been treated with varying depth and width by existing mainstream international relations (IR). There are three mainstream IR theoretical traditions, namely; conventional, progressive and constructivist traditions. Under each of these theoretical traditions, several schools of thought are found; some are dominant and strong on their treatment of the concept of the national interest, whilst others are peripheral and weak.







































































































































































































