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Analysis of Environmental Variables, State Objectives and Inter-State Relations

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Abstract

The paper examines the intricate relationships between environmental variables, state objectives, and interstate relations in the global system. Using a content analytical approach anchored on the Copenhagen School's Securitisation Framework (CSSF), the study investigates how domestic environmental variables influence state objectives (including economic development, national security, and citizens' wellbeing) and impact inter-state relations. Findings indicate that environmental variables significantly shape state objectives, which subsequently affect interstate relations, with securitisation processes playing a crucial role in the linkage. The study concludes by identifying key linkages between environmental stressors, state priorities and international interactions, highlighting the need for integrated approaches to address global humanitarian challenges and promote sustainable peace. The findings indicate implications for policymakers, diplomats, and scholars seeking to understand how the complex interplay between domestic environmental, political and socio-economic dynamics shapes interstate interactions in contemporary international relations.

Keywords: Environmental variables, State objectives, Inter-state relations, Securitisation framework, National security and Linkage analysis.

Introduction

The formulation of state objectives in international relations is carried out within the limits of the internal and external environment. The implication of this is that the objectives of states are a product of environmental variables, whereas the foreign policy of states cannot evolve in isolation. Thus, environmental variables refer to the aggregate socio-cultural, economic and political forces that exist in the domestic and external spheres, which drive and determine what constitutes state objectives, how states arrive at these objectives, why states pursue these goals and with what tools

(Nwaozor 2020, p. 180). Although states dominate the international political arena, other actors are classified as non-state actors. These actors exert the same pressure and influence as states. In essence, state and non-state actors relate complexly, and the complicated relationship determines and influences the state's objectives, in what Stopford and Strange described as a triangular relationship.

According to Stopford and Strange, triangular diplomacy encompasses the range of relationships in the global system, including states, transnational corporations, and the relations between states and transnational corporations. However, there is a direct relationship between state objectives and state capability. While a state may set diverse goals based on its national interest, what determines the actualisation of these goals is its capability, defined in terms of its level of economic and political development, its set of interests, the power it has at its disposal to actualise these interests, and the nature of its national leadership.

An important point to note is that not every objective outlined by a state can be pursued and realised. A major determinant of states' capability to articulate and realise their foreign policy is their positioning in the international system. The closer a state is positioned at the centre, the more likely it is to enjoy some modicum of independence in the formulation, pursuit and realisation of its objectives. In contrast, a state positioned at the margin is most likely to realise its objectives without interference from the states occupying the centre of global politics. Hence, economic crises, poverty, and political instability, amongst other negative attributes that characterise Third World states, have made it impossible for countries of the Global South to be the real architects of their foreign policies. This study, therefore, examines the internal and external environmental variables that act as triggers and drivers of state objectives in international diplomacy. It also interrogates the linkage between environmental variables and the forces that contribute to the realisation of state objectives. Although environmental variables are not the only determining factors that spawn state objectives, but also contributory influences in their realisation.

Conceptual and Theoretical Explication

The international system is replete with a variety of actors categorised as both state, sub-state and non-state actors, but despite their multiplicity and increasing role, the prominence and influence of state and non-state actors remain the cornerstone of international relations. Even though non-state actors such as international non-governmental organisations, and transnational corporations regional, inter-regional and global are relevant and important in international relations and have exerted far-reaching influence on the resolution of international issues in one way or another, the centrality of the nation-state remains the major conduit through which such resolutions are conducted and effectuated.

There have been various conceptions of the nation-state, ranging from legal, philosophical, and sociological to political connotations. No matter the ideological construct of a nation-state, Igwe (2002, p. 416) argues that it is a concrete manifestation of the culmination of man's struggles in a settled life, embodying and expressing the common interests of the dominant class within the system, and of its derivative ruling class within government, both of whom can attain and sustain such pre-eminence by various designs including the ultimate application of authoritative force; and importantly, the state is the realm of collective action and decision (Ballam & Veseth 2007, p. 15). The state is a legal entity that embodies sovereignty, political institutions, population, geographical territory, a relatively coherent and autonomous system of government, a legitimate monopoly of force, and a body of codified law (Nwozor 2020, p. 182).

According to A. Nwozor (2020), whether the state is conceptualised holistically and equated with the country or disaggregated and differentiated from the society and government or as a public bureaucracy and administrative collective incorporating a set of personnel who occupy positions of decisional authority in policy formulation and implementation, or the totality of the materiality of political class domination in society (Ibeanu 2008, p. 12), or specific modality of class domination or class-related phenomenon or a creature of the basis, and decisive element of the superstructure of society, the state is the reason for and framework of international relations

(Zamora 2021). In contemporary times, however, there have been challenges to the dominance of the nation-state as a major organising force in the international system as a result of the phenomenon of globalisation.

The emergence of globalisation and its obfuscation of state boundaries led liberal interdependence theorists to contend that the state had become irrelevant or dead in international relations. Their argument is anchored on the unfolding interdependence and erosion of state sovereignty through “economic interdependence, global-scale technologies, and democratic politics” (Thompson 1995, p. 281). Essentially, sovereignty is one of the major attributes of statehood. It encapsulates “the possible powers of independent statehood, including constitutional and legislative supremacy, which entitle its government to make and implement its own decisions in domestic affairs and conduct of international relations, without the prior consent or permission of an outside power” (Igwe 2002, p. 15). The implication is that through the instrumentality of sovereignty, a state is, by and of itself, independent and possesses unquestionable authority or what Thompson (1995, p. 218) refers to as “meta-political authority”, that is, the ultimate political authority which the state wields without restrictions from any quarters, domestically and internationally.

The contradictions which globalisation has introduced concerning a state’s sovereignty are the erosion of a state’s traditional state boundaries. While sovereignty presupposes the absence of contending entities within or outside the state’s territorial area, globalisation symbolises the dismantling of state boundaries. Otoro (2017, p. 372) submits that the core of liberal interdependence theorists is anchored on the complex interdependence which globalisation epitomises and promotes, undermining states' capacity to control their borders. Thompson (1995) further elaborates on the manifestation of globalisation:

Modern technology empowers non-state or sub-state actors to evade state efforts to control the flow of goods, people, capital, information and services across territorial boundaries. Capital can flow to another state or another currency to escape state fiscal and monetary policies... Efforts to defend cultural values or bar subversive ideas are

stymied by computer and telecommunication technologies in the hands of other states, sub-states and non-state actors. Similarly, technological advances have produced weapons of mass destruction which preclude the state from protecting its citizens or territory. As a result, states cannot ensure economic or military security.

In contrast, however, state-centric theorists have refuted the retreat of the state in international political order by posting two strands of arguments. These strands of argument are identified as denial that interdependence has increased and, therefore, state sovereignty has been eroded. Thompson (1995) notes that the denial is predicated on the contestation that:

... Current ratios of transborder to intra-border flows of people, information, and capital are not dramatically different from those of the late nineteenth century. If these ratios are reasonable measures of interdependence, then interdependence is not on the increase and does not reflect an erosion of state sovereignty.

The second strand of the argument and appropriation of the expansion in interdependence reflects a depiction of the enhancement of state power and authority. Thus, Gilpin (1987) submits that the complex global interdependence manifesting in the expanding transborder economic flows, advances in technological developments, the dismantling of state borders and increased global financial flow, among others, is based on the exercise of state power.

Though other actors exist in the global arena and exercise undue influence, they have not been able to dislodge or diminish the state from its position of dominance. The continued relevance of the state in international political discussions is acknowledged both at the theoretical and practical levels. At the theoretical level, Lake (2007, p. 1) opines:

Many analysts focus on states and their interactions to explain observed patterns of global politics. The state is fundamental to neorealism and neoliberal institutionalism. It is also key in many constructivist and English school theories. Even critical, postmodernist or feminist theories, which have mounted sustained opposition to existing forms of social order, often focus on problematising the state and state practices.

At the practical level, the dominance of the state is underlined by the fact that non-state actors owe their allegiance to one or more states. Nonetheless, all sub-state and non-state actors have linkages with states and often rely on the states to push their interests in the international system. However, the financial strength of transnational corporations and states' quest to attract foreign direct

investments to boost their economies has conferred upon them state-level powers. The financial power of transnational corporations is demonstrated by the statistics that reveal their relative strength to states. For instance, out of the global 100 largest economic entities in 2010, 42 per cent were corporations.

However, Balaam and Veseth (2007, p. 387) have compared states and transnational corporations in strictly monetary terms, neglecting other variables. Nonetheless, states possess several attributes that transnational corporations cannot measure up with and that is where the margin is drawn between them. For instance, states possess territories, make binding laws therein and have an organised government. States also have sovereignty, population and various categories of law enforcement agencies with coercive powers. All these confer legitimacy on the state and induce international recognition of its decisional authority.

Notwithstanding the financial capacity of some transnational corporations, which places them ahead of states, they are incapable of acting as states. As Lake (2007) observed, “states decide to go to war, they erect trade barriers, they also choose whether and at what level to establish environmental standards. States may choose to enter into international agreements or not, and choose whether to abide by their provisions.” It is imperative, too, to note that the dominance of the state in international relations does not undermine or diminish the relevance of non-state actors, especially the transnational corporations. Transnational corporations have been known to be used by and serve as tools of super powers hegemonic control, providing the platform for triangular diplomacy.

Triangular diplomacy refers to the pattern of states’ relations that set the parameters for the direction of foreign direct investments, which are both important to the states and the corporations. The importance of state-transnational corporations’ relations has been summarised by Balaam and Veseth (2007, p. 399) as follows:

Transnational corporations today face more competition than ever from their contemporaries. States face more competition with states for the pool of foreign direct investment flows. Attempts to reach agreements on a set of ‘rules of the game’ to govern

state-corporations' relations have failed at exactly the time when it would be most useful to have them. Lacking such agreement, the triangular pressures on state-to-state, transnational corporation to transnational corporation and state to transnational corporation negotiation will increase, and the political and economic struggles will grow more desperate...

Despite the complexities of contemporary international relations, the place of the state is incontrovertible. On this, Waltz (1979, p. 93) argues that “states are not and never have been the only international actors.... The importance of non-state actors and the extent of transnational activities are obvious.” States remain both the objects and units of analysis, with non-state actors being ancillary to, though not inferior in relevance, in the dynamics of international politics. This is imperative because the formulation and pursuit of state objectives often transcend state influence and find expression and fulfilment in the domain of non-state actors.

Delineating Environmental Variables in International Relations

Environmental variables in international relations relate to two questions that beg for both meaning and prominence. These are environment-qua-environment or factors that engender, impinge or motivate and maintain the foreign policy of states. In either way, the environment is important in interstate relations, whether states are operating in the domestic or international arena, states do so within the context of the environment and are sustained by the environment. Contextually, the environment encompasses all the external factors influencing the life and activities of citizens, flora and fauna (Pierre 2024). The centrality of environmental variables is underscored by their importance as the constitutive elements of power in interstate cooperation.

Balaam and Veseth (2007) opined that “environmental issues have become increasingly important in recent years as the pace of economic development, industrialisation and population growth have quickened, testing the limits of nature.” Therefore, the importance of environmental factors in international relations lies in their complex and transboundary character, i.e. environmental issues transcend national boundaries and are increasingly global in configuration. Zamora (2021, p. 147) has argued that population, climate change and other natural disasters are

too broad to be the concern of a single state; hence, the rationale for multiple and conflicting interests in the international system.

Environmental variables incorporate all the aggregate factors – domestic and external, ranging from living and non-living things that contribute to or detract from national survival and affluence. These environmental factors affect states and are instrumental in dictating how states behave in the global arena. Environmental variables have had direct and indirect impacts on influencing the trajectory of states' foreign policy objectives and their responses arising therefrom. These variables are categorised into two broad classifications: domestic and external factors.

Domestic variables refer to all features, factors and forces, indeed the whole ensemble of natural, human and man-made resources peculiar to a state which determine their national power. These are important in determining the thrust of a state's foreign policy objectives (Ejitu & Ecoma 2022, pp. 23 -24). Beyond laying the guiding principles in the formulation of state objectives that direct foreign policy, they define the tools for the realisation of the objectives. According to Morgenthau (1985), domestic environmental variables constitute the elements of national power. These are

- i) Geography – all the physical features that characterise and define a state's territory, including natural resources.
- ii) Demography – a state's population in terms of size or numerical strength, growth rate, density, gender and age distribution.
- iii) Nature of political.

Framing state objectives in international relations refers to the procedure of carefully defining and presenting a nation's goals and priorities in international diplomacy and strategically shaping how these objectives are perceived and understood by other countries, often by using specific language, narratives, and arguments to influence negotiations and achieve desired outcomes. It is pertinent to note that states do not have uniform objectives in the international system. Every state is motivated

to pursue certain goals based on its overall national interest. Each state determines what it considers vital and hierarchizes same in the order of importance.

However, as Ricardo (2021) has poignantly noted, states' objectives are not formulated in isolation but within the framework of other states' objectives. This is so because the formulation and pursuit of antagonistic objectives could snowball into belligerent relationships capable of threatening the stability of the international system. The objectives of states constitute not just the thrust of, but the essence of their foreign policy. According to Lingua (2021, p. 12), the key aspects of framing a state's objectives are predicated on national interests, strategic communication, context and parameters of diplomatic issues, shared values and principles to legitimise state objectives, domestic political dynamics and public opinion. Other considerations include the level of economic development, security and environmental sustainability. All these are considered to gain leverage, build consensus and manage perceptions in the international arena. Thus, the thrust of states' foreign policy is synonymous with what states consider important for their well-being, survival and maintenance of a healthy relationship with other states in the international system, and such interests are determined by both domestic and external environmental factors and stimuli.

Environmental Variables and Interstate Relations: A Linkage Analysis

The nexus between environmental variables and state objectives in international politics finds accommodation in their reciprocal relationship. Domestic and external environmental variables act as the driving force in the formulation of the state's objectives. The complexities inherent in contemporary international relations are exemplified by the multiplicity of actors with overlapping interests (Morris 2023, p. 17). The task before states is how to balance their objectives and preferences with international morality. In other words, the behaviour of states is moderated to conform to internationally approved standards of morality.

Environmental variables are evident at the domestic and international levels, and both levels have direct and indirect impacts on shaping the trajectory of states' foreign policies. However, how these variables determine the course of a state's actions in the international arena is the power available to it to drive its objectives. Nwozor (2020, p. 208) has indicated that it is not

just enough to evolve a bouquet of objectives without the componential power for their realisation. If a state outlines its objectives without the composite capability for its pursuit, they are as good as not formulated at the initial instance.

Though states are theoretically regarded as equal in the international system, the practical implication is that this is not so. Several indices set states apart. The categorisation of states by their economic status based on their level of development plays a significant role in determining their place in the comity of states. For international stability, states exercise their power with due understanding of the interests of other states. While territorial integrity and protection of state sovereignty constitute the essence of state objectives, what determines if a state can live up to these ideals is the resources at its disposal vis-à-vis the resources at the disposal of rival states.

The emergence of the new world order since the end of the East-West ideological confrontation has ushered in a new thinking about morality that places a limit on the state's sovereignty. State sovereignty was reconceptualised from the prism of power and unquestionable authority to that of the obligation of states to behave responsibly in exercising authority within their territories. The United Nations introduced the doctrine of responsibility to protect (R2P) to underline this shift in focus, which was precipitated by gross acts of inhumanity in some states. R2P was preoccupied with and targeted at crimes against humanity. Such crimes included war crimes, genocide and ethnic cleansing. Essentially, Granville (2010, p. 191) has argued that:

R2P was anchored on three fundamental pillars: the obligation and responsibility of states to protect their citizens from mass crimes; the responsibility of the international community to assist states in fulfilling their primary obligations; and the responsibility of the international community to intervene in states where the citizens are in danger and governments have demonstrated incapacity to act appropriately, through coercive measures ranging from economic sanctions to military interventions.

In Africa, the continent was replete with all kinds of conflicts ranging from intra and inter-elite to inter-group and state versus-group conflicts. The Organisation of African Unity (OAU) introduced several reforms that moved it from its traditional paths. Since its rebranding from the OAU to the African Union (AU) in 2001, the AU shelved its non-interference posture and replaced it with the

responsibility to protect by making provisions for collective action in grave circumstances such as wars, genocide and crimes against humanity (Ibeike-Jonah 2022, p. 3). These implied that the imposed limitations on, and debarment of states from invoking the powers associated with sovereignty and territorial integrity, as the basis for acting arbitrarily and dictatorially (Ejitu & Ecoma, 2022).

However, the disparity in economic development among states has also imposed limitations on states' behaviour in the international system. Developed states have often deployed their economic advantages to elicit certain states' behaviours from Third World countries. Foreign aid and various policies of multilateral institutions have been deployed to achieve certain goals, including the reordering of states' objectives. Thus, Otor (2016, p. 133) opined that the debt crises of the 1980s created widespread economic problems across Third World countries, paving the way for intervention by the Bretton Woods institutions in their economies. The reform packages delivered to the Third World countries were meant to implement, specifically the structural adjustment programmes (SAP), which provided an opening for neoliberal entrance that facilitated globalisation (Offiong 2001, p. 17). The reforms, though hinged on certain conditionality, effectively compromised the independence of states with far-reaching consequences for evolving independent state objectives (Onah & Nyewusira 2006, p. 57).

However, there is a two-way link between domestic and external environmental factors in shaping and driving the path of state objectives. This means that state objectives are never formulated in isolation, as they must consider various factors, including public support, the international community's mood, the influence of neighbouring states' compliance or non-compliance with existing international treaties, and the views of other countries. This is crucial due to the growing overlap between national boundaries, which makes a state's internal affairs a concern for the international community. The international community's united stance against Colonel Gaddafi, the intervention in Mali, and the subsequent restoration of democratic rule in that country, as well as the ongoing interest in Syria's evolving revolution, illustrate the

internationalisation of domestic issues and the limits on a state's independence in setting its objectives.

Conclusion

There is no gainsaying that environmental variables are major determinants of state objectives. This is because states do not operate in isolation; the formulation of their objectives is a product of domestic and external environmental variables. A state's objectives are often hierarchised in the order of their importance and overall affinity with its national interest. States do not just set objectives for their sake but also to realise them. The realisation of state objectives in the international system is predicated on a state's overt and covert capability. A state's capability is synonymous with the power it wields both internally and externally. However, the power is wielded in a system comprising multiple states competing for interests. Thus, while environmental variables act as a lubricating framework in spawning state objectives, their realisation is a function of the national power of states. This is indicative of the fact that in the arena of international politics, environmental variables engender state objectives, but the realisation of the said objectives is embedded in the possession of national capability.

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