

NATIONAL INTEREST, TERMINOLOGY AND DIRECTIONS OF APPROACH

Ileana-Gentilia METEA

“Nicolae Bălcescu” Land Forces Academy, Sibiu, Romania
meteailiana@yahoo.de

Abstract: The “national interest” is a very actual, complex contemporary concept, yet still not sufficiently investigated. It is the final product of the activity of any legitimate government of any state, constantly and continuously materialized through its competent institutions and citizens, both inside the country’s borders, and abroad. For Romania, national interests represent the dominant, continuous and institutionalized ways in which the state relates to its national values.

Keywords: "national interest", independence, sovereignty

1. Introduction

This study is aimed at analysing the national interest from a paradigmatic point of view, and less to discover its new valences, which does not exclude the possibility of a perspective that could frame the aspects that generate a real interest in the current times, characterized by special challenges, with consequences for the development of the state-type actors (and not only), acting on the international stage.

2. Meanings of National Interest

The orientation of foreign policy is based on the concept of *national interest*. The term signifies the basic guideline of all actions that a state under takes in its external policy. At the same time, contrary to its frequent use, it is not a very clearly-defined concept. It would rather express the aspirations, which, need to be operationalized, in order for them to be applicable. Taking into consideration the valences attributed to it by political forces, according to their interests.

The constants by which it can be defined are the following: the level of *generality* – not all categories of interests can be

considered national, we could say that only those with a wider scope apply; the second constant can be considered *sustainability* – that excludes short-term interests, validating only those that have passed the test of time, not being altered by its passing, especially including the possibility that these interests are expressed in political practices, because otherwise, they remain at the level of utopian thinking. In what national interests are concerned, not only one but several interests are pursued, which, together can ensure security and prosperity, the good condition of a state-type actor.

“A national interest - says Samuel Huntington - is a public good that concerns everyone, or most citizens; a vital national interest is that interest for which they are willing to shed their blood and spend their wealth to defend it. National interests usually combine security with material concerns, on the one hand, and moral and ethical concerns, on the other”.

The interests included in the category of national interests represent the expression of the values characterised by tangible objectives, which the actor-state must achieve. After setting the objectives, the

means of achieving them are chosen, and, together with them, the effective ways in which they are to be achieved. This procedure is confirmed if the foreign policy initiative is launched by the concerned actor, but if it is a response to an initiative of another actor, which means that we are dealing with an external stimulus, the problem is that of finding an answer that would provide the highest fulfillment of its own national interest.

We classify interests into three categories:

- those of the fundamental values – *territorial integrity, independence, sovereignty* and other values that cannot be negotiated.
- those that can be negotiated even if they are important, for example *arms control* and / or *disarmament agreements*, within the limits of maintaining the initial balance.
- those that are frequently the subject of negotiations, such as *navigation rights* on the Danube and others. [1]

The wide range of exponents of the interests in question starts from the level of individual, groups, classes, parties, up to the level of the nation. In this regard, the correct relationship between reality and the way it is perceived is especially important. It is necessary to demonstrate that an interest, presented by the rulers as being of major importance, falling into the category of national interest, is further confirmed as such. The question is: how can a government ensure that the interpretation they give to the national interest is correct, relevant? This field does not offer certainty or, absolute truth. The national interest, as a sum of the opinions resulting from the political compromise, will most faithfully reflect the objective reality.

In concrete terms, reality demonstrates both the complementary, convergent relationship of interests and the non-convergent, even the conflicting relationship that must be settled through a series of measures and procedures, from the level of political-diplomatic negotiation, to war.

3. National Interest. Generated consequences National interest, a realistic perspective

The ambiguity of the meaning of the national interest has its origin in the frequency with which it is used, but especially in the contextual diversity in which it can be found. Analysing the concept of national interest from the perspective of international relations is one of the objectives of this study. We associate the notion of national interest with the realistic point of view found in the International Relations researches.

According to this realistic vision, the character of the international system is an anarchic one, presenting the states as main actors on the world stage, that act rationally in order to achieve their national interests. According to the nature of the international system, the survival and preservation of national security is the fundamental national interest of all states. Interest is therefore defined in terms of power, leading politics in a distinct direction, independently from economics, ethics, religion and other, and providing continuity to a state's foreign policy.

In the small and medium-sized states, including Romania, a reorientation of national interests could be observed in the period preceding their accession to NATO and the EU, as compared to the period following their accession. In what the great powers are concerned, the change was related to the events before and after September 11, 2001.

Thus, a 1996 paper [2] considered the following fundamental national interests of the United States: *preventing, combating, and reducing the threat of chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons in the United States, preventing the emergence of an opposing upper power in Europe or Asia; preventing the development of a great power hostile to US borders or in control of the oceans; preventing the collapse of one of the major global systems: trade, financial markets, energy supply or the*

environment; ensuring the survival of US allies.

From this perspective, it must be considered that all of the above mentioned serve, according to the realistic point of view, the primary interests of the United States of America, namely the preservation and guarantee of national security. They were designed in relation to the international security environment of that period, bearing the imprint of the end of the bipolar era, and the beginning of the increasingly important role played worldwide by the US as the main power pole. The document also includes other interests falling into the following categories: *vital interests, extremely important, important and secondary interests.*

Vital interests are those interests that are indispensable to the survival of the state and that guarantee the security of the nation. ***Extremely important interests*** are those that, if compromised, would seriously, but not permanently, affect the US government's stability to ensure the state's survival and the national security. This category includes: *prevention, deterrence and non-proliferation* anywhere in the world of biological and nuclear weapons; preventing the regional spread of nuclear, biological and chemical weapons and their transportation systems; promoting the acceptance of the rules of international law and the mechanisms for the peaceful settlement of disputes; preventing the rise of a regional hegemony in certain important region such as the Persian Gulf; protecting US friends and allies from significant external aggression, etc. Compromising important interests as such could have negative consequences for the US's ability to promote its vital national interests.

Important interests are considered to be: *discouraging the massive violation of human rights in other states as part of government policy; promoting political pluralism, freedom, democracy in countries with an important strategic position, as far as possible, without destabilizing them;*

preventing and ending conflicts in geographical areas of no strategic importance without incurring major costs, and other.

Secondary interests are preferable, but they do not bring major in put to the government' stability to secure the vital ones. The latter category of interests includes: *balancing bilateral trade deficits; expanding democracy too their parts of the globe; preserving the territorial integrity and the specific political system of other states, and others.* Thus, all categories of national interests, established by the US government, fall into the first category, that of vital national interests that have been defined by the realistic paradigm of international relations, as those of survival and security of the nation.

Furthermore, the case of the USA is characteristic of the third principle of political realism: *"Realism considers the key concept of interest defined in terms of power, but does not load it with a meaning fixed once and for all"* [3].

What remains constant is the idea of interest as the essence of politics, but the type of interest, its content, differs depending on the context. The US National Security Strategy (May 2010) mentions four national interests: *security* (of the United States, its citizens, allies and partners), *prosperity* (a strong, innovative and growing economy within an international economic system, promoting opportunity and prosperity), *values* (respect for universal values, domestically and in the world), the international order, supported by the USA, promoting peace, security and the opportunity for stronger cooperation to meet global challenges [4]. The Security Strategy notes that vital, very important, important and secondary interests overlap and together create the national interest, oriented towards, as it is conceived in terms of realism, the survival and security of the nation. Another element that conditions the actual content of the national interest is related to power. The definition is a

complex one in this case and involves taking into account several factors. One of them refers to the elements of national power (the sources of power of a state).

These include, according to most authors, *quantitative factors* (population, geography, natural resources, economic capacity, military capacity) and *qualitative factors* (general level of population training, level of technological development and research, type of government and its nature, democratic legitimacy, nature, size and structure of the alliance system, national will).

These factors together determine a certain level of power of a state, which influences the way it perceives, conceives and pursues its own national interests. Thus, the national interests of a state of the size of the USA or Russia, and those of other states such as Romania, Poland or Bulgaria will have as a common aspect the fact that they refer to the survival of the state and the guaranteeing of its security, but their actual content will be different, being thought in terms of power, related to the level of power of that state, the level of power it wants to maintain or acquire on the international stage and according to the tools it has at its disposal for achieving it. Therefore, when analyzing the national interests of a state, we must take into account: the general features of the international security environment; the power level of the state, the sources of power that can be identified in the case of that state; positioning the state on the geopolitical map of the world; the instruments of power that the state benefits from in order to be able to promote its interests internationally.

The conclusion that emerges is that the term “national interest” can be expressed in two ways. The first refers to the general, theoretical level of the implications of the analyzed concept, and hence the idea that the national interest means the need for survival and national security of a state. The second shows that the national interest does

not change in terms of time and space, but the content and the way it is expressed change as a result of the evolution of the international security environment, depending on the power resources of that state. Surviving and ensuring national security can mean different things in time and from state to state.

4. Other approaches to the concept of “national interest”

In the current context, the delimitation between the national interest and the public interest is necessary, as the “national interest” concept is frequently used in the political, administrative and academic environment. Definitions that are outside the scope of international relations theories are also considered useful and noteworthy. The term can also signify “*the preferences of decision-makers at top level*”, “*objectives which must refer to the general aims of society, which are perennial and of great importance which justifies their classification as national interests*” [5]. National interests serve to meet the psychological needs of a high standard of living, to weaken opponents, to conquer territories or reinforce the law. The concept of national interest is the expression of a broad vision, which also includes an internal dimension, not only the international one, in terms of the place that a state occupies on the world stage, among other international actors. In these paradigmatic examples, we can argue that the security and defense strategies developed by most states in the world refer, in essence, to national interests. Beyond this approach, there is a number of other national interests, which are treated as secondary in the documents dealing with security. This comprehensive view of national interest has its origins in the fact that the notion of state often designates a whole series of bureaucratic institutions and roles. Thus, the state-centered approach of international relations studies may disagree with that of internal policy. As a result, a

realistic approach could affirm that the state's interest in preserving territorial and political integrity is, and is supported by all social groups, although, in the case of international economic relations there is nuclear societal consensus on the term of "interest", because tariffs, exchange rates, foreign investment may be more convenient for some groups and less convenient for others [6].

Therefore, we cannot speak of national interest as an objective supported by all social groups of a state. Even the mentioned source supports this opinion. Analyzing national interests and the process of decision making in the US, Krasner states that the state has its own goals, which are pursued by the rulers, without them sharing unanimous views in making decisions. We rely on such things when we claim that the perspective on national interests may be different depending on the specialization of the person performing the analysis, which maybe of an economic, environmental, social training, or other orientation. Following the line of the pursued goal, we consider that the promotion of national interests has the same goal, that of obtaining and maintaining the survival of the state itself and of guaranteeing the national security.

Its scope is found in the very meaning of the term *security*, which is a multivalent one, covering multiple dimensions: economic, political, environmental, social, human, cultural: the survival of the state depends on the existence of a high degree of security, regardless of the perspective from which we approach the issue. This is the reason why we consider that this type of interests is subordinated to and assimilated by the primary national interests, and that their promotion, by means of instruments of power, contributes to the advancement of the first category of specified interests.

5. Conclusion

The problem of national interests, analyzed from a realistic point of view offers new perspectives regarding the relative power of the states within the international security system. In the hierarchy of interests, whether individual, local or group, national interests come first. In other words, for any servant of the state, a simple citizen or a public person, in any conditions, place and time, the national interest must prevail over all other interests. At the same time, precisely because of its importance, this concept, in all its dimensions, must be constantly reconsidered and reinterpreted, according to the contemporary reality.

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