



**THINK-TANK AND FOREIGN POLICY: A COMPARATIVE STUDY
OF THE NIGERIAN INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS
(NIIA) AND THE INSTITUTE OF STRATEGIC AND
INTERNATIONAL STUDIES (ISIS) MALAYSIA**

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Abstract:

Think tanks all over the globe have been known to play a pivotal role in the foreign policy formulation of their respective countries. This paper is a comparative study of Nigerian Institute of International Affairs (NIIA) and Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia and the paper seeks to address the following questions: What is think tank? What role Nigerian Institute of International Affairs and Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia play in foreign policy formulation in their respective countries? What are the constraints faced by these two think tanks in foreign policy formulation and how can these challenges be addressed? This is a desk research and it relies on secondary sources of data such as books, journals, newspapers and internet materials. The paper argues that both think tanks have provided expertise, informed opinion and advice to their respective countries and have also reflected the foreign policy corner stones of their respective countries. Both think tanks differed in terms of level of government interference and also faced finance and manpower problems. The paper recommends among others, improvement of financial base through seeking assistance from wealthy individuals and corporate organisations; collaboration with universities in order to address manpower shortage.

Keywords: think tanks, foreign policy, Nigerian Institute of International Affairs, Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia

1. Introduction

Think tanks are believed to be the “educated voice” representing the people in practices of government. They are fora for debate on contemporary issues of national and

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international policy-making (Singh, Sharma & Jha, 2014, p. 289). The term think tank was first used in the 1950s to refer to research contract organisations (such as the RAND Corporation) that were established by the United States military after the Second World War. By the 1960s, the term has gained popularity and it denotes many kinds of research groups (Denham & Garnett 1996).

For over a century, think tanks have sought to play a significant role in the formulation and execution of foreign policy (Roberts, 2015). The origin of think tanks dates back to 1831 when the first think tank that specialised in international affairs called Royal United Service Institution known today as Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Service was set-up by the Duke of Wellington as an independent professional body to study strategic and military issues (cited in Roberts, 2015). Since the end of the Second World War, there has been a proliferation of think tanks in the world (McGann 2005; Stone & Denham, 2004).

Cadier and Sus (2017) note that think tanks are often ignored in the analysis of foreign policy. However, the existing literature on think tanks, centres on a number of issues: conditions and modalities for the emergence of think tanks (El-Din, 2016; Drezner, 2015; Abelson, 2014; Zhu, & Xue, 2007); nature of funding (Stone 2000; Tanner, 2002); assessment and ranking (NEPC, 2014; Snider, 2009; Stone, 2007); their behaviour as communities of experts (Bedford & Hadar, 2014); roles and strategies of think tanks in the policy making process (Selee, 2013; Ball & Exley, 2010; Stone, 2007; McGann & Johnson, 2006; Parmar, 2002; Shambaugh, 2002; Smith, 1993) and the influence and impacts of think tanks on foreign policy (Cadier & Sus, 2017; Nicander, 2016; Ohemeng, 2015; Abelson, 2014; Van Efferink, 2012; Glasser, & Saunders, 2002; Denham & Garnett, 1996; Higgott & Stone, 1994; Lindquist, 1993).

Most of the studies on think tanks, particularly those that are comparative in nature tend to focus on Western and Asian countries (Cadier, & Sus, 2017; Rahbek-Clemmensen & Schmitt, 2017; Abb, 2015; McGann & Johnson, 2006; Braml, 2004; Parmar, 2004, 2002; Abelson & Carberry, 1998; Higgott & Stone, 1994). Thus, there is a paucity of a comparative study of African and Asian think tanks, this study intends to fill the lacuna in the literature and contributes to the body of literature on think tanks.

Accordingly, Nigeria and Malaysia's think tanks are the focus of our study and are among the top think tanks in their respective continents. For example, Nigeria's Institute of International Affairs (NIIA) occupies the twenty first spot in Sub-Saharan Africa while Malaysia's Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) sits comfortably in the sixth position in South-East Asia and the Pacific (McMann, 2019).

The choice of Nigeria and Malaysia is based on common colonial experiences. Both countries were colonised by Britain and belong to the Commonwealth of Nations (an international organisation predominantly dominated by ex-British colonies or territories). Malaysia became independent in 1957 while Nigeria got her independent in 1960. The two countries also shared similar social-cultural background, they are multi-ethnic and religious. For instance, Nigeria dominant ethnic groups are the Hausa-Fulani,

Igbo, and Yoruba, while Malaysia has the Malay, Chinese and India (Aleyomi & Abu Bakr, 2015).

This study is comparative in nature and it examines Nigeria Institute of International Affairs (NIIA) and the Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) of Malaysia. These two think tanks are the foremost in both countries in the area of international affairs or studies. The article seeks to compare the roles of both institutes and the constraints they faced in the foreign policy process. Hence, the paper addresses the following questions: What is a think tank? How does the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs and Institute of Strategic and International Studies Malaysia contribute to foreign policy process? What are the challenges facing both think tanks and how can these challenges be addressed?

The paper is divided into eight sections of which this introduction is a part. The second segment is a conceptual clarification which examines the two concepts that are germane to this discourse and they are think tank and foreign policy. The third part examines the relevance of think tank to foreign policy, the fourth section discusses the historical development of both NIIA and ISIS, the fifth part examines their roles in foreign policy process, the sixth segment takes a cursory look at constraints faced by both think tanks, the seventh segment is the comparison of both think tanks and the final section is the conclusion and recommendation

2. Conceptual Clarification

For the purpose of removing ambiguity, it is imperative to clarify the concepts used in this discourse and these concepts are think tank and foreign policy.

2.1 Think Tanks

The term think tank is difficult to define and there is no agreement among scholars and practitioners of international affairs as to its meaning and it has remained "*slippery and ambiguous*" (Kollner, 2011; Weaver & McGann, 2000; Stone, 1996). Nevertheless, think tanks can be defined as "*an organization that conducts research on policy issues and then makes its recommendations available to policymakers, opinion leaders, and the citizenry.*" (Talbot, 2007, p. 82)

Stone (2001) describes think tank as a policy research institutes concerned with examining a particular policy area or a broad range of policy issues and seeking to advise decision makers or inform public debate.

Similarly, Singh, et al. (2014) see think tank as "*a highly heterogeneous group that include universities, research centres, media and consultancies, semi-informal networks, NGOs and both internal and external policy research centres.*" (p. 292). This definition focuses on different categories of think tanks.

Rich (2004) defines think tank as "*independent, non-interest based, non-profit organisations and principally rely on expertise and ideas to obtain support and to influence the policy-making process*". For Hames and Feasey (cited in Denham & Garnett, 1998) define

think tank as “a non-profit public policy research institution with substantial organizational autonomy.” (p. 7). The definition is broad as it houses all policy research institutes. However, the definition reveals little or nothing about the nature and character of think tanks.

McGann and Weaver (2000) define think tank as, “... a policy research organization that has significant autonomy from government and from societal interests such as firms, interest groups, and political parties” (p. 5). While Rich (2004) defines think tanks as, “independent, non-interest-based, non-profit organizations that produce and principally rely on expertise and ideas to obtain support and to influence the policymaking process, (p. 11)

Think-Tanks have also been defined as relatively autonomous organizations engaged in the research and analysis of contemporary issues without excessive governmental and political parties’ influences. They are relatively autonomous but dependent on similar research institute and international organisations for funding. Funding may come from government, but they strive to maintain their research freedom. Thus, Think-Tanks attempt to influence or inform policy through intellectual arguments and analysis, rather than direct lobbying. It is an organization that conducts research and engages in advocacy in areas such as social policy, political strategy, economy, science or technology issues, economic policies and defence policy (Makanjuola, 2015). This definition is comprehensive in nature as it dwells on the autonomous status of the think tank, functions and types. However, it is difficult for think tanks to be entirely free or autonomous of government interference as he who pays the piper dictates the tune.

Ahmadu (2014) sees think tank as a public policy research, analysis and engagement institution that generates policy-oriented research analysis and advice on domestic and international issues. Think-tanks attempt to influence or inform policy through intellectual arguments and analysis rather than direct lobbying (Ahmadu, 2015). The definition highlights not only the different types of think tanks but also their functions. However, the definition fails to incorporate the autonomy status of the think tank.

McGann (2017) defines think tanks as:

“...public-policy research analysis and engagement organizations that generate policy-oriented research, analysis, and advice on domestic and international issues, thereby enabling policymakers and the public to make informed decisions about public policy. Think tanks may be affiliated or independent institutions that are structured as permanent bodies, not ad hoc commissions. These institutions often act as a bridge between the academic and policymaking communities and between states and civil society, serving in the public interest as independent voices that translate applied and basic research into a language that is understandable, reliable, and accessible for policymakers and the public.” (p.6)

The definition above is very broad as it comprises all the different policies oriented institutes whether those engaged in social policy, foreign policy, educational policy and

their status, whether permanent or ad hoc, independent or dependent, among others. It also highlighted the role of think tanks. Moreover, the definition fails to take into account the differences in the political systems and civil societies among nations (McGann, 2017). In contrast, Zhu & Xue (2007) argue that policy research institutes are not think tanks. For them, think tanks are organisations functioning as external brains of government but independent of government.

From the foregoing definitions, think tank can be described as a relatively autonomous policy research institute (be it public or private) that generate policy through research and advise the government on both national and international issues.

3. Typology of Think Tanks

The extant literature on think tanks has identified various types of think tanks (Ullrich, 2004; Abelson, 2002; McGann and Weaver, 2000; Sherrington, 2000; Weaver, 1989). These various think tanks include academic think tanks also known as a university without students, advocacy think tanks, contract think tank, party think tanks, policy enterprises and policy club (Kelstrup, 2016). We shall be concerned with three of the classifications, namely: academic, contract and advocacy think- tanks.

3.1 Academic Think Tank

An academic think tank also known as university without students is a think tank that is most likely to support or challenge existing policy. It strives for independence, which it believes can be accomplished through diversification of funding sources using corporations, individuals, and foundations to obtain the bulk of its financing. Academic think tanks by have financially autonomous had a strong conviction that they have the leverage to set their agendas. They attempt to be ideologically neutral and perceive the outcomes of their research to be of the entire human race (Elliot, Hicks & Finsel, 2005). Besides, they employ the methodology of science in their research and analysis of policy and their researchers are PhD holders and also publish their findings in high impact journals (Cadier & Sus, 2017).

3.2 Contract Think Tank

Like their academic counterpart, contract think tanks employ staff with strong academic backgrounds and also engage in research that is rigorous, objective and credible (McGann & Weaver, 2000). But they differ from academic think tanks in the areas of funding sources, agenda setting, the client, and outputs produce (Abelson, 2002; McGann & Weaver, 2000). They are financed by government agencies and their agendas are set by the financiers and their outputs which take the form of reports are submitted to the government agencies. In addition, they are the less scholarly focus, as their activities are directed at the public administration in the form of analyses and sometimes training (Cadier & Sus, 2017).

As stated above that the sponsors of the contract think tanks set the agenda for the think tank, this has both positive and negative impacts. The positive impact is that the outcomes of the research will have policy relevance and a negative impact is that the financier may try to influence the outcome of the study or stop it if the outcome does not favour it (McGann & Weaver, 2000). Examples of contract think-tanks in the United States are RAND and the Urban Institute.

3.3 Advocacy Think Tank

They seek to provide policymakers with an update information on current issues and market their ideas to a particular audience rather than being objective like the two preceding think- tanks discussed (Abelson, 2002). Similarly, Cadier and Sus (2017), note that advocacy think- tanks concentrates on promoting a particular idea, agenda or position and aim more to persuade than to inform. The staff of advocacy think tanks is non-academic and this category of the staff are not interested in basic research (McGann & Weaver, 2000). Besides, advocacy think tanks focus on short-term research that they can distribute to policymakers and the media in order to influence current policy as against future plan.

4. Foreign Policy

Like most concepts in social sciences, scholars and diplomats are divided as to the meaning of foreign policy. Indeed, Hermann (cited in Neack, 2008), refers to the term as “*a neglected concept*” and contends that the neglect has been responsible for the difficulties in understanding and explaining the concept.

Harun (2009) defines foreign policy as “*the policy of a sovereign state in its interactions with other sovereign states. It is a policy that a nation pursues in its dealings with other nations designed to fulfill its national objectives.*” (p. 25). This definition centres on state and an independent for that matters. It is the policy pursuit by these independent states in their interaction with each other that is termed foreign policy. The definition ignores other actors in the international system who also formulate guidelines in their interaction with each other.

Northedge (1968) defines foreign policy as an interplay between the outside and inside. Similarly, Akinboye (cited in Solomon, 2009) sees foreign policy as a dynamic process involving interaction between the domestic and external environment. Both definitions, see foreign policy as an interface between domestic and foreign environment. Put differently, foreign policy is an extension of domestic policy.

For Gibson (cited in Adnan, 2014), foreign policy is “*a well-rounded, comprehensive plan, based on knowledge and experience, for conducting the business of government with the rest of the world. It is aimed at promoting and protecting the interests of the nation.*” (p. 658).

Modelski (1962), defines foreign policy as, “*the system of activities evolved by communities for changing the behaviour of other states and for adjusting their own activities to the international environment*” (pp 6-7). This definition focuses on those aspects of policy

which sought to change the existing behaviour of states and ignores the behaviour of states at different times. For Frankel (1968), foreign policy “*consists of decisions and actions which involve to some appreciable extent relations between one state and others.*” (p. 1).

Foreign policy is “*a coordinated strategy with which institutionally designated decision-makers to seek to manipulate the international environment,*” to accomplish national goals (cited in Agbu & Emi, 2006, p. 40). It also refers to the actions of a state towards the external environment and the conditions under which those decisions are formulated (Agbu & Emi, 2006). This definition not only highlighted the course of actions taken by a state, but also the factors influencing such decisions. In other words, the domestic determinants of foreign policy. Foreign policy has also been defined as the actions and reaction of countries to the external environment. (Agbu & Emi, 2006, p. 40).

From the foregoing definitions, foreign policy can be described as the course of actions by an independent state in its relation with other states in the international system in order to protect its national interest.

4.1 Relevance of Think-Tanks to Foreign Policy

The think tanks influence policy through their impacts on public opinion and this is done through a number of ways. They discuss on radio and television and publication of research findings in reputable journals. Hence, through this means they are able to affect public perception of policy issues (Teitz, 2009).

Research and dissemination is another way by which think tank influence policy, through this means, they play a critical role in the formation of public opinion, indirectly influencing decision makers (Teitz, 2009).

Ideas are essential for policy and as Kuhn (cited in Teitz, 2009) has rightly observed: “*that paradigm will only be replaced when new ones have been found.*” (p. 482). This implies that existing theories can only be replaced based on a new information that disproves the previous theories. Therefore, policy research is a source of new ideas and a vital means to make them be heard and think tank generates ideas that are important to policy (McGann, 2007).

Think tanks are seen as the voice of the people in the art of governance because their findings are examined and implemented by the government in order to ensure satisfaction of the people and avoid negative impacts of policy (Singh, et al, 2014).

Think tanks provide a forum for interaction and discussion among professional within and among countries; defend the foreign policies of individual states; create awareness and set a policy agenda; engage in informal diplomacy and nurture future scholars and practitioners of international affairs (Köllner, 2011).

Wallace (cited in Denham & Garnett, 1998) identifies the role of think tanks as:

- 1) Information dissemination to a wider audience through publication, meetings, and discussion with a diverse group
- 2) Collecting and classifying of information relevant to policy covering detailed research to the provision of press reports and documents which can be used by government agencies in policy formulation

- 3) Scientific analysis of policy issues, using multiple approaches drawn from mathematics, social sciences, laws, history, applied to issues relevant to government
- 4) Seeking to influence government policy either directly or indirectly through engaging in discussion with appropriate Minister or government officials directly or through publications on the policy debate
- 5) Promoting ideas and concepts which stimulate policy and also examine and questioned the popular view on the day-to-day policymaking (p. 12)

Similarly, Mc-Gann and Weaver (2000) contend that think-tanks played the following roles in foreign policy process:

- 1) They engage in the intellectual and theoretical analysis of policy issues, ideas and concepts that underprop government policies and programmes
- 2) Think- tanks assist to create legitimacy for government policies if there is cooperation between them and political executive or appointees.
- 3) They serve as centres for recruitment of experts and technocrats for relevant government institutions.
- 4) Think-tanks not only collect, synthesize and create a range of information targeted at bureaucratic or political office holders but also for the benefit of the civil society group, general public, academic institutions and international actors.
- 5) They assist not in creating knowledge and political communication but also the effective application of the knowledge.
- 6) They generate ideas and pragmatic policy options for governments on economic, national and international issues.

5. Nigerian Institute of International Affairs and the Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS), Malaysia: An Overview

5.1 Nigerian Institute of International Affairs

The Nigerian Institute of International Affairs is the premier and foremost foreign affairs think tank in Nigeria. It was founded in 1961 and modelled after the Royal Institute of International Affairs, Chatham House, London. The NIIA was originally set up to be an independent body with financial assistance from the Federal Government of Nigeria. However, in 1971, the Federal Military Government of Nigeria, by Decree No.35 of 18 April 1971, established the institute as a corporate body to rid it of foreign influence (Oraka, 2015).

There are different accounts of the origin of Nigeria Institute International Affairs (NIIA). The first account indicated that the institute was initiated by some prominent Nigerians such as Sir Adetokubo Ademola, Professor Kenneth Dike, Dr R.A.B Diko, Chief Simeon Adebo, Sir Ibrahim Kashim and Sir Louis Mbanefo, who felt that there was need to establish a think tank in the country because of the expected role she was to play in Africa and the world at large because of her size, human and natural resources. These

eminent Nigerians came together and with the support of the then Prime Minister, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, the institute was established (Banjo, 1986).

Interestingly, the name Nigerian Institute of International Affairs was chosen out of the three names submitted for deliberation and discussion at a meeting convened by the then Chief Justice of Nigeria, Sir Adetokunbo Ademola, which was held in his Chamber. Other names proposed for the Institute were the Nigerian Institute of World Affairs and Nigerian Institute of International Studies (Banjo, 1986).

The second account stated that the idea to establish the NIIA was conceived at the All Nigerian Peoples Conference held in Lagos in 1961 where a Research Institute Committee was set-up by the conference and the committee recommended the establishment of an Institute of African and International Studies and this recommendation serve as a tonic for the Prime Minister to support the idea of setting up foreign affairs think tank (Tochukwu, 2014).

As stated above the Federal Government of Nigeria took over the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs with the promulgation of Decree No.35 of April 18, 1971 and the Act of 1971 that set-up the institute states its objectives as follows:

- a) To encourage and facilitate the understanding of international affairs and of the circumstances, conditions, and attitudes of foreign countries and their peoples;
- b) To provide and maintain means of information upon international questions and promote the study and investigation of international questions by means of conferences, lectures, and discussions, and by the preparation and publication of books, records, reports, or otherwise as may seem desirable to develop a body of informed opinion on world affairs;
- c) To establish contacts with other organizations with similar objects. To achieve the above objectives, the Institute is charged with promoting the scientific study of international politics, economics, and jurisprudence.

The Institute is also mandated to:

- 1) Provide such information to the Government of the Federation and members of the public as respects matters concerning international relations;
- 2) Provide facilities for training of Nigerian diplomats and personnel and those of other countries whose vocations relate to international affairs;
- 3) Promote and encourage the study of and research into all aspects of international affairs;
- 4) From time to time arrange international seminars and conferences on any matter relating to its objects;
- 5) Promote and undertake such other things and to carry out such other activities as may in the opinion of the Institute be deemed necessary for the attainment of the objects of the Institute (Cited in Wapmuk, 2019, pp118-119).

The Nigerian Institute of International Affairs has five research studies areas or divisions, namely: African politics and integration, security and strategic studies, International politics, International economic relations and International law and organisations. The Malaysian think tank is examined in the section that follows.

5.2 The Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS), Malaysia

The idea to establish the Institute of Strategic and International Studies was conceived during the administration of late Tun Hussein Onn (Tun Hussein, 2016). The Institute was set up on 8 April 1983 as an autonomous, non-profit research organization. It has a diverse research focus which, among others are: nation-building, economics, social policy, foreign policy, environmental studies, security studies, technology and innovation studies. It undertakes research in co-operation with both national and international organisations in areas such as international affairs and national development (ISIS, 2017).

The foremost think tank also engages in Track Two diplomacy and encourages the exchange of opinions at both national and international levels through discussion with leaders of thought and influential policymakers. It fosters regional and international cooperation through fora such as the ASEAN Institutes of Strategic and International Studies (ASEAN-ISIS), Asia-Pacific Roundtable, the Network of East Asia Think-Tanks (NEAT) and the Pacific Economic Cooperation Council (PECC) (ISIS, 2017). The institute focuses on foreign policy and security studies, economics, social policy and technology, innovation, environment and sustainability.

5.3 The Role of NIIA and ISIS in Foreign Policy Process. Nigerian Institute of International Affairs

The NIIA has played and continued to play a significant role in foreign policy formulation and as Folarin (2011) has noted, the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs (NIIA) was more important in the formulation of Nigeria's foreign policy than the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The NIIA plays these roles through a number of ways among which are the following:

The inclusion of the Director General of the Institute and some Researcher Officials from the Institute in Federal Government delegation to diplomatic mission such as the UNGA sessions and also the participation of Research Fellows in different inter-ministerial committee meetings organised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or Agencies to address specific foreign policy matter is an indication of the think tank involvement in the foreign policy formulation (Babatunde, 2012).

The NIIA through its technical role which is concerned with expertise advice, policy advocacy and policy science (scientific analysis of policy options) makes input into the foreign policy formulation. The Institute through the preparation of the policy paper commissioned by the government or its agencies for negotiation with other government or bodies serves as background information for such negotiation (Olusanya, 1990). Besides, the research staff of the institute teaches the foreign officers of the Foreign Service Academy (an arm of the Foreign Affairs Ministry) as part of its technical role or efforts of Nigerian foreign policy. Prior to the establishment of the Foreign Service Academy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Institute runs a nine-month post-graduate diploma course for the Foreign Service officials (Makanjuola, 2015).

Nigerian Institute of International Affairs also engages in foreign policy formulation through secondment of some of its staff to the presidency and government parastatals as well as serving on ad hoc basis or capacity in the foreign policy process (Agbu, 2000).

A corollary to this is the contribution of the NIIA's personnel to foreign policy formulation. The institute has produced individuals who played a pivotal role in Nigeria's foreign policy formulation. For instance, the pioneer Director-General of the institute, Dr Lawrence Fabunmi after completion of his tenure as Director-General went back to his duty post in the Foreign Affairs Ministry and served as Nigeria's High Commissioner or Ambassador to Zambia, Turkey, and Poland (Babatunde, 2012). While Professors Bolaji Akinyemi, Ibrahim Gambari and Joy Ogwu were former Directors - General of NIIA and also served as Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Nigeria. Professor George Obiozor and Professor Gabriel Olusanya were also former Directors-General of the NIIA who were also appointed as Ambassadors of Nigeria to Israel and United States, and France respectively.

In furtherance of the functions of the institute, one of which is to conduct research into all aspects of international affairs. The Nigerian Institute of International Affairs collects data on national and international questions for usage in its various activities and functions and these data are systematically collected to address international questions and matter. Thus, through this means, the Institute contributes to foreign policy process (Nwauba, 2014; Wapmuk, 2019.).

6. The Institute of Strategic and International Studies, Malaysia

The institute has conducted research and made concrete policy recommendations on a number of issues both local and international and some of these are:

- A Master plan to move the Malaysian economy towards knowledge-based sources of output growth;
- The conceptualisation of national vision statement;
- A strategic plan of action to capitalise on the rapid growth and development of a vibrant Southeast Asia emerging economy;
- Effective management and right-sizing of the public sector;
- Greater empowerment and revitalisation of national investment promotion agency and
- Strengthening of ASEAN institutions and co-operation processes (ISIS, 2012).

The institute organises the Asia-Pacific Roundtable conference annually, and this conference brings together security experts, policy makers and implementers to rub minds and exchange ideas and chart a new course as well as proffer solutions to prevailing security and other related matters confronting the sub-region. The APR has in the words of the Malaysia Prime Minister, "*made major contributions to policy discussions about the Asia-Pacific*" (Abdul Razak, 2016).

As highlighted above that the institute conducted research and made a policy recommendation, it prepared the National Interest Analysis to be undertaken on the Malaysia's participation in the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). The TPP is a free trade agreement linking the United States and 11 other Pacific Rim economies (Investopedia, 2017). It is a regional free trade agreement undertaken by Canada, New Zealand, Malaysia, Singapore, Australia, the United States, Brunei, Mexico, Vietnam, Chile, Peru, and Japan. And the negotiation was concluded in October 2015. According to National Interest Analysis, a document produced by the ISIS, the TPP offered the first layer of defence against rising protectionism in the way of non-tariff measures (The Star, 2015).

The Institute also contributed to vision 2020 concept. The vision 2020 is a blueprint that sets out how Malaysia would be transformed from her present developing status to a developed country by 2020. The vision is credited to Dr Mahathir, erstwhile Prime Minister. The vision 2020 (known in local parlance as Wawasan 2020) covers all aspects of life, political, social, economic, technology, spiritual and many others. In addition, the ISIS also served as a consultant to the Knowledge-Based Economy Master Plan initiatives (ISIS, 2016).

The institute provides expert advice and research inputs to the government when its services are required by it. For instance, when in 1986 the Malaysian government was confronted with the problem of whether to remain or quit the Commonwealth of Nations, the government commissioned the ISIS to examine the cost and benefit analysis of Malaysia continue membership of the organisation. Another body was also set-up to look into the matter and both reports recommended that Malaysia should remain a member of the organisation (Almeida & Wong, 2016).

7. The Constraint of NIIA and ISIS in Foreign Policy Process

7.1 The Nigerian Institute of International Affairs

One of the constraints of the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs, which has hindered its ability in influencing foreign policy formulation in Nigeria is inadequate finance. The NIIA is a public organisation which receives substantial funding from the Federal Government and a decline in Nigeria's revenue will definitely affect the budgetary allocation to the institute.

Also, bureaucratic bottlenecks within the government may affect the ease at which the institute gets its budgetary allocation and the implication of financial constraint is that the institute may be forced to cut its cloth according to its size, thereby limiting its operation due to her finance. Besides, the institute due to the financial problem has been forced to reduce its Research Fellows, thus, affecting research and general operation as well as its collaborative efforts with foreign institutions (Agwu cited in Nwauba, 2014).

Another challenge confronting the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs is the expansion in the landscape of foreign policy. In the contemporary world, the field of foreign of policy has become specialised as issues in relations between or among nations

have become complex. Hence, foreign policy formulation is characterised by the intricacies and complexity (Ade-Ibijola, 2012).

There is the challenge from similar institutions which the NIIA has to contend with. The institute has to operate in an environment in which it engages in competition with institutions such as the Nigerian Institute of Policy and Strategic Studies (NIPSS) Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research (NISER) and other think tanks for attention and resources from the government (Ogwu, 2005). This challenge from rival institutions poses threat to the dominant place of the institute in the area of foreign affairs

Leadership is another challenge of the institute. The institute has been plagued by a lack of rigorous academic and intellectual leadership in the field of international relations and foreign policy not only in the West African sub-region but also in Africa and this factor has been responsible for the declining foreign policy formulation for some time now (Ade-Ibijola, 2012).

The rivalry between the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs and Ministry of Foreign Affairs is yet another factor inhibiting the institute in its role of the foreign policy process. The ministry feels the institute is usurping its legitimate duties, and this is responsible for the cold relationship between them. The impact of this rivalry is that some of the policies recommended by the institute are rarely implemented by the Ministry. Put differently, the Ministry implements the nation's foreign policy with little inputs from the think tank (Ahamdu, 2014).

7.2 The Institute of Strategic and International Studies, Malaysia

One of the problems confronting think tanks in Malaysia and ISIS inclusive is finance. Like its Nigeria counterpart NIIA, ISIS relies on the government for financial support and patronage. Though it runs a consultancy service and has organisations that partnered with it in organizing some of its activities like earlier indicated the support of the Malaysian government in terms of financial support is very instrumental. Hence, the financial health of the institute will continue to fluctuate depending on the fortune of the Malaysian state. As Sundaram (2016) rightly observed, there has been a decline in government patronage of think tanks in the country and this might also affect the financial strength of the institute. The import of over-reliance on government as a major source of funding is that it may result in government interference in the research outcomes especially if such outcomes do not favour it.

A corollary to this, is the absence of the strong tradition of individual and corporate organizations, philanthropy gesture for non-profit and non-partisan think tank such as ISIS in the country, so the institute and other think tanks in the country rely on government and foreign non-governmental organisations for financial assistance (Mahadi & Kwa, 2016).

Sundaram (2016), in his insightful analysis of the difficulties faced by think tanks (ISIS inclusive) in terms of finance in Malaysia, notes that funding of think tanks are difficult and sometimes problematic and this stems from the combination of business models. According to him, a model aimed at promoting independent research and

independent research by its nature involves a medium or long-term issue, which is what nations need because they are concerned with enduring issues while funding by its nature is short term. As Sundaram rightly noted, developing a medium and long-term strategy to address these issues outside the university-based think tanks that are more long-term in orientation compared to others including ISIS is a problem.

Another problem or challenge of the ISIS is human capital or resources. There is the problem of attracting and retaining existing human capital, which is not peculiar to ISIS alone. As stated, it is a universal problem among corporate organisations. The absence of or inadequate personnel in a specialised discipline may affect some of the activities of the institute coupled with this is how to retain the existing ones so that they would not be snatched by others who may have a better welfare package.

The access to data is yet another challenge of ISIS. Charion (cited in Naufal, Yasmin & Lim, 2016) claims that obtaining access to data in the country is not easy. For him, data ensures that debates are informed by research as against opinion. The institute is a research institute and engages in a number of research activities for both the government and regional organisation either alone or in collaboration with local or foreign non-governmental organisation. For the think tank to be able to discharge its responsibility and conduct a reliable research that the findings will be credible and reliable, there is a need for reliable data and for data to be reliable, there must not be a hindrance to its accessibility. However, this is a Herculean task that the institute has to face. There is the issue of classified documents and where documents are not classified, they are either unavailable or those officials concerned are not willing to part with them. In case of the interview, some of the officials may be either unwilling to provide the necessary information that may be required by the researcher or make themselves unavailable for the research.

7.3 Comparison of Nigerian Institute of International Affairs and Institute of Strategic and International Studies, Malaysia

Both foreign think tanks have a diverse research focus. For instance, the ISIS focuses on foreign policy, security studies, social policy, economics, nation-building, environmental, technology, and innovation studies while the Nigeria Institute of International Affairs also has its areas of research African politics and integration, international law and organisations, security and strategic studies, international politics and international economic relations.

Moreover, both are public think tanks and created by their respective states. For instance, the Federal Military Government of Nigeria took over NIIA with the promulgation of Decree No.35 of 18th April 1971 while the Institute of Strategic and International Studies like its Nigeria counterpart is a public think tank funded by or closely connected with the state (Sundaram, 2016).

Both think tanks do not fit into the Anglo-American definition of think which see think tanks as non-profit, distinct from universities, the private sector, and the state.

Although both are autonomous and separated from universities but have close relations with their government in terms of funding.

Both think tanks have provided expertise, informed opinion and advice to their respective countries. For example, the Nigerian Institute of International affairs played a significant role in the process that led to the Nigerian government recognition of MPLA in 1975. In the same vein, the Institute of Strategic and International Studies, Malaysia played a pivotal role in Malaysia continue membership of the Commonwealth of Nations.

Though the world stage is their platform, both think tanks tend to reflect the foreign policy cornerstones of their respective countries. For instance, Nigerian Institute of International Affairs (NIIA) attaches importance to African politics and integration and this is because Africa is the centrepiece of Nigerian foreign policy. Likewise, the ISIS focuses on issues that centred on Southeast Africa because that part of the world is the cornerstone of the Malaysia foreign policy.

Nevertheless, both think tanks differ in some major areas. The Nigerian Institute of International Affairs is semi-autonomous organisation while the Institute of Strategic and International Studies is to a large extent autonomous. The NIIA is Nigerian government property as the government appoints its principal officers. For instance, the Director-General of the Institute is appointed by the government, the members of the Governing Board of the institute are appointed by the Federal Government and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is the overseeing Ministry in charge of the institute. In addition, the Federal Government of Nigeria is responsible for the bulk of the finance of the institute. Whereas, the Institute of Strategic and International Studies is autonomous and has diverse sources of funds apart from government. In other words, ISIS does not rely solely on the government for funds to finance its activities.

The Nigerian Institute of International Affairs also differs with the Institute of Strategic and International Studies in the area of interest or specialisation. To be specific, the NIIA concentrates on foreign issues or matters only while ISIS focuses both on domestic and foreign matters.

8. Conclusion and Recommendation

This paper has examined the role of think tanks in foreign policy with a focus on comparative study of two think- tanks whose area of speciality is foreign affairs and these two think- tanks are the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs and Institute of Strategic and International Studies, Malaysia. The study has shown that they both played significant roles in the foreign policy processes of their respective countries through their publications, conferences, seminars, advocacy, technical support, secondment of officials to foreign affairs ministries and policy advisor to government and many others. The study has also shown that the two think-tanks differed in a number of areas such as autonomy, scope or areas of interest and they shared common challenges like finance, manpower, accessibility of data and keeping pace with the global technological advancement.

8.1 Recommendation

Based on the problems identified in the study, the following are recommended as solutions or ways of addressing the problems:

- Both think-tanks should continue to diversify their financial base as relying on one source of revenue may hamper their activities. They should improve their financial base by seeking wealthy individuals, corporate, local and foreign non-governmental organisation support in financing their activities as relying solely on government to finance their activities will not be in their best interest.
- The issue of manpower could be addressed by collaborating with universities to identify experts in various fields required by the institutes and be recruited on part-time or full-time basis depending on the availability of resources of the institutes.
- Data should be made easily accessible to researchers as this will ensure credible findings or results. In this regard, a law should be enacted to make it a criminal offence for any official of the state who refuses to make available any document or information needed by a research which will assist in the outcome of the research. Moreover, all government ministries, agencies, extra-ministerial departments, corporate companies should be mandated to make available online vital data relating to their establishments or organisations.
- The world today has become a global village and think-tanks should be attuned with the development in technology if they do not want to be left behind in the scheme of things. To this end, they should be proactive for them to meet the demand for instant information. It is important to note that the ISIS is ahead of the NIIA in this regard. The ISIS has developed an online platform through the viewpoint series on YouTube, where researchers and analysts analyse contemporary issues. The platform affords scholars, policymakers and the public with different opinions to engage one another. The Nigerian Institute of International Affairs has a lesson to learn from the ISIS by establishing a similar platform to meet up with the digital age.

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