

Nigeria's External Affairs Relations: A Historical Discourse

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ABSTRACT

Nigeria as a sovereign State has been involved in many relations with other sovereign States across the world since independence. These relations are conceived within the context of our foreign policy. It is necessary to appraise the impact of Nigeria's foreign policy in relation with other States. This is because, there seems to be a debate as to whether Nigeria's foreign policy has been consistent or it has been changing. Our contention in this work is to highlight the consistency of Nigeria with foreign policies. Using the decision-making theory as our model of analysis, this paper posits that there has been consistency in Nigeria's external-affairs relations with other States and its focus is on Africa. And African issues are perceived to be germane. Although in our findings, there has been series of changes occasioned by different leadership which come and go with the imposition of their unique styles of leadership. This variation to a certain degree indicates lots of inconsistencies. This work therefore takes a historical discourse of the overall relations of Nigeria's external affairs and recommends that there is need to prevent a downward slide in Nigeria's external affairs relations with other States.

Keywords: *External affairs, foreign policy, relations, diplomacy.*

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria's external affairs relations is premised on our foreign policy thrust, which are expressed in the official pronouncements of the decision-making elite and embodied in our constitution. The ability of any State to formulate realistic foreign policy depends to a large extent, on some important factors which guide the States' actions in the international sphere. The indicators of such actions are based on the structure of the international system which usually manifests into the polarization of East and West, the geo-strategic position of the state, economic viability, military strength and the dynamics of foreign policy thrust. The summation of these factors determines the State's action and in-action in her external affairs relations. Added to the above is the degree of recognition and respect she attracts in the comity of nations, which literally is referred to as the foreign policy. Therefore foreign policy as posited by Frankel (1967), consists of decisions and actions which involve to some appreciable extent, relations between one State and another. To that extent, we can agree that foreign policy consists of two primary elements national objectives to be achieved and the means for achieving them. According to Pham (2007), the interaction between national goals and the resources for attaining them is the perennial subject of State craft. In essence, despite the uniformity of the ingredients of foreign policy of nations, there is a

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dynamic process involving the interaction between a country's internal and external environments. Therefore, this study is a historical discourse of Nigeria's external affairs relations as manifested by the various Nigeria's leaders. The problem of this work is that the consistency of Nigeria's foreign policy has grossly been affected by different leaderships in Nigeria. This is further exacerbated by the dominant years of praetorian leadership as various military leaders brought to bear on Nigeria's external affairs relations.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES IN NIGERIA 'S EXTERNAL AFFAIRS RELATIONS

Since attainment of nationhood, the guiding principles of Nigeria's foreign policy relations has been from the formative years, as was enunciated by Balewa, as follows:

- i Respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of other State;
- ii Non-interference in the internal affairs of other States;
- iii The promotion of functional cooperation among African States;
- iv Commitment to eradication of colonialism and racism on the Africa continent;
- v Membership and active participation in the commonwealth and the United Nations;
- and
- vi Non-alignment in her relationship with super-powers.

From 1960 to date, Nigeria has relatively maintained a consistent foreign policy. This, according to Olusanya and Akindele (1986) as cited in Alao (2011), are identified as five major principles influencing and guiding the conduct of our external relations;

- (a) non-alignment;
- (b) the legal equality of all States
- (c) non-interference in the domestic affairs of other States;
- (d) multilateral diplomacy; and
- (e) Afrocentrism.

This study adopts the decision-making theory, as the model of analysis. This theory is an offshoot of the behavioural revolution of the 1950's in the United States which arose consequent upon the inability of both the Realist and the Marxist paradigms to explain the incidences in foreign policy and the analysis thereof. According to Hilsman (1959), decision-making is as important as the beginning of the discipline of Political Science. This is because from the first time they tried to establish a separate discipline. Political scientists have sought to understand how decisions of government are made and by who. The first approach was analysis of the legal powers of the President and Congress. This was followed by the conceptualization of decision-making model of analyzing international politics which was put in better perspective with the assertion by Rosenau (1969) that:

It is one of our basic methodological choices to define the state as its official decision makers those whose authoritative acts are to all intents and purposes, the acts of the state. State action is the action of those acting in the name of the state. Hence, the state is its decision-makers.

According to Ezirim (2010), this approach of taking decisions on behalf of the State is hinged on three major factors: the internal which deals with the domestic politics, public opinion and the geographical location; the external setting which refers to conditions of decision makers of other States; and the decision-making process reactions of decision-

makers of other States; and the decision-making process which consists a sequence of activities carried on by members of a unit whose behaviour is determined by organizational variable, information variables and motivational factors. The above goes to show the extent to which the decision-making theory is important in reviewing the foreign policy of Nigeria. The internal setting, which is not conducive, makes it imperative that Nigeria's foreign policy decisions should seek to be *in tandem* with the external environment as the opinions, actions and reactions of the external setting play major roles on how foreign policy decisions are made in Nigeria.

The Balewa's Administration, 1960-1966

Balewa's pursuit of extreme conservative foreign policy and lack of vision was dictated by some factors, which imposed severe limits on possible radical posturing of Nigeria's political and economic alignment. In spite of Balewa's conservatism, Nigeria played leading role in the establishment of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1963 and the establishment of Lake Chad Basin Commission in 1964. Again, Balewa also signed some economic agreement with the Socialist Bloc; supported the liberation movements in their bid to attain independence (Idang, 1973).

The Ironsi's Regime, January - July, 1966

The Ironsi administration of January 1966-July, 1966, did not stay long enough to formulate any definite foreign policy. It was also preoccupied with the problem of domestic political instability. The Ironsi regime that took over the government eventually negotiated by politicians and top military brass was too short-lived to make any meaningful foreign policy for Nigeria (Ayele, 1976). Nonetheless, Ironsi ordered the closure of the regional offices overseas and also put an end to the practice whereby regions sent economic missions abroad.

The Gowon's Regime, 1966-1975

During the Gowon era, Nigeria's foreign policy took a dramatic turn. The government solicited military aid from her traditional friends to prosecute the war against the secessionist forces. The refusal by United Kingdom and the United States to sell arms to Nigeria forced Gowon to turn to the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR). This also marked the beginning of Nigeria's central role in African affairs, as was affirmed by Gowon himself in 1972 that "Africa was the cornerstone of Nigeria's foreign policy" (Akindele, 1996). In this dynamic foreign policy, this was translated into reality by Nigeria's direct assistance to liberation Movements and open support for armed struggle in the decolonization of African territories. Since 1970, Nigeria has consistently supported freedom fighters, and declared that there is no alternative to armed struggle and the use of force to liquidate colonialism in Africa (Akindele and Ete, 1994). In order to demonstrate Nigeria's commitment to foreign economic cooperation, she played a leading role in the creation of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in 1975.

The Mohammed/Obasanjo's Regime, 1975-1979

This regime pursued a policy of seeing Africa as the centerpiece of Nigerian diplomacy. The regime demonstrated more commitment towards a total eradication of colonialism and racism from the African continent. This new regime supported the MPLA in Angola

and the freedom fighters in other parts of Africa. Nigeria participated fully in the commonwealth Heads of State and Government Conference held in London in 1977; arranged a state visit to the United States for General Obasanjo in October 1977 and the U.S returned the Visit with President Jimmy Carter coming to Nigeria in April, 1978. In his address to the OAU summit in Khartoum, in 1978, Obasanjo also declared: "To the Soviets and their friends, I would like to say that, having been invited to Africa to assist in the liberation struggle and consolidation of national independence, they should not overstay their welcome" (Garba, 1991). To demonstrate that Nigeria was non-aligned to either the West or East, he condemned the presence of French troops in Chad and demanded their withdrawal.

The Shagari's Administration, 1979-1983

Nigeria's foreign policy objectives were restated in the 1979 constitution. This administration stressed the importance of Africa in Nigeria's foreign policy, as well as the enhancement of international cooperation for the consolidation of world peace. In consonance with these objectives, Shagari's administration described Mugabe's success in the Zimbabwe elections as a "victory for Africa and the third-World and impetus for total liberation of Africa" and promptly gave \$5 million grant to Mugabe's government (Garba, 1991). Shagari's government proposed and hosted the OAU economic Summit in Lagos, 1980. The Lagos Plan of Action emphasized the need to expand and promote closer economic relations at the intra-African level as a necessary step towards the eventual establishment of an African Economic Community (Obaze, 2009). That Administration also called for decade of reparation and restitution for Africa Nigeria's economic fortune, also sharply deteriorated during this administration, forcing Shagari to take some unpleasant decisions. For example, the Ghanaian Head of State, Flight Lt. Jerry Rawlings, described the aliens order as a "calculated plot against his government" (Iwelumo, 1983). Shagari's government, which wanted some IMF credit and guarantee, mellowed Nigeria's position on the United States' policy on Angola succumbed to the United States' pressure in 1983 and agreed that a Pan-African Peacekeeping Force should replace the Cuban Force in Angola. This was contrary to OAU's decision and those of the withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola with Namibia's independence, as was then demanded by United States.

The Buhari's Regime, 1984-1985

This administration which overthrew Shagari's government inherited a very weak economy and therefore was pressed by this economic situation to become more shrewd in its foreign policy operations. Despite this handicap, the new military Junta continued to support the liberation struggles in many parts of Africa (Ekpu, 1984). Before the emergence of Buhari, there had been a stalemate in the negotiations between Nigeria and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) over a loan of \$2billion.

The Babangida's Regime, 1985-1993

When, in 1985, Babangida succeeded Buhari as the Head of State, Buhari's regime had not made its impact before it was toppled (Ademiran, 2008). The immediate concern of the new regime was how to tackle Nigeria's depressed economy and liquidate the new

huge national foreign and domestic debts. Through it, Nigeria received more loans and debt rescheduling from western powers including United States, United Kingdom, Japan, France and Germany. For example, the Export Credit Guarantee Department (ECGD) rescheduled Nigeria's official British debt and gave 200 million pounds to Nigeria in July, 1987 (Nwachukwu, 1997). It was strongly felt that the strong presence in the nation's economy of international monetary institutions like the IMF, the World Bank, Paris Club, London Club, and others, was mainly to promote the interests of the west by creating credit line in their favour (Shagaya, 2003). During this period, Nigeria's tie with Israel was strengthened by the re-opening of diplomatic relations in May 1993 (Ifeadi, 2013). Under this regime, Nigeria's image was further boosted by the appointment of Joe Garba, President of the UN General Assembly and Emeka Anyaoku as the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth of nations. A major foreign policy initiative of the administration was the Technical Aid Corps Scheme (TACS), a programme whereby willing young Nigerian professionals were sent to serve in Africa, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries for a period of two years.

The Shonekan's Administration, 1993

Shonekan emerged as Nigeria's interim administrator, following the stepping aside of Gen. Ibrahim Babangida. This was due mainly to the annulment of June 12, 1993 Presidential election, the undemocratic circumstances that produced Shonekan as Nigeria's Head of State, coupled with the ever-increasing pressure from the Nigerian citizen, to agitate for the transfer of power to democratic rule, was ordinarily not going to allow for any significant review of Nigeria's foreign policy. Even though Nigeria needed to take appropriate steps to redefine her relations with other nations of the world (Mohammed, 1993).

The Abacha's Regime, 1993-1998

The advent of the Abacha's regime occurred at a time when Military rule had already lost its attraction in the world. The international community was already irrevocably committed to the promotion of democracy, particularly in Africa. The Abacha military junta was immediately confronted with widespread opposition. Severe sanctions were imposed on the government by several other governments to express their displeasure. Apart from the problem generated by the annulment of June 12 presidential election, several other decisions of the regime further distanced the international community from it. Among these were the gross abuse of human rights and brutality meted out to the opposition, the detention of Abiola, the winner of the June 12, 1993, Presidential election; the hanging of the minority rights and environmental activist Ken Saro Wiwa (Fayemi, 2005). The nation's airports were decertified allegedly because of drug trafficking, even though the government argued it was for political reasons. The regime reacted to this isolation with a radical shift in policy, which was manifested in the words of Abacha, "as the cultivation of new ties with countries that we consider not only friendly, but display honest desire to cooperate with us in pursuit of our development objectives" (Akintola, 2007). The exchanges of high level diplomatic visit between the two countries paved the way for the involvement of the Chinese in oil exploration, the refurbishment of the Nigerian Railway System, the dredging of the Calabar and Warri ports etc. In West Africa, Abacha continued Nigeria's commitment to the

peacemaking efforts of ECOMOG. These efforts were successful, as domestic political conflict in Liberia and Sierra Leone were resolved; even though Nigeria's moral authority waned considerably across the continent because of her military dictatorship.

The Abubakar's Regime, 1998-1999

With the death of Abacha, Abdulsalami Abubakar who succeeded him embarked upon a programme of national reconciliation. The key element in this was the immediate announcement of a nine-month transition programme, which led to the election of a democratically elected government (Badmus and Ogunmola, 2003). He released many political detainees and prisoners. He earnestly cultivated the goodwill of Nigeria's traditional allies. Like the US, Britain, Canada, the European Union and African Countries. The efforts of Abubakar to repair the damage brought by General Abacha to the nation's diplomacy and standing in the world were well appreciated. The international community opened its arms, once again to Nigeria. One after the other, sanctions was lifted. In West Africa, Abubakar pursued the peacemaking agenda of ECOWAS through the ECOMOG. His efforts yielded fruit in the resolution of the Sierra-Leonean conflict and the Military *Coup d'etat* in Guinea Bissau. On May 29, 1999 Abubakar bowed out honourably, having completed his transition programme.

The Obasanjo's Administration, 1999-2007

The election of Obasanjo, a retired General and former Military Head of State marked a historic point in Nigeria's political history. Obasanjo was warmly received internationally and the international community confirmed its support with offer of assistance and encouragement. The Obasanjo's Administration declared its intention to chart a new course for Nigeria (Adebajo and Mustapha, 2008). At the international level, Nigeria's foreign policy thrust is aimed at an African renaissance and a renewal of the Pan African spirit. Osita and Egomi (2009) state that Obasanjo promised strong supporters for Qaddafi-sponsored idea of United States of Africa encapsulated in the Sirte Declaration (Ifeadi, 2013). With the beginning of a new era in Nigeria and with the strong hope for the sustenance of democratic governance, Nigeria and Nigerians once again, started playing more active roles in an increasingly globalizing world, in the United Nations, African Union, ECOWAS and in Africa particularly (Ezirim, 2010).

The Yar'Adua's Administration, 2007-2010.

The election of Musa Yar'Adua, as the President of Nigeria, and his assumption of office actually gives further credence to the democratization process in Nigeria's fourth Republic. Immediately after assumption of office in 2007, the government adopted a new foreign policy which was christened "Citizen Diplomacy". However, it should be stressed that it was not a departure of our traditional posture of Africa as the centre-piece. However, the policy was rebranded to focus on the citizen (Bakare, 2007). It is believed that Nigeria will strive for a synergy between foreign policy and domestic affairs in such a way that the citizenry is the focus. In the views of another scholar, the basic trust of this new foreign policy initiative revolved around the socio-economic wellbeing of Nigerians in their relation with other States (Mbachu, 2007). It should however, be stressed that from 2007 till

2010, when it was terminated due to the demise of its chief initiator, President Yar' Adua, citizen diplomacy and the entire foreign policy drive of the administration, did not really change much (Ogunsawo, 2007).

The Jonathan Administration, 2010-2015

It is a fact that States seek to attain different goals and objectives in the process of governing their sovereign entities in their external affairs relations. Starting as acting President, Jonathan embarked on a number of diplomatic shuttles, which was to re-assure the international community that Nigeria was well and secure, despite her domestic challenges (Nnoma-Addison, 2010). The 1st effort to boost our inter-state relations was the return of Nigeria into the international arena by ensuring that with the support of USA, Nigeria was de-listed from the discriminatory rule of the department of Homeland security on special screening of passengers on international flights to the United States (Abati, 2012). Nigeria's external affairs relations with the United States under Jonathan administration continued to improve. This is most exemplified in the signing of the 1st U.S - Nigeria bi-national Commission, in April, 2010. This was aimed at establishing a mechanism for a sustained bilateral, high-level dialogue to promote and increase diplomatic, economic and security co-operation between the two States (Alao, 2011).

To sustain the foreign affairs legacy posture of the previous administration of late President Yar' Adua, of "Citizen Diplomacy" the Jonathan administration followed visible actions in this regard. The diplomatic way he managed the Nigeria- South Africa face-off was commendable. Shortly after his election as the president of Nigeria, he directed a review of Nigeria's foreign policy to reflect current realities. Globally, Nigeria under the Jonathan administration strives to deepen relationships with other States. This partnership must be anchored on mutual respect and responsiveness (Anyanwu and Uzoatu, 2011). Apart from keeping operations, the recent election of Nigeria as non-permanent member of the United Nations Security council is an expression of faith in Nigeria by the international community (Ikuomola, 2011). Finally, it should be buttressed here that the Boko Haram insurgency in the north-eastern part of Nigeria, has adversely affected the implementation of actions that would have been taken in Nigeria's foreign policy (Obijiofor, 2012).

The Buhari's Administration, 2015 - Date

The election of Buhari as president and under the platform of the All Progressive Congress (APC) further underlines Nigeria's democratic status in the comity of Nations. Though it is too early in the day to actually attempt a comprehensive assessment of Nigeria's foreign policy, but it is pertinent to point out here that with the security threat posed by the Boko Haram insurgency, the new administration has embarked upon diplomatic strides to cage the sect. Buhari's attempt at co-opting the member's States of the Lake Chad Basic Commission, who are also Nigeria north-east neighbours is in line with the aggressive posture defeating terrorism. Despite these early diplomatic shuttles, by the new APC Buhari led administration, it is the view of this paper that Boko Haram will be defeated and peace will surely return to Nigeria's North east region. In the aspect of corruption, which was his primary campaign promise, the present administration is taking pragmatic steps at reshaping the image of Nigeria that has being murdered on the altar of corruption by some harden

and heartless political office holders. Despite scores of criticism by the corrupt leaders themselves and other religious fanatics as well as other greedy sycophants, the fight against corruption the Buhari's administration is yielding good fruits.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study espoused Nigerian's foreign policy since independence. It notes that despite various forms of government which have come to operate in Nigeria's foreign policy drives, there have been semblance of continuity within the context of Africa. Without doubt, Africa has continued to be the centre piece of Nigeria's foreign policy. It is therefore the view of this work that Nigerian's foreign policy must be anchored within the context of our national goals. Presently, Nigeria is not duly implementing its foreign policy as expected. There has been a remarkable consistency in the underlying principles and objectives guiding the conduct of Nigeria and foreign operation since independence. The approach and orientations of each government have depended not only on the buoyancy or otherwise of the economy, but also on the perceptions of the various leaders. An assessment of all the successive governments-civilian and military-has been revealing. The military regimes tended to be more radical and dynamic, while the civilian governments were more conservative and bureaucratic in their approach. In spite of political instability, especially since 1966, and frequent changes of government, essential elements of Nigeria's foreign policy objectives and principles, enunciated since independence, have remained largely unchanged. As Nigeria enters the middle of the fifth decade of her independence under democratic rule, she should be in a position to take advantage of globalization and broaden her relations with other members of the international community.

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