



NIGERIA'S CONSOLIDATION OF FOREIGN POLICY DIRECTIVE IN WEST AFRICA: SOME MAJOR CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

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ABSTRACT: *This paper discusses the Nigerian foreign policy in the West African sub-region and the attendant challenges. It focuses on the nature of this policy which is basically Afrocentric. The paper as a result dwelt on the idealism of the policy itself as some scholars posit in terms of the relations between Nigeria and these countries in the sub-region. The paper adopts the descriptive research from library instruments and findings show that, issues involved are quite pervasive and problematic to the effective projection of the country's foreign policy in the sub-region. The examination of these issues, some of which are traceable to the country's domestic economic and political setting have become pertinent in order to reduce the seeming misunderstanding and mistrust of Nigeria's noble and progressive gesture towards her fellow African neighbors. The paper concludes that Nigerian foreign policy even in the West African Sub-region has been influenced by its African focus. This scenario inevitably conferred on the country, the status of a sub-regional leader in all ramifications. The paper recommends that the Nigerian authorities must regard and treat its West Africa neighbour as strategic. This has become important as it can be harnessed as a verifiable market for the country's goods and services to the reduction of outside rivals.*

KEYWORDS: Nigeria, Consolidation, Foreign Policy, Directive, Challenges, West Africa

INTRODUCTION

It is perhaps largely correct to state that the Nigerian Foreign Policy even in its immediate sub-region is substantially influenced by its African focus. There is no doubt that given the huge population of the country and its enormous resources endowment vis-à-vis its West African neighbors, it clearly dwarfs the rest in all ramification. However, while she has over the years, refrained from being domineering over its neighbors, it is doubtful if these her sub-regional neighbors appreciate the contentious challenges impacting on the country as a result of this status. This paper is a modest attempt to examine the issues arising from this scenario as they continuously impact on the country's external projections, especially in the West African Sub-regional terrain where it is located. In furtherance of this, conceptual clarification of foreign policy as the basis of our discussion will not be out of place. Secondly, it will be pertinent in view of the focus of this paper to discuss the country's Sub-regional foreign policy and the attendant challenges. Since there is a nexus between a country's domestic policies and its external projections, it becomes important to examine Nigeria's economic situation and its political leadership in relation to her sub-regional foreign policy. It has often been maintained by some scholars that even the Nigeria foreign policy in the West African Sub-region is highly idealistic in approach. Hence the need for a critical analysis of this assertion.



Conclusion will be logically drawn from our discussions and recommendations, accordingly proffered.

Conceptual Clarification

So far, there is no consensus among scholars as regards a universally acceptable definition of the term-foreign policy. As a result, several perspectives of the term have been offered on the meaning of this concept. Which is why Aluko (1981:1), doubted the possibility of any one being able to formulate a universally acceptable definition of the term. Northerge (1968:15), thus sees foreign policy as simply on interplay between the outside and the inside. In towing a similar position, Sai'd and Lerche Jr. (1979:32), state that the foreign policy of a state usually entails the general principles by which she conducts her projection to the international environment. From yet another dimension, Frankel (1963:17), observed that foreign policy is a dynamic process of interaction between the changing domestic demands and support and the corresponding changing external circumstances.

Moreso, this concept has been held to be a course of action undertaken by authority of a state and intended to affect situations beyond its domestic sphere of influence. (Marshall Burtun Charles in Strivastva 1995:2:3). Therefore, this term could thus be understood as a country's response to stimulus outside its boundaries. This, Gupta and Sachdeva (1993 -94:21), had appropriately described as an aggregate of decisions effected by a government in terms of its position with other states, including its postures in international Institutions and conferences. From this perspective, it is clear that the concept of foreign policy embodies a continuous mutuality of relations among states through various elements like diplomatic, military, trade, economic, socio-cultural and others. Hence the foreign policy of Nigeria could be understood from the point of advancing and achieving certain national objectives in her relations with other countries, especially with its sub regional neighbors.

For the purpose of this paper, it must be observed in view of our conceptualization above that there are always challenges in interstate relations. For instance, while the foreign policy of Nigeria towards her sub-regional neighbors has been correct and progressive, it is doubtful whether these neighbors has responded to this good gesture in equal measures. A re-appraisal in approach especially from the Nigeria side has become pertinent, while not jettisoning the principle of good neighborliness. This paper is thus an attempt to examine the issues involved. Like Omojuwa (2007), rightly intoned, while Nigeria dealt with her neighbors idealistically, they on the other hand tended to deal with Nigeria realistically.

Nigeria Sub-Regional Foreign Policy and Its Attendant Challenges

Over the years, emphasis on African as the cornerstone of Nigeria foreign policy has been the norm. In this respect Akiba (1997: 27 - 46), contends that there was no special interest in relation to the strategic importance of the West African sub-region. This, he maintained, was evidenced by the unflinching Commitment of the country's leaders to the continental organisation- the OAU organisation of Africa Unity, now A. U African Union, to which Nigeria was a founding member anyway. However, he observed that the event of the civil war, in addition to the role played by some of the neighbouring states, prompted the necessity for a sub-regional oriented foreign policy for Nigeria. For example, he posits, the country was clearly displeased by the recognition of Biafra by Cote'Dvoire as well as the use of Benin



Republic for a “**conduit pipe**” in the supply of ammunitions and relief materials to the Biafra Secessionists.

Consequent upon this development, the country began to show more enthusiasm in Sub-regional economic cooperation. Thus to Akiba (1997:51), this explains the desire of Nigeria to champion the formation of ECOWAS in West Africa Sub-region, propelled by certain fundamental factors. Prominent among these he said was the security concern of the country, following in the heels of the anti-Nigeria role played by France and some of her former colonial territories during the country’s Civil War. More so, her defacto recognition of Biafra he contends, motivated some of the Francophone West African states to recognise the Biafran secessionists. Specifically, Cote D’voire and Benin Republic were used as staging post for the supply of ammunition and relief materials to the Biafra, a situation he concludes, that created anxieties for post –civil war Nigeria.

In view of this, Nwokedi (1989:122-128), observed that the Nigeria’s leadership had perceived that the nation’s security would be at risk in a situation where virtually all her neighbors are let loose without an organization of some sort for cooperation and mutual benefits. In his opinion, one strategy for allaying this fear was getting friendly with France and providing an Institutional framework, not only to keep the Francophone countries together but also to draw the Anglophone countries closer to them. However, he noted that while Nigeria was effecting this, France was on the other hand cultivating a new anti-Nigeria disposition among the Francophone countries. An instance of this he noted, was during a tour of Africa by President Pompidou of France in February 1971, following the end of the Nigeria Civil War. He urged the Francophone Countries, apparently in view of the anticipated fall of Biafra, to harmonise their efforts to outmatch Nigeria’s economic political weight in the West African Sub-region. The formation of the CEAO, an Economic Community of the Seven Francophone countries in West Africa he argued, could be understood from this stand point. This was designed to check Nigeria’s heavy weight and her attempt to organize a larger economic grouping that could endanger French hegemony in the West African Sub-region.

Indeed, as some scholars have voiced, the challenges of Nigeria foreign policy in West Africa have their root in antiquity. In this regards, allusions have been made to issues like France over-bearing presence, its decisive influence on its former colonies in the West African Sub-region, and the continuous suspicion of Nigeria’s intentions and actions by the Francophone countries. The West African colonial experience actually saw to its balkanization into these major blocs of influence. These are the Anglophone, Francophone and Lusophone that has defined the characteristics of the sub-region. In the post –colonial period till the present, these Colonial blocs became entrenched along distinct political, cultural and economic lines. The Francophone bloc emerged with the highest numbers of states and these are nine. The Anglophone hold five and Lusophone, two. However, the Anglophone, which has Nigeria in its fold remains the most formidable in political, economic and demographic terms. In this connection, Omojuwa (2007:26a), posits that this is largely attributed to the presence of Nigeria in this bloc. He stressed that given its enormous resources and hence advantages over not only the francophone countries but all other countries combined, a strong perception of Nigeria as a “Hegemon” developed.

In consequent of this, Nigeria’s every move in the West African sub-region has consistently according to Olukoshi and Obi (1994:99), Lyons (1998:84), and Akindele and Akinterinwa (1992:241-242), been interpreted as a stride towards hegemonic dominance. However, this in



the contention of Omojuwa (2007:26b), is clearly a misconception which Nigeria has made efforts to address over the years, through its policy of good neighborliness. He argued that this misconception has persisted at various times, manifesting as fear and suspicion, thus serving to underline both the potency of colonial legacy measure and the ineffectiveness of Nigeria's policy measure. The practical consequence of this he maintained, underscores the kind of discomfort and rivalry with which several of these countries greeted the ECOMOG – ECOWAS monitoring group campaign by Nigeria in the 1990s.

It has equally been expressed by some scholars that this intra-regional rivalry is worsened by France continued dominance of the political, economic and military aspects of the national life of its former West African Colonies. In fact, in the words of Akiba (1986:62), Charlick (1994:121), and Wright (1983:108), the persistence of the rivalry and suspicion of Nigeria, harboured by the Francophone states in West Africa, coupled with the challenges of overcoming this problem overtime is traceable to France's machination. This formidable challenge posed by France to Nigeria's sub-regional policy is so much so that it has acquired recognition as the "real rival" as Mazrui (1995:92), would have us believe. The impact of this on Nigeria thus, is that it cannot formulate or implement any policy in the West African Sub-region without taking into account, the interest and possible reaction of France. This by implication he insisted, limits Nigeria to the status of a second – rate power in its own "backyard" and diminishes its sense of accomplishments.

Weak Economic Base and Poor Political Leadership

In spite of the aforementioned, by far according to Omojuwa (2007:27), the greatest constraint on Nigeria's sub-regional policy, even with its enormous resources and potentials, is its weak economic base and poor domestic political leadership and stability. Although the latter has been relatively addressed by the unbroken democratic dispensation from 1999 to date. These views nevertheless have found parallel in the position of yet some other analysts, who have variously labelled this situation. In this sense, Zatman (1995: A,114), sees it as "internal weakness and governmental incoherence". In the same vein, Obiozor (1994:16), was towing the same line in dubbing it "mismanagement of resources and leadership failure". Whatever the label, the crux of the matter, Omojuwa (2007:26c), succinctly stated, is that resources alone do not give power. This he informed, must be combined with a willingness to follow a systematic plan of action, coupled with the ability to exert influence on others.

However, to Wright (1983:107), Nigeria has proved unable to develop this ability over the years. Its economy he observed, remains mono-cultural with overwhelming dependence on oil which prices constantly fluctuates, while its industrial base remains not only light but terribly weak. In this perspective Gambari (1989:5), was to remark that the country's political leadership has failed to match the abundant human and physical resources with "entrepreneurship, unity integrity and vision". The consequences of this he summed up, has been serious domestic instability and incapacitation on the pursuit of foreign policy objectives.

For example, the lack of industrial capacity says Omojuwa (2007:26d), adversely affected and still affects the attainment of the goals of expanding regional trade in Nigeria industrial goods. As Akiba (1998:176), pointed out, most of the trade agreements signed with this aim in mind with countries in the Sub-region between 1973 – 1979 have either been suspended or cancelled by prospective consumers because Nigerian industries have not been meeting up with expected supplies of goods. Therefore, the implication yet again, to Omojuwa (2007:26e), is that despite,



new realities in the international arena, Nigeria's policy of economic diplomacy could not promote the country's interest in West Africa, due to lack of necessary economic platform. This explains in his view, why several decades after Nigeria's independence, its enormous resources are still seen basically as conferring potentials as opposed to actual capabilities on it. It is hardly surprising then he pursued, that political and security issues continue to overwhelm Nigeria's foreign policy in West Africa. This is exemplified in its pre-occupation with ECOMOG and its campaigns in the 1990's. To Omojuwa, (2001), this remains the only area left in the circumstances for the country to make some impact.

The demonstration effect of the European Economic Community (EEC) has also been alluded to as influencing Nigeria's designs in West Africa. The EEC it has been argued, was considered a model by Nigeria to emulate. The EEC already constitute major outlets for Nigeria's exports. Here, it was felt that if only an equivalent of it was set up in the West African Sub-region, it would remove the potential dangers of the EEC becoming the dominant market for Nigeria goods. Nigeria therefore, it was held, found it expedient to persuade the other West African states to establish a regional economic body that is equivalent to the EEC. In spite of these motivating factors that influenced Nigerians desire to champion the formation of a Sub-regional economic organisation in West Africa, it was equally contended that even within the country, there was a groundswell of opposition to this idea. The opposing group's argument according to Akiba (1997:57), was anchored on the neo-colonial theory that integration among developing states would not yield welfare gains. He noted also that integration in this perspective might aggravate rather than reduce economic dependence on Europe. It was thus strongly argued that Nigeria's intra-regional trade which was then quite insignificant, would not be significantly improved upon as a result of integration, since the economics to be involved are competitive and not complimentary.

On this same vein, Jibrin (2004: xxxi), was to affirm that Nigeria on the sub-regional level, opened up her border to her neighbors thus promoting good neighborliness. The spill over effect of this he pointed out, is the strengthening of her position among the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). The enduring policy of such movement of citizens, goods and services within ECOWAS has in his opinion, made it possible for the exports of Nigeria's relatively low prized locally manufactured goods across West Africa. This Sub-region is of great disparity in terms of size, population and resources endowment of the countries within it. This scenario in the words of Omojuwa (2007:16), becomes significant in the sense that it almost solely, stands Nigeria out from the pack and defines for it, the foreign policies and postures it has assumed both inside the Sub-region, and the African continent as a whole. To a great extent he pursued, it also conditions the relationship between Nigeria and other countries in the West Africa Sub-region.

While Nigeria is certainly not the largest physically in the West African Sub-region, She according to (Ezenwa 1994:32), accounts for 60% of the Sub-regions populations, about 70% of its GDP Gross National Product and exports and 55% of the manufacturing industries. In addition to the afore mentioned, Omojuwa (2007:16b), is of the view that Nigeria until recently is the only crude oil producing nation in the zone, and thus have the added advantage of petrodollars. (This monopoly has however been challenged with the coming on board of new petroleum nations like Ghana, Niger Republic, Cameroun and Chad). It is no wonder he mused, that many analysts and key observers of the Sub-region have dressed Nigeria in various garbs. Instances of these are "primus inter pares", "giant," "regional power", "regional hegemon (Mazrui 1995: 91), Shepard (1991:142), Ihonvbere and shaw (1998: xxxiii), (Wright



1998:85) and (Diplomacy in Action 2011:9). It is also no wonder Omojuwa (2007:16c), continued, that Nigeria has constantly perceived (as well as it has perceived itself), over the years, in terms of her leadership and influential role especially in the Sub-region.

Apparently alluding to this, Kraus (1994:259), has argued thus “It is Nigeria, a giant among Lilliputians in West Africa that is destined to exert power and influence in West Africa and beyond. In the light of the size, its roughly 118 Million populations (now about 150 Million), its past and perhaps future oil riches”. Nigeria, Omojuwa (2007:16d), maintained, has indeed been exerting this power and influence in West Africa over the year.

Nigeria’s foreign policy in West Africa it would seem, actually took its bearing from its general African focus. On this note, Omojuwa (2007:19), has hinted that for the period immediately following its independence, that is from 1960 -1970 no special attention was given to the West Africa Sub-region. The Sub-region he enthuses, featured only as part of Nigeria Intra African diplomacy. Indeed, in opposition to Ghana’s president Kwame Nkrumah’s drive for immediate Continental Union, Wright (1998:195), informed that Nigeria has argued for gradualist approach to be constructed on a Sub-regional bloc on the basis of economic cooperation. There was obviously nothing more to this posture he said, beyond the need of the Nigerian government as it were to “counter balance” President Nkrumah as no vigorous efforts were effected to translate this into policy actions. Nigeria, it was held, no doubt, entered into cooperation relations with some of the countries in the sub-region. But these were only as extension of its general Afrocentric foreign policy posture. There was no expression of a special recognition that the sub-region constituted its immediate sub-zone of influence or interest.

Idealism and Nigeria’s Foreign Policy in the West Africa Sub-Region

In the perspective of Akindele and Akinteriwa (1992:250), a consequence of idealism of Nigeria foreign policy in West Africa was manifested in Nigeria, reneging on its EWOWAS treating obligations by ordering massive expulsions of immigrants from other West Africa Countries in 1985 and 1993. The entry of these people into Nigeria was in their view, facilitated in the first place by ECOWAS treaty provisions allowing free movement of people and goods across national borders of the sub-region. So, if as Omojuwa (2007:22), noted, the overwhelming attributes which set Nigeria apart from its West Africa neighbors did not seem to have achieved much both for Nigeria and the Sub-region, it is due to the fact that the whole foreign policy pursued was still dominated more by ideology. This, according to him was the background against which Nigeria emerged especially in the 1990’s following the demise of the cold war era.

The country’s foreign policy in West Africa, especially in the 1990s was in the view of Omojuwa (2007:23), logically expected to take the new reality into consideration. The general redefinition away from political to economic concerns he noted, should normally have guided Nigeria’s West Africa policy. The pre-occupation with structural reforms domestically, and debt rescheduling, attraction of new loans and investment at the extra African level he stressed, should have been ideally complimented by a new drive for economic integration, inclined to trade at the Sub-regional level. The country, he added, made efforts in this direction through the usual ECOWAS resolutions and protocols which however remained largely unimplemented. As it was in the past, its efforts he surmised, were over-whelmed once more by political and security pre-occupations. Nothing seems to have changed. Rather, Nigeria’s



West Africa policy came to be known more in his observation, for its military than economic endeavours.

As has been pointed out, all that was required to manifest this military ventures by Nigeria, was a domestic rebellion by Mr Charles Taylor of Liberia against the government of the time in his country. The enormous toll on human lives and property it was observed, prompted the Nigerian government to lead in the formation of a peace keeping or intervention force under the aegis of the Sub-region's organization – ECOWAS Monitoring group (ECOMOG) . From the very beginning of this force in 1996, following its launching, it was held that it become a dominant issue in intra-West African region. It divided instead of uniting the countries of the Sub-region. This polarity it was stressed, largely, but not totally coincided with the long established historical division of the Sub-region –reminiscent of the colonial mainly Anglophone and Francophone blocs. Nigeria, being Anglophone, it was maintained, succeeded in rallying the Anglophone bloc and two or three countries of the Francophone behind it. The fact it was hinted, is that the Francophone constituted the largest bloc, having nine out of the sixteen countries in the sub-region, which meant that Nigeria, was clearly carrying the minority. Two of these countries Cote D'voire and Bokina Faso, were as a result, said to be openly hostile to Nigerian's initiative. To complicate matters, the Liberia crises became prolonged than anticipated and was not to be resolved until 1997, when Charles Taylor himself was democratically elected the President of Liberia. Thus, the Liberia crises it was held, translated into crises for Nigeria's foreign policy. As the Crises dragged on, it became clear that Nigeria has taken a challenge it was militarily and economically illprepared for (Omojuwa 2007:24).

CONCLUSION AND PROSPECTS

The discussion in this paper showed that the Nigerian foreign policy even in the West African Sub-region has been influenced by its African focus. This scenario inevitably conferred on the country, the status of a sub-regional leader in all ramifications. However, as the paper demonstrated, this situation also attracted enormous burdens that has tended to blur the clear vision of the country's foreign policy in the Sub-region. Admittedly, Nigeria's foreign policy in the West African Sub-region engendered good neighborliness. In view of its Afrocentric posture, coupled with the enormous economic endowment she is gifted with vis-à-vis other countries in the Sub-region, restraining from a domineering posture has been upheld by the country, yet Nigeria's harmless and progressive gestures have been largely misunderstood by most of her Sub-regional neighbors.

The French British dichotomy, arising from colonial experience of these countries seem to have worsen the situation. Hence some scholars have largely described Nigeria's foreign policy in the West Africa region as idealistic. Therefore, it is the submission of this paper that whilst Nigeria's foreign policy in the West African Sub-region, is tailored to fit into its African focus which accommodates peaceful designs and intra-African cooperation, there is no doubt that the country has encountered numerous challenges at every turn. As an undisputed leader in the Sub-region it thus appears this is the cross Nigeria has to bear for a while.

In view of the discussions and Conclusions of this paper, the following prospects and recommendations are proffered:



The Afrocentric posture of Nigerian's foreign policy in West Africa is in order but this should be refocused for the national interest of the country while not abandoning the philosophy behind it. The Nigerian authorities must regard and treat its West Africa neighbour as strategic. This has become important as it can be harnessed as a verifiable market for the country's goods and services to the reduction of outside rivals.

Closely related to the above, Nigerian's special interest in the West African sub-region must be strengthened especially in view of the need to harmonize their military strategies for the reduction of terrorism currently ravaging the North East of the country and the Sub-region. There is a nexus between the domestic situation of a country and its external projection. In this sense, the light and weak economic base of Nigeria's industries must be improved upon to effectively have a strong foot hold on the West African sub- region to strengthen her export capacity for the mutual interest of Nigeria and her neighbors.

Given the relative political stability in Nigeria in terms of its democracy, the country must leverage on this setting by consistently adhering to a systematic plan of action in its Sub-region's foreign policy to exert influence on other states without scaring them.

Since Nigeria is not only the producer of oil in the Sub-region, she must intensify her effort to develop other sectors of the economy with the West Africa Sub-region in focus and beyond to the rest of the world. The recent incursions of the country's domestic airlines into Conakry, Ahidian, and Dakar, in addition to the existing routes is a welcome development. This will further cement the co-existence of West African countries in several dimensions.

In view of the current post-cold war era and globalization, Nigeria must intensify her economic diplomacy with its West African neighbors.

Indeed, the Nigerian West African foreign policy is highly idealistic as several scholars has averred. A much more realistic posture that take into account, the present global realities must be adopted for the interest of Nigeria and then, her West African neighbors.

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