



NIGERIA'S AFROCENTRIC FOREIGN POLICY IN A GLOBALIZED WORLD: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT: *Nigeria's Afrocentric foreign policy in a globalized world x-rays the country's external projections in this context from independence to date. This phenomenon is quite consistent a pattern from the 1960 to present albeit some slight modifications. In view of its continuous relevance, this paper attempt to examine the basic issues involved. To this end, a conceptual clarification of the term foreign policy was discussed. Relative to this are issues that were examined within the context of a globalized world. Flowing from this analysis is the perception of Nigeria as a national leader in Africa, hence the presentation of its various dimensions. Conclusion was accordingly drawn and recommendations proffered for a clearer appreciation by the relevant authorities, policy makers and students to enable a more progressive realization of the country's national interest in the international arena, especially in relation to its African focus.*

KEYWORDS: Afrocentric, Foreign Policy, Globalized World, Policy Makers, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

A cursory look at Nigeria's external relations with other African Nations since her independence in 1960, would seem to reveal a consistent pattern. This is reflected in the legacy at independence that has fundamentally continued to affect the pattern of this relationship which continues to date. In summary, the Afrocentric focus in this perspective is based on three basic rubrics thus, the concept that Nigeria is an African Nation, it is part and parcel of the continent of Africa, and therefore, it is so completely involved in anything that pertains to the continent that it cannot be neutral. This paper is thus an attempt to examine this phenomenon in view of its continuous relevance to the country's external projections within the context of the present globalized world. With this in view, a conceptual clarification of foreign policy generally, will be accordingly given its pride of place in this paper. The country's Afrocentric foreign policy is pivotal to the level of analysis in this paper, hence will be accorded its due focus. Relative to this is the perception of Nigerian leadership status in Africa and this will be appropriately examined. Conclusion will be drawn in the final analysis, and recommendations proffered to the relevant authorities and policy makers, for the mitigation of challenges arising in the course of implementing this policy for the country's national interest.

Conceptual Elucidation

Foreign policy is a term in international relations that has so far defied a universally acceptable definition. As a result, several attempts have been made by scholars to offer a seemingly generally acceptable definition of the term. But as contended by Aluko (1981:1),



none has been able to formulate a universally acceptable definition of the concept and doubt if anyone will ever succeed in doing so. To Northerge (1968:15), however, foreign policy is “simply an inter-play between the outside and the inside”. Sai’d and Lerche Jr. (1979-32), seem to tow a similar position in stating that the foreign policy of a state usually refers to the general principles by which a state conducts its projection to the international environment. Again, it must be noted that the concept of foreign policy is dynamic. In this perspective, Frankel (1963:17), had observed that foreign policy is a dynamic process of interaction between the changing domestic demands and support and the corresponding changing external circumstances. He also subsequently presented the concept as consisting of decisions and actors involving to some appreciable level, relations between one state and another (Frankel 1975:9).

Foreign policy therefore, could be seen as a country’s response to varied stimulus from outside its shores. Stated otherwise, an aggregate of decisions effected by a government according to Gupta and Sachdeva (1993 – 94:21), regarding a state position vis-a-vis other states and its posture in international Institutions and conferences. This concept also denotes a course of action undertaken by authority of the state and intended to affect situations beyond the span of its jurisdiction (Charles 1995:2:3). The concept of foreign policy thus embodies an ever present mutuality of relations among states, through various elements like diplomatic, military, trade, economic social, cultural and so on and so forth. Thus, the foreign policy of Nigeria could be understood from the prism of advancing and achieving certain national objectives in her intercourse with other countries, especially her African focus in view of the discussion in this paper.

NIGERIAN AFROCENTRIC FOREIGN POLICY IN A GLOBALIZED WORLD

Nigerian foreign policy as it is, could be said to be guided by a commitment to several broad principles reflective of the African region as her focal point and beyond to the rest of the world. Ihonvbere (2004), alluded much to this historical transformation of Nigerian foreign policy spanning through successive administrations from the first Republic at independence in 1960 to date. All through he maintained, the issue of Africa being the centre piece of Nigerian’s foreign policy is dominant albeit with some adjustments, a scenario itself that has been described by Atoyebi (2004:7), as continuity and change. Yet on this same vein, Jibrin (2004), did express that the Nigerian foreign policy has been and still remains African oriented, but with some shifting in response to the ever present dynamics in global events.

In perspective, these had been the resonating views as regards the Nigerian foreign policy, encapsulated in the often quoted “Balewa Doctrine” at the United Nations (UN) October 7th 1960 and in the Nigerian parliament as recaptured below in Gbor (2004:77-78).

(1) the promotion of the national interest of the Federation and Its citizens (2) friendship and cooperation with all nations which Recognize and respect Nigerian’s sovereignty (3) non-alignment with any power blocs (4) assistance to African states in search of solution to their problems and the encouragement of the development of common ties among African states (5) respect for the



*sovereignty equality of nations as well as non-intervention
in the internal affairs of others.*

The above is quite in conformity with the well-established principles of the country's foreign relations especially in her African focus. With this in mind, Nigeria rendered countless assistance to sister African countries, many of which did not seem to appreciate the country's gesture which is why Odofin (2005:20), cautioned for a rethink and a re-appraisal on the role of Nigeria in Africa. To him therefore, the notion that what happens in other African countries affects Nigeria is a fallacy. He observed that under this premise, Nigeria has assumed responsibility for the mismanagement and wastage of others. He does conclude that since foreign policy is indeed an extension of domestic policies of a country, Nigeria's aid to other African countries should be tied to both economic and political gains for Nigerians.

Nevertheless, this Afrocentric outlook of Nigeria foreign policy has also been clearly enunciated in the various Nigeria constitutions. For instance, section 19 of the 1979 Nigeria Constitution and section 20 of the 1989 Nigeria Constitution lucidly enacted the basic objectives of the Nigeria foreign policy under the fundamental objectives and directives principles of state policy as follows:

*The State shall promote Africa unity as well as total
political Economic social and cultural liberation of
Africa and all other forms of international
cooperation conducive for the consideration of
universal peace...*

In retrospect therefore, it would be seen that all the constitutions from the 1979, 1989 to 1999, harbour and promote same foreign policy objectives. In view of this line of thought, the various regimes in Nigeria, be they civilian or military have been guided in their foreign policy, basically as it conforms to this well-established principles and charter of the African Union AU), among which is the commitment to functional approach as a means of promoting cooperation and peaceful co-existence in Africa.

However, it has been held that in a rapidly changing world of the post – cold war order, characterised by the emergence of regional economic blocks, globalization and new patterns of security and strategic thinking, there is sadly, a growing consensus that Africa constitute the weak link in the global chain (Obiozor 1995:5). He enthused that the continent is home to the world's most devastating Civil wars which themselves are the retrogressive inheritance of colonial balkanization and cold war rivalry of the twentieth century. Africa he reasoned, reels under the impact of pervasive and deep-seated economic crises whose effects have been further worsened by failed imposed economic dislocations accompanying the democratic struggles on the continent. This uninspiring image of Africa is so much so he stated, that in some quarters, questions have been openly asked as to the viability of some African States and in fact justifying calls for the re-introduction of a new trusteeship system to takeover these "failed states".

While Africa admittedly was held to be in the throes of massive crises, it should be emphasized that under no circumstances must this scenario be seen in isolation of the present disproportionate distribution of political and economic power on a global scale. A power reaction it was held, in which Africa's resources are ruthlessly exploited, and in which



Africa's commodities are discriminated against by all forms of tariffs and low pricing. This is also in the context in which African economies, ravaged by colonial plunder and neo-colonial exploitation, are still held down by new forms of adjustment which enrich people outside of Africa while improving Africans. It is therefore clear that the present marginalization of Africa politically and security wise in the emerging post-cold war order is the outcome of history and an inequitable distribution of power on a global scale.

In the opinion of Obiozor (1996:56) this scenario should define the context for discussing the articulation and projection of Nigeria's interest and power in Africa. In view of her large population and enormous material resources, Nigeria, he argued is Africa's giant by all definitions. He recalled that this reality was recognised very early by Nigeria founding fathers. Hence it was concretely entrenched in the country's foreign policy in the 1970's when it was articulated that Africa is the centrepiece of Nigeria's foreign policy. Nigeria, from this perspective was indeed in the forefront of the decolonization process in the continent. It lends tremendous material and financial support to the various liberation struggles. Nigeria was in the forefront for the demise of Apartheid in South Africa and provided material and financial support to Sister African states in demonstration of her keen interest for the economic wellbeing and maintenance of peace in the continent and the world at large.

Perception of Nigeria's Natural Leadership in Africa

In view of the accolades that have been bestowed on Nigeria in her Afrocentric posture, Akintola (2011:361), was to observe that the country's external relations can also be viewed through the lens of her perceived role as the "natural leader" of Africa. This assertion is apparently fostered by the relative advantage of size, population and resources Nigeria is endowed with vis-a-vis other countries in Africa. To this end Otubanjo (1998:6), quoting the times of London expressed that:

Nigerians justifiably see themselves as the giant of Africa. It is the one element they are agreed upon. And they are now seeking to use their oil and emerging industrial muscle to influence opinion and guide events. It is Nigeria's foreign policy, more than that of any other black Africa country, that must determine Africa's collective future. Nigeria is determined not just to play her national leadership role in Africa, but also to build upon it.

As a fact the oil boom of the 1970s did strengthen Nigeria's leadership role in Africa. The Times of London rightly reflected this situation in commenting thus:

large size, huge population and abundant natural resources endowed her with a manifest destiny, a natural mandate to be a leader and a major actor in international politics.

Notwithstanding this advantage, one of the fundamental principles of Nigeria's foreign policy as suggested by Olusanya and Akindele (1986:3), has been the belief in the legal equality of states. This they assert, is in tandem with the country's conviction that a well-ordered and peaceful society requires mutual and reciprocal respect for the interests and opinions of all



countries. Stated in another way, Nigeria would not consciously impose herself on any other country or carry out aggressive activities against them in the pursuit of her leadership role in Africa.

Given this background, Bukarambe (2000:120), observed that three critical lessons can be drawn from the trend of Nigeria's foreign policy in Africa since 1960. First, is that Nigeria had always preferred to approach Africa and Africa issues with a rational mindset inclined towards the idealization of its entitlements to a leadership role. This self-perception he opined, invigorates it and permit it to undertake and accept extra burdens and commitments. The second lesson he reasoned, is that after pushing herself to exhausting end on the basis of self-idealization, Nigeria had invariably encountered palpable limitations at the end of which had always stood for a re-assessment of what its leadership role actually meant. This implies the exercising of a leadership role which does not involve vital aspect of power politics, i.e power diplomacy, power economics and military primary. The third lesson he hinted, is that the enduring gap between desires, needs and means which Nigeria encountered at every historic turn, can be extended to the whole of Africa as well.

From this perspective, the non-payment of loans assessed dues and accumulated arrears that have been undermining the performance of multi-lateral African Institutions like the African Union AU, African Development Bank ADB and the Economic Community of West Africa State ECOWAS, reflects the general non-performance of individual African states themselves.

Bukarambe (2000), thus maintained that the ever- widening gap between development needs and means that continually undermined and overwhelmed Nigeria's quest for a credible leadership is also responsible for the exasperating state of affairs that creates the needs for debilitating interventions over functional cooperation. Therefore, to Bukarambe, breaking out of this vicious circle is clearly the next stage for Nigeria's foreign policy in Africa and foreign policy of Africa states in general.

Indeed, the predilection for taking the lead and expending enormous resources and energy on African problems is deeply embedded in the psyche of members of the Nigerian elite class and the intelligential. But as has been pointed out by Stifting (2011:32-33), this tendency seems to be changing in view of the unfolding realities at home and beyond. These realities among others include, the inauguration in Nigeria of a civilian administration since May 1999, the global economic meltdown in 2008, the end of the cold war, globalization and its attendant consequences as well as the "disappearance" of the issues that once engaged Nigerians attention in Africa from the 1960s to late 1980s. These, it was held, had resulted in an entirely new domestic and global realities and challenges that are fast interrogating the continuous basis of the Nigeria's Afrocentric policy as it were. It was therefore emphasized that whilst Nigeria's commitment to Africa has not been jettisoned, and no one is advocating such, a quick reality check automatically suggests that a critical review of the conceptual basis of modalities for the country's foreign policy, especially its African component, is already long overdue.

Relative to the capacity and capability of Nigeria to maintain and sustain a prime position even with her West African Sub-regional neighbours, a U.S. Department of state document has described the country as the main regional power of the West Africa sub-region (Diplomacy in Action 2011:9). This is largely correct in the opinion of Odofin (2005:19),



when viewed from the fact that Nigeria is enormously endowed with rich mineral resources like coal, tin, iron, ore, phosphates etcetera. He maintained that Nigeria remains Africa's largest producer of petroleum and also blessed with enormous deposits of natural gas. From this perspective, it is clear he intoned, that Nigeria is richly enhanced with critical elements of national power such as population, geopolitical, economic resources which may be quite decisive in foreign policy formulation. As Omojuwa (2007:26), did observe, the fact that Nigeria possess these elements largely in superlative terms too, set it apart from the rest of its neighbours and confers on it, a prime position even beyond the West African sub -region to the rest of the continent.

From yet a similar context, Oche (2011:231-231), had submitted that leadership constitutes a fundamental aspect of human or social interaction and a crucial element in any political system. Within the ambit of this analysis he says, a leadership role signifies the unique responsibilities that a state perceives for itself in relation to other states within the same region or geographical location. It also involves in his opinion, the desire by a state to be actively involved in expensive international political matters. This role conception he noted, has characterized Nigeria's foreign policy since independence. This he quipped, also informed the perception of Africa as the centre piece of the country's foreign policy over the years. Significantly as it were, Nigeria has always considered herself as a regional power in Africa and has therefore, seen it as her legitimate right to protect that value and play a leading role not only in sub -regional but also in continental affairs. This according to him, accounted for the frontline role the country played in the formation and growth of ECOWAS as an instance. This also informed her frontline role in the process of dismantling apartheid in South Africa despite the geographical distance.

CONCLUSION

This paper is an attempt to examine the Nigerian Afrocentric foreign policy within the context of a globalized world. From the discussion, it is clear that since independence in 1960, the foreign policy of the country especially as it relates with sister African countries has been quite consistent in pattern albeit some slight changes along the way. This approach that Institutes the African continent as the centre piece of its foreign policy has fundamentally continue to be the norm from the dawn of independence till the present. This explains its continuous relevance to the country's external projections especially within the context of a rapidly dynamic globalized world of today. Moreso, the Afrocentrism of the country's foreign policy has been succinctly encapsulated in her constitutions thus implying the critical importance and commitment attached to this phenomenon by the Nigerian state. By implication, this development has conferred on the country, the toga of leadership in Africa with all its attendant burdens which is why some analyst has called for a rethink by the Nigerian state in response to the present global realities. Indeed, uneasy lies the head that wears the crown. As the paper contends, the Nigeria leadership role in Africa seems divine, hence a very strong perception of this as a reality by the country's elite. However, this approach as the paper submits need not be jettisoned. But there is however, the need to pursue it in line with the country's national interest and in conformity with the contemporary global economic reality that does not seem to favour a Father-Christmas.



RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are proffered in view of the analysis and conclusion of this paper.

- (1) Nigeria's Afrocentric Foreign policy should be persuaded more by cold economic calculations based on national interest and not by sentiments.
- (2) Official relations in this context should be strengthened into critical strands in tandem with today's dynamic global world.
- (3) Nigeria's security posturing should be effected in a way to serve as a deterrent against outside rivals that may want to step into its immediate neighbourhood.
- (4) In view of the levels of economic and political reforms in Nigeria, opportunities arising from this process should be leveraged upon to build a more solid, diversified and diffused relations with sister African nations for the benefit of Nigeria and Nigerians.
- (5) Relative to the above, there is indeed need for a rethink and reappraisal of Nigeria's role in Africa. Since foreign policy is an extension of domestic policies of a country, Nigeria aid to other African Nations should be tied to both economic and political gains for Nigeria and Nigerians.
- (6) Nigeria's commitments to Africa should not be jettisoned but there is need for a critical review of the conceptual basis of the country's foreign policy as it relates to its African component.

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