

Review

Nigerian foreign policy in the fourth republic: an assessment of the impact of Olusegun Obasanjo's civilian administration's foreign policy (1999 to 2007)

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Like all other countries in the world, Nigeria's foreign policy is intended to promote and protect the country's national interests. The civilian regime of Obasanjo was not an exception as it focused its foreign policy on the restoration agenda of the previous administration. It has the exclusive prospect of restoring Nigeria to the comity of nations to be treated and esteemed as co-equals. The administration immediately embarked on the process of moving the nation from a foreign policy of segregation to globalization. In the light of the foregoing, this paper attempts an x-ray of the impact of Olusegun Obasanjo's civilian administration's foreign policy during the fourth republic.

Key words: Foreign policy, fourth republic, assessment, impact.



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INTRODUCTION

At the re-occurrence of democratic rule to Nigeria in May 1999, President Olusegun Obasanjo engaged himself in the business of restoring the lost glory of Nigeria within the international community. He cried over how Nigeria had deteriorated over the years in their foreign relations. In inauguration speech of president Olusegun Obasanjo in May 29, 1999, he said that "Nigeria, once a well-respected country and a key role player in international bodies, became a pariah nation" adding that the task before his administration would be to pursue a dynamic foreign policy to promote friendly relations with all nations and to play a constructive role in the United Nations, organisation of Africa unity now African Union and other international bodies. The coming of President Olusegun Obasanjo and the various reforms which he embarked upon actually brought Nigeria out of the messy situation that Gen. Sanni Abacha led the country into.

On assumption of office in May 1999, Obasanjo left no one in the doubt of his desire to open Nigeria's window to the world and restore the lost glory. He embarked on foreign trips on regular basis in other to re-unite Nigeria to the world. This paper therefore tries to x-ray the impact of Nigerian foreign relation policy of President Olusegun Obasanjo during the fourth republic.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

There are many theories that capture the topic of discussion in this paper. Among these theories include but not limited to the theory of International Cooperation and National Interest.

International Cooperation Theory

From its begining, the focus of international relations has been the study of the causes of conflict and the conditions for cooperation. Cooperation may occur as a result of adjustments in behaviour by actors in response to, or in anticipation of, the preferences of other actors. Cooperation may be the result of a relationship between a stronger actor or a weaker party as it is in the case Nigeria foreign relations. Hegemonic powers may provide stability that enhances the security and economic well-being of lesser states. The hegemonic power provides a basis for mutual gains in the form of expanding markets or military protection.

Cooperation has been defined as a set of relationship that are not based on coercion or compellence and that

are legitimize, as in an international organization such as the United Nations, or the European Union. Cooperation may arise either from a commitment on the part of individual to the welfare of the collectivity or as a result of perceived self-interest.

The National Interest Theory

It has become a common practice for the state officials to explain their decisions and actions towards the external environment of the state in terms of National interest. The main objective of any nation's foreign policy however, is the promotion and furtherance of its National Interest. Rosenau (1980) explained National Interest from two perspectives. One hand, he view National Interest as an analytic concept used in explaining, describing or evaluating the sources or adequacy of a nation's foreign policy.

On the other hand, he views it as an instrument of political action which politicians use to justify and legitimize their policies or to mobilize public support for intended objectives. National interest can therefore be viewed as a highly generalized concept of those elements that constitutes the states most vital need as well as being the fundamental objective and ultimate determinant that guides the decision makers of a state in making foreign policy.

SCHOLARLY DEFINITIONS OF FOREIGN POLICY

Encyclopaedia Britannica define foreign policy as general objectives that guide the activities and relationship of one state in its interactions with the other states. The development of foreign policy is influenced by domestic considerations, the policies or behaviour of other states, or plans to advance specific geopolitical designs. Leopold Von Ranke emphasized the primary of geography and external threats in shaping foreign policy, but later writers emphasized domestic factors.

Holsti (1983) presents foreign policy as "actions of a state towards external environment and the conditions under which their actions are formulated".

According to Akinyemi, foreign policy consists of three elements. Firstly, it is one of the overall orientation and policy interactions of a particular country towards another. The second element is the objective that a country seeks to achieve in her relations or dealing with other countries. The third element of foreign policy is the means for achieving that particular goal or objectives (Akinyemi, 2006). Kissinger often submits that in foreign policy analysis, "the domestic structure is taken as given; foreign policy begins where domestic policy ends" (Kissinger, 1970). This emphasizes the linkage between the domestic environment and foreign policy pursuit. Hence, Kissinger asserts that "the domestic structure is

decisive finally in the elaboration of positive goals".

Adeniran (1983) advanced that foreign policy should be perceived from the connection of the motives and benefits that underpin states relations. He further opines that goals and means are basic ingredients of foreign policy. Morgenthau ties the goals of a nation's foreign policy to what he calls national interest.

According to encyclopaedia, a country's foreign policy also called the foreign relations policy consist of self-interest strategies chosen by the state to safeguard its national interests and to achieve its goals within international relations milieu. The approaches are strategically employed to interact with other countries.

In recent times, due to the deepening level of globalisation and transnational activities, the state will also have to interact with non-state actors. Since the national interests are paramount, foreign policies are designed by the government through high level decision making processes. National interest's accomplishment can occur as a result of peaceful cooperation with other nations, or through exploitation.

American heritage dictionary define foreign policy in the context of U.S. military history "the goals the nation officials seek to attain abroad, the values that give instruments used to pursue them". Khan et al. (1977) argue that "foreign policy consists of a set of ranked objective which a government seeks to achieve in its relation with others".

Northedge conceptualises foreign policy simply as interplay between the outside and the inside (Northedge, 1968). In the research of T. B. Miller, foreign policy is presumably something less than the sum of all policies which have an attempt upon national governments (Miller, 1969).

Akinboye defines foreign policy as a dynamic process involving interaction between the domestic and the external environment (Solomon, 1999). Foreign policy is therefore the general objective that guides the activities and relationship of one state in its interactions with other states. Morgenthau ties the goals of a nation's foreign policy to what he calls national interest. He believes that the objectives of a foreign policy must be interpreted in terms of the national interest (Morgenthau, 1978). He therefore, submit that no nation can have a true guide as to what it must do and what it needs to do in foreign policy without accepting national interest as a guide.

ORIGIN OF NIGERIAN FOREIGN POLICY

One of the hallmarks of independent and sovereign statehood is the determinations and conduct of a nation's foreign policy. Nigeria assumed sovereign independent status in October 1, 1960 and the mantle of leadership fell on Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, the first and the last prime minister of Nigeria. The task of taking and pursuing Nigeria's national interest became a task for the

pioneering indigenous administration whose ability and capability in performing the roles were limited by experience, lack of precedence, institutional deficiencies, poor operational environment and shortage of foreign policy experts.

Nigeria from January 1, 1814 when the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorates was formally effected to October 1, 1960 when she attained independence could not pursue an independent foreign policy which could be said to be separate and distinct from that of Britain.

PRINCIPLES AND OBJECTIVES OF NIGERIA'S FOREIGN POLICY

There is a consensus among scholars and policy makers in Nigeria that the core national interests upon which country's foreign policy decisions had been directed since independence were:

- (a) The defence of the country's sovereignty independence and territorial integrity.
- (b) The restoration of human dignity to black men and women all over the world, particularly the eradication of colonialism and white minority race from the face of Africa.
- (c) The creation of the relevant political and economic conditions in Africa and the rest of the world which will not only facilitate the preservation of the territorial integrity and security of all African countries but also foster national self-reliance in Africa countries.
- (d) The promotion and improvement of the economic well-being of the Nigerian citizens.
- (e) The promotion of world peace with justice.

The principal guiding principles of the regime's foreign policy include the following:

(a) Legal equality of states: Nigeria believes that all nations of the globe are equal no matter their classification as to whether they are powerful or weak, developed or underdeveloped, big or small, industrialised or non-industrialised, rich or poor. This position implies that Nigeria will not discriminate on the basis of these distinctions in her international relations.

(b) Non-interference in the domestic affairs of other states: Nigeria has respect for the sovereign independence of other states. Therefore, Nigeria does not want to be seen as flaunting a seemingly colonial policy.

(c) Multilateralism: The principle of multilateralism explains not only Nigeria's enthusiastic and instinctive search for membership in key international organisations at both regional and global levels but also her support for and leadership in the establishment of some regional organisation (Olusanya and Akindele, 1984).

(d) Africa as nerve-centre of Nigeria's foreign policy: This implies that in the nation's external relations, Africa will receive priority attention. Nigeria's declaration of making Africa her preoccupation was informed by certain factors. One, Nigeria is geo-politically located in the African region. Two, it is the most populous African, and black nation on the globe. It is therefore natural for the country to express afro-centric concerns.

(e) Non-alignment: The nation evolves a strategy on dealing with the prevailing cold war between erstwhile western and eastern blocks. The nation resolved to be neutral and not take sides with any of the blocks. This posture is meant to enable Nigeria have ample opportunities to freely manoeuvre in the world politics.

SUMMARY OF OBASANJO'S FOREIGN POLICY, 1999-2007

Like Gen. Abdulsalami regime, chief Obasanjo's administration appreciated much the task before it as that of bringing Nigeria out of her dead-end "by consolidating democracy at home, respecting fundamental human rights and encouraging liberal economic reforms, good governance and transparency with a view to boosting internationals to reassuring the rest of the world that Nigeria was truly back on track.

Olusegun Obasanjo administration continues image building started by the General Abdulsalam administration. Obasanjo administrations made a shift from concentration of Africa as the centre piece of Nigeria's foreign policy to globally focused policy.

The Obasanjo administration pursued the affairs of her immediate neighbours and Africa as a whole with vigour and great commitment. He played a crucial role in transforming OAU into a more effective African Union (AU). Nigeria under Olusegun Obasanjo worked tirelessly for the creation of new partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). On conflict resolution and peace initiatives, Nigeria has been involving in series of peacekeeping missions in Africa in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Togo, Sao Tome and Principe and the African mission in Sudan (Adeniyi, 2005).

OBASANJO'S SHUTTLE DIPLOMACY

On assumption of office in May 1999, Obasanjo embarked on foreign trips on regular basis. There is no major country in the world which has not witnessed the visit of the Nigerian president. He seemed bent on taking Nigeria out of the recluse of Abacha years. President Olusegun Obasanjo was renowned for his shuttle diplomacy which was a vital instrument of foreign bilateral and multilateral collaborations for sustainable development and peaceful co-existence in the West Africa sub-region as well as with other countries of the

world. The nation shuttle diplomacy is said to have emerged from Henry Kissinger's efforts in the Middle East in the early 1970s. He flew back and forth between Middle Eastern capitals for months in an effort to bring about peace after the 1973 Arab-Isreali war.

The term shuttle diplomacy according to Cambridge dictionary refers to discussion between two or more countries in which someone travels between the different countries, talking to the governments involved, carrying messages and suggesting ways of dealing with problems (Cambridge university press, 2005). American heritage dictionary of English language, defines shuttle diplomacy as diplomatic negotiations conducted by an official intermediary who travels frequently between the nations involved (The American heritage dictionary, 2000).

The politics behind shuttle diplomacy is primarily based on the use of a third party to convey information back and front between the parties, serving as a reliable means of communication less susceptible to the grandstanding of face-to-face or media – based communication.

The diplomatic shuttle provided a platform for Nigeria to seek and secure, at least to a reasonable extent, the repatriation of the country's stolen money in foreign banks in Switzerland, Britain, America, Belgium and Germany, among others. President Obasanjo also cultivated the habit of holding routine interactions and dialogues with Nigerian communities in the countries he visited to discuss issues of common national interests and update the Diaspora of Nigerian government policies, as well as assistance on possible ways of moving the country forward.

Through an Open Skies Agreement with the US Airspace Agency in 1999, the Obasanjo government also secured the lifting of ban on direct flight between Nigeria and the US which had been in place since the time of Gen. Abacha, while the country, to an appreciable degree, regained its lost status as the hub of air and sea transportation in Africa. More international and domestic airlines came on board through private initiatives.

The nation has achieved significant gains through Obasanjo regime shuttle diplomacy. Apart from the psychological relief following its re-integration and accommodation into the world affairs, Nigeria had assumed the leadership of several international organisations such as: ECOWAS, AU, and G-77. It had hosted very important international summits thereby attracting foreign players to Nigeria. All these imply that the international system has restored its confidence in Nigeria.

IMPACT OF OBASANJO FOREIGN POLICY

Securing debt relief for Nigeria

Before Olusegun Obasanjo became president in 1999, Nigeria external debt was 27.008 billion dollars which

presented Nigeria as the highest indebted country in Africa (CBN, 2002) and the country was spending 3 billion dollars every year to pay interest on debts.

In order to tackle this financial problem, the Obasanjo led government went on the drive for foreign direct investment, the campaign for cancellation of the nation's debt and a cutting edge economic diplomacy. President Obasanjo went on foreign trips to woo prospective investors to the country and established high diplomatic contacts with leaders of Nigeria's creditors. Nigeria's foreign reserves rose from 2 billion dollars in 1999 to 43 billion dollars while leaving office in 2007. He was able to secure debt pardons from the Paris and London club amounting to some 18 billion dollars.

Restoring Nigeria into comity of nations

The regime of General Sanni Abacha was characterised by tension, chaos, conflict and outright suspension from the commonwealth. The Commonwealth of Nations was worried over various human rights abuses and about the regime's repressive and oppressive tendencies. The peak of Abacha's regime human right abuse was the hanging of Kensaro Wiwa and other eight Ogoni activists on November 10, 1995. All these put together put Nigeria in a pariah state at the assumption of office of President Olusegun Obasanjo in 1999. In his determination to regain Nigeria's lost glory and re-integrate it to the civilised world, president Obasanjo engaged in shuttle diplomacy across the major capital of the world. The president during his extensive foreign trips have addressed the United Nations (UN), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the group of 8 (G-8), Group 77 (G-77), the Commonwealth African Union (AU) and European Union (EU) (Ajayi, 2006).

Preservation of democracy in Africa

Under President Olusegun Obasanjo regime, Nigeria has been a principal promoter of democratic rule in Africa. Obasanjo administration resisted government change through coup detats in Sao Tome and Principe where the country's president Fredrique de Menezes came to Nigeria to attend the Leon Sullivan summit. The Nigerian government ensured the return of de Menezes to power. Another instance was in Guinea-Bissau where the government of Kumba Yala was overthrown. Nigeria and other countries ensured immediate commencement of a transition programme to civil rule in Guinea- Bissau.

Obasanjo's Administration and ECOMOG

Under Obasanjo's leadership, Nigeria has proven a powerhouse in the region in economic and security

affairs. Without Nigeria, ECOMOG (West African Peace Monitoring Force) of ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) would be toothless, and African-led peacekeeping missions in Guinea-Bissau, Liberia and Sierra Leone would not have been possible. Nigeria's foreign policy thrust under President Obasanjo recorded remarkable achievements in the area of maintenance of peace and security.

Regional Economic Integration under Obasanjo Administration

On regional economic integration front, Nigeria under President Obasanjo moved on the West African Gas Pipeline Project (WAPCO) that had been billed to facilitate the supply of natural gas to four countries in West Africa – i.e. Benin, Ghana, Togo, and subsequently Cote d'Ivoire. Although the country could not meet the 2006 deadline slated for the completion of the project due to unforeseen challenges, including the crisis in the Niger Delta.

NEPAD and Obasanjo's Foreign Policy

Obasanjo has been instrumental in gathering African leaders to work towards establishing a code of conduct in economic and political reforms that would satisfy the conditions and expectations of Western donors. At the June 2001 Group of Eight summit in Genoa, Italy, Obasanjo was one of four leading African heads of state to unveil an African initiated plan called the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). NEPAD is designed to garner aid from donors in return for African commitments to good governance. Obasanjo has led a number of meetings on NEPAD including the March 2002 summit of leaders from 19 countries.

One of the cardinal principles of Nigeria's foreign policy since 1999 is that of Afro-centrism, which implies that Nigeria under the new attempt at democratic rule has not deviated from the main principles as outlined in 1960 and noted above. This was brought to the fore by the leading role Nigeria played by deploying her foreign policy structures in both the formation of NEPAD and implementation of its programmes. We have noted earlier that Olusegun Obasanjo was one of the five heads of state mandated to work out the NEPAD framework. Also as noted above, it was at the Nigerian federal capital city, Abuja, that the policy framework was finalized on October 23, 2001, obviously at the structural and functional expense of Nigeria. Therefore, it can be safely opined that Nigeria has been in the fore-front for the development and promotion of NEPAD from conception to full growth as witnessed today.

As Nigerian President, Olusegun Obasanjo, working in accord with Thabo Mbeki of South Africa, continued to

provide ample leadership to NEPAD throughout his tenure. He functioned as chairman of the Heads of State Implementation Committee, while Nigeria continued to lead two strategic committees namely; economic and corporate governance as well as capital flows.

SHORTCOMINGS OF OBASANJO'S DEMOCRATIC FOREIGN POLICY

There were several national issues that dragged Nigeria's foreign policy in the mud during Obasanjo's civilian administration. One major setback to Obasanjo's foreign policy was Niger Delta crises. The crises discouraged the free inflow of oil foreign investors as they considered their life unsaved in the Niger Delta region. There were cases of kidnapping, hostage taking, bunkering, etc. Another shortcoming of Obasanjo's foreign policy is corruption that has eaten so deep into marrow and fabric of Nigeria's bone. The corrupt nature of Nigerian frustrated Nigeria's foreign policy under Obasanjo's civilian administration.

Also, Obasanjo's domestic policies on infrastructural development yielded little which in turn negatively affected the conduct of foreign relations especially in the area of wooing investors to the country. Nigeria did not witness a significant improvement in infrastructure in eight years of Obasanjo's civilian administration.

CONCLUSION

The study examines foreign policy under the civilian administration of Olusegun Obasanjo. President Obasanjo administration was able to transform Nigeria from isolated state of Sani Abacha's regime to a globalized nation. The development is that Nigeria is no longer perceived as a pariah state by the international community and her views on global issues are now respected.

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