



Nigeria's Foreign Policy in a Democratic Setting: An Appraisal of the Fourth Republic

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Abstract. Foreign policy deals with the pursuit of a nation's national interest in its interactions with other nation. Nigeria attained independence in 1960 and since then has continued to play active roles in the area of foreign policy decision making. The military epochs in Nigeria's foreign policy were replete with incessant challenges which culminated in the excommunicated of the nation from the common wealth of nations. The swearing in of Obasanjo was perceived as the dawn of a new era in Nigeria's foreign policy, however democracy has presented new challenges for leaders since the inception of the fourth republic, the study therefore examines the challenges of Nigeria's foreign policy in a democratic setting with a focus on Obasanjo's administration in the fourth republic. The secondary data collection was employed in the study. The descriptive and explorative research design was used in the study. Findings revealed that there were incessant challenges; however, some of these challenges were surmounted. The study therefore recommends that the foreign affairs ministers should take more proactive decisions that will uplift the national integrity of the nation when making foreign policy decisions in Nigeria.

Keywords: Foreign policy, Democratic era, Governance, decision making, international system, military regime, democratic administration.

1. Introduction

The instrument of governance of the Nigerian state was transferred from the military to a civilian administration on the 29th of May 1999; this was a major turning point in the history of Nigeria. Military ended as General Abdulsalami Abubakar led his military team back to the barracks and pledged the subordination of the military to civilian rule given the enormous goodwill, he was able to garner for himself after assuming office. General Abubakar's sincerity to

hand over power to the civilians was little doubted. In an electoral process that was perceived by many to be imperfect but nonetheless acceptable Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, presidential candidate of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) was elected the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria on the 20th of February, 1999. His swearing in on the 29th of May, 1999 was held amid pomp and pageantry with an impressive representation from the international community. In all, about forty head of state governments including former South African President Nelson Mandela and Prince Charles of the British Monarchy graced the occasion. This marked the institutionalization of Nigeria's fourth democratic republic and signed the beginning of a process of full reintegration into the international system from which Nigeria was isolated a few years earlier (Anietie; 1999: 20). General Abdulsalami Abubakar handed over a newly promulgated Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria to President Olusegun Obasanjo as the basic instrument of governance. As a supreme and sacrosanct instrument, the constitution provides the basic guidelines for the conduct of domestic and foreign policies by the new democratic administration.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Obasogie and Okeibunor (2024) emphatically stated that in a democratic administration, public opinion is paramount in decision making and therefore advised that the Nigeria government and United States of America to allow citizens input in the democratization of these countries. Democracy was a welcome development in 1999 after a long reign of military misrule, the international community including several Africa nations were happy when Nigeria embraced democracy in the fourth republic, however, since the commencement of democracy in Nigeria, there social vices have continued to plagued the nation's development. Corruption on the part of the

political elites is on the increase and has affected the country's national image in the eyes of the international community. These problems have negative implications on both domestic and foreign policy of Nigeria.

Oyegeola (1996) stated that the lack of transparency, accountability, honesty etc have created negative image in Nigeria's democracy in the fourth republic and these vices have negative implications in Nigeria's foreign policy.

2. Methodology

The descriptive and explorative research design was adopted in the study. The secondary source of data collection was used to elicit vital information from existing literatures. The method of data analysis was descriptive. The specialized library of the Nigeria institute of International Affairs was used for research in the course of investigation.

3. Foreign Policy Analysis: Conceptual Clarification

Foreign policy is an important aspect of International Relations. In the 21st century nations round the world plays active in foreign policy relations, no nation in the contemporary international system is an island, every nation craves to make meaningful contribution and progress in every area of growth and development therefore foreign policy plays a vital role in this regard. Foreign policy is the pursuit of a nation's national interest in its interactions with other states. The concept of foreign policy is complex and equivocal and this is only the inevitable consequence of its being a synthesis of the ends and means of states. Foreign policy incorporates national orientation, roles and objectives which are all composed of images in the minds of policy makers as well as national actions. The things governments do to others in order to effect certain orientations. (Oyegeola, 1996)

4. Literature Review

According to Adeniji, (2000), he stated that foreign policy is a very crucial aspect of governance in a democratic state and therefore admonished the need for good and effective governance in foreign policy decision making. Akintiruwa, (2004), in his work "Nigeria New Foreign Policy Thrust; Essay in honour of Ambassador Oluyemi Adeniyi" also asserted that Nigeria foreign policy should focus on good and inclusive governance and that government should be transparent and accountable to their citizens. Obayuwana, (2004), in his work title "a study of the Nigerian foreign policy under Olusegun Obasanjo,

stated explicitly that democracy should be given a place by democratic leaders, in the same vein Nweke, (1986) in his work on Nigeria foreign policy, an appraisal of twenty five years stated that Nigeria should put in place new foreign policy initiatives in order to move the country forward in terms of growth and development.

The 1999 Constitution addresses the issues of foreign policy under Section 19 of its first chapter, the foreign policy objectives of Nigeria are clearly outlined as follows: Promotion and protection of the national interest. Promotion of Africa integration and support for African unity. Promotion of international cooperation for the consolidation of universal peace and mutual respect among all nations and elimination of discrimination in all its ramifications. Respect for international law and treaty obligations as well as the seeking of settlement of international disputes by negotiation, mediation, conciliation, arbitration and adjudication, and Promotion of a just world economic order. The Constitution vests the power to appoint the emissaries of Nigeria (Ambassadors, High Commissioners or other principal Representatives) in the President but subject to confirmation by the Senate. The Constitution grants the President wide latitude to act but his policies and actions are subject to the dictates of the laws made by the National Assembly. The National Assembly is required to ratify treaties and agreements before they can become laws, approves/disapproves deployment of the armed forces of the nation for combat duties outside the country and approves or disapproves a declaration of war by the President (The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria). Obasanjo's Foreign Policy Challenges The civilian administration of President Olusegun Obasanjo inherited a fairly congenial foreign policy. The ignominies of the Abacha years were slightly removed by his successor Abdulsalami regime while the international community gradually opened up to the humane military rules. Its acceptance was not instantaneous, although General Abubakar had earned respect as a sincere leader, it was not impossible that he wanted to play pranks like his predecessors had done. As such, it was not until he eventually handed over power that the task of fully repositioning Nigeria in the international system began. This task was largely reserved for the Obasanjo administration (This Day, 2000:6). The foreign policy challenges of the new democratic administration revolve around the restoration of Nigeria's lost glory in the comity of nations.

There is the need for a consolidation of democracy at home respect for human rights, encouragement of liberal economic reforms to find accommodation in

the globalized world economy, offer leadership to the Africa continent and champion the course of attaining a fair international economic system that favour the third world. In accomplishing this task, a lot depends on the leader; the personality perception and concentration of the leader are important factors in the conduct of foreign policy. (Anietie, 1999).

There is no controversy that the warm reception Nigeria enjoyed in the comity of nations is partly due to the international community's perception of the personality of President Olusegun Obasanjo. Obasanjo was a respected international figure who had served in several international bodies and was a one-time contender for the Secretary Generalship of the United Nations. Since coming to power, he had traversed the globe in grand style. He was the chairman of the G.77 an influential voice of the Non-Aligned movement, a passionate apostle of Africa's unity and a sub-regional peace maker in pursuit of a vibrant foreign policy course for Nigeria. Obasanjo confers extensively with other world leaders. He has played host to several foreign dignitaries in Abuja. The visit of the former President of the United States, Bill Clinton from August 26-28, 2000 was perhaps the heights of his popularity as President and therefore an indication that Nigeria has been fully reintegrated into the comity of nations.

President Obasanjo military leadership objectives differed from what was under a democratic regime, and also differed from what General Muritala Mohammed or Yakubu Gowon before him had prioritized, support for liberation movement across Africa, involvement in international peace keeping as well as fighting apartheid. Between May 26th 1999 and May 29th 2007, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo did veer quite noticeably away from the priorities of its predecessors since Balewa in the early 1960s invented a complicated crisis in Sierra Leone and neighboring Liberia in the former, some ten thousand Nigerian troops sent in by General Abacha had been bogged in operations against RUF-ARFC rebels as part of an ECOMOG peace enforcement contingent.

The Abdulsalami junta had inherited same from the Abacha regime only to bequeath the situation to his democratically elected successor, Chief Obasanjo, within the first three months of his administration had an exit strategy i.e. involving the United Nations so that the Nigerian military presence in Sierra Leone could be seriously downgraded in favour of leaving a much smaller contingent under a much larger UN peace keeping structure. The government of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo remarkably did also agree to be bound by a ruling of the ICJ that the disputed Bakassi

Peninsula belongs to neighbouring Cameroon; this is an indication that President Olusegun Obasanjo administration pursued a pro-active foreign policy. It also tried to deviate from the more confrontational attitude of its predecessor by abiding to the ruling of the ICJ demanding that Bakassi be handed over to Cameroon, contrary to the approach adopted by previous military regimes. According to a publication of this issue, Chief Obasanjo at this point in time preferred the use of carrot to the stick approach. This he did by effectively supporting the use of diplomacy, by also granting of asylum, to persuade Mr. Taylor to vacate power in Liberia and Mr. Fare Nyasingbo not to take power in Togo through unconstitutional means. Through the effective use of diplomacy, the government was able to persuade its neighbors as well as the UN that international peace keepers were needed in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Cote d'Ivoire, Darfur in Western Sudan.

The administration of the outgoing president also hosted talks in Abuja with Africa leaders such as Somalia, Guinea Bissau and following the attack of 9/11 in the United States of America, the Nigerian government also opted for American war against terrorism. After all, some ten percent of US oil inputs originate from Nigeria plus the fact that America has overtaken Britain as the single biggest investor in the Nigerian economy. In response, the government of Nigeria adopted a balancing act in its policy towards Washington and its allies in the terrorism arena while secretly pursuing military cooperation and some degree of exchange of intelligence with America, the administration under Obasanjo also tried hard to maintain the goodwill of few Muslim Arab states such as Iran, Syria and Sudan which may have fallen apart with America viewpoints on certain crucial international issues, such as the war on terror and the occupation of a post Saddam Iraq. Obasanjo during the time of the bombing of World Trade Center on behalf of Nigeria and Africa commiserate with the American state for the tragedy that befell them at the point in time thereby strengthening the nation's foreign policy with United States of America. George W. Bush acknowledged and appreciated the African nations for their concern and kindness in their time of national tragedy. President Bush in his much-anticipated speech before a joint session of Congress on 20 September, 2001 said "America will never forget the sounds of our national anthem playing at Buckingham Palace, on the streets of Paris and at Berlin's Brandenburg Gate, we will not forget South Korean children gathering to pray outside our embassy in Seoul, or the prayers of sympathy offered at a mosque in Cairo. We will not forget moments of silence and days of mourning in Australia and Africa and Latin

America.” Conclusively, Obasanjo administration played an enormous role in the launching of the African Union thereby strengthening regional integration among states in Africa. The government also presided over many meetings before the formation of the United Nations, on international issues, the Obasanjo administration was not left out, in this address to Africa leaders in Kingston, Jamaica, the President admonished Africa leaders to approach globalization with caution.

5. Trends in Nigeria’s Foreign Policy in the fourth republic

The unfolding trends in Nigeria’s foreign policy indicate that it is characterized by an African focus but with an eye to the Western world. Obasanjo’s foreign policy centers on the core issues of Africa unity, peaceful dispute resolution, non-intervention and non-alignment in sovereign affairs and promotion of regional development and economic cooperation. This Afro-centric thrust of Nigeria foreign policy was well articulated by the then Foreign Affairs Minister Alhaji Sule Lamido, who stated that “We need to give the African focus of our foreign policy dynamism by getting direct to the people instead of remaining at a government-to-government level.” He further expressed faith in this re-enforced policy direction. (Oyegeola,1996).

6. Challenges in Nigeria’s Foreign Policy in the fourth republic

The Obasanjo administration was faced with certain issues to be addressed in Nigeria’s foreign policy. In the West Africa sub-region, Obasanjo diplomatic headache was the unending crisis in Serra Leone. The intractable civil war that has ravaged that country since 1991 was a major headache or an issue in Nigeria foreign policy. It is important to assert that Nigeria involvement in the fratricidal war dates back to February 1998 when ECOMOG forces were deployed by the late General Sani Abacha to invade the country and remove the Johnny Koroma led junta which had earlier in 1997 overthrown the civilian government of Tejan Kabah. Although President Obasanjo had promised to pull Nigerian troops out of Sierra Leone before he was sworn in, he had to rescind that promise and find a lasting solution to the imbroglio, he need to resolve the crises and release Nigeria of heavy burden that was at the root of the Lome Peace Accord signed on July 7, 1999 between the government of Tejan Kabah and the Revolutionary United Front led by Foday Sankoh. (Oyegeola,1996).

The agreement brokered by ECOWAS spearheaded by Nigeria granted an unconditional pardon to Foday Sankoh and his rebels, guaranteed his return from exile and reintegrated him into government in a power sharing deal which gave the RUF four cabinet positions and Sankoh, the Chairmanship of the Commission in charge of strategic mineral resources. As the events were later revealed, this agreement was a demonstration of naiveté on the part of the sub regional leaders. They grossly underestimated Sankoh capability for ruthlessness and insincerity by not insisting on, obtaining a firm commitment on disarmament and demobilization of the rebel forces. Also, by handling the economic wherewithal to continue funding of his operations over to Sankoh, the seed of a protraction of the war was sown. This was demonstrated when the RUF began its systematic violation of the agreement no sooner than it was signed.

The rebel group abducted and held members of UN monitoring team, ECOMOG soldiers, journalists, etc. and the violence continued unabated. Amnesty International had uncovered the defects of the agreement (See Amnesty International’s view in Africa Today, August, 1999; 36). By failing to tackle impunity for gross human rights abuses, the peace agreement brokered provides no deterrent to continuing human rights abuses or contempt for human rights and international law (Africa Today: 36). The Sierra Leonean imbroglio and Nigeria’s failed attempt at imposing a Pax Nigeriana spawns certain lessons for the nation’s foreign policy making elite. First, Nigeria may not always succeed in imposing its will on its neighbours and it must learn to tread with caution, for no nation has control over events and situations outside its own borders. Second, Africans need to come to terms with the antics of a global community that has no patience with the continent’s internal problems. Another major issue handled by the Obasanjo administration was the country’s debt profile.

President Obasanjo made repeated appeals on almost all available platforms, for debt cancellation not only for Nigeria, but also for other heavily indebted third world countries. Nigeria’s latitude to chart a vibrant foreign policy was hampered by the crushing weight of \$32 billion. The administration’s belief that without economic clout, there can be no room for a dynamic foreign policy led it to champion the crusade for debt forgiveness. Obasanjo appealed to both the Paris and London clubs, and to individual leaders of creditor nations.

When Bill Clinton visited Nigeria, Obasanjo saw it as an opportunity to raise and discuss the issue. These and more other diplomatic moves finally succeeded in the debt cancellation for the country of the sum of \$18 billion. The Sharai problem was another domestic issue that had external ramifications. Since Zamfara state adopted the legal system in October 1999, several other northern states joined the bandwagon and this created a political problem with its attendant diplomatic consequences in the process. The controversial measure was widely suspected to be supported by Saudi Arabia and Libya. The former is well known for its sponsorship of Islamic organizations and groups in the country. As a democracy, the foreign policy machinery of the Obasanjo administration was elaborate, and seldom accepted inputs from the Civil Society, the Press, Public opinion, pressure groups, etc., in the conceptualization of national interest and formulation and implementation of foreign policy.

7. Theoretical Framework

7.1 Decision making theory

Decision making is the act of choosing in the mist of several alternatives, in every society, leaders make policies that guide the behaviors of the citizen. Easton (1953) emphasized the importance of decision making and how it affects political system in the world. Decision making can be classified into three and these are the rational economic model, the incremental model and the mixed scanning model. Three models attempt to explain the importance of decision making in a political system, the decision-making models also explains the role of government and other stake holders in decision making.

8. Conclusion

Nigeria has experienced turbulent times in the area of foreign policy since the attainment of independence. The military era witnessed hullabaloo in the era of the late maximum dictator, after this era, a new era was born and Olusegun Obasanjo took over the mantle of leadership, Nigeria since then has continued to play a very active role in foreign policy decision making not only towards the growth and development of the country but also to Africa as a continent. Nigeria has also contributed to the growth of Africa and Ecowas. However, the country is currently facing the Boko Haram insurgency in the north and this has made the country a place of trepidation for foreigners who would have love to invest in the economy of the country, this and other challenges has continued to pose a threat to Nigeria's foreign policy.

9. Recommendations

Nigeria foreign policy in contemporary period should be centered on citizen diplomacy.

The public and other professional bodies in Nigeria should contribute to the development of Nigeria's foreign policy.

Nigeria is the center piece of Africa's foreign policy; therefore, Nigeria should help to support good and inclusive governance in Africa and also help to promote their foreign policy initiatives.

Nigeria is no longer a military regime; therefore, democratic leaders and foreign affairs ministers only should be the ones to be innovative in making foreign policy decisions for the nation

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