



# Continuities and discontinuities in Nigerian foreign policy

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## Abstract

Nigeria's fundamental foreign policy principles and objectives have remained unchanged since independence. However, every succeeding administration in the country has invented new circumstantial mechanisms tailored towards the achievement of foreign policy goal. In this paper, attempts would be made to see how succeeding governments in Nigeria have pursued the country's foreign policy goals. To this extent, it becomes inevitable to situate the paper in historical context of Nigeria's match to greatness. It is by so doing that the analysis would be meaningful. The fundamental principles and objectives of Nigeria's foreign policy invented by the first Prime Minister of Nigeria, Alhaji Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, have remained unaltered irrespective of the rapid turnover of governments. Both the Civilian and Military governments have pursued foreign policy objectives with different emphasis. The difference between civilian and military regimes in pursuit of the foreign policy goals is clear. The civilian regimes could be lumped together as governments whose foreign policy pursuits lacked the expected bite, although Obasanjo's Presidency stands out in the category. The military regimes had more assertive foreign policy pursuit with each taken a different course.

**Keywords:** Foreign policy; Governments; Nigeria

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## 1. Introduction

The primary responsibility of all framers of foreign policy is to articulate in clear terms their country's national interest and to relate them to those of other nations within the international system. The pursuit of foreign policy goals pre-supposes the existence of a credible and widely accepted general principles on which to base an overall foreign policy (Dauda, 2006:14).

Successive Nigerian Governments, from that of Alhaji Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, the first Prime Minister of Nigeria, to the immediate past Government of President Umaru Musa Yar'adua have demonstrated commitment to these guiding principles of Nigeria's Foreign Policy (Nigeria at the United Nations Partnership for a Better World, p. 32). In Dauda's words (2006:vii), it is important to stress the fact that irrespective of the changes in government, the principles and objectives of Nigeria's foreign policy as laid down by the late Prime Minister, Balewa has remained basically the same; that what was noticeable in all the continuities and discontinuities was in the area of emphasis.

The principles which have imbued Nigeria's foreign policy since independence include the following: protection of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Nigerian State; promotion of the socio-economic well-being of Nigeria; enhancing Nigeria's image and status in the world at large; respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of other states; non-interference in the internal affairs of other states; promotion of the unity and solidarity of African States; total political, economic, social, and cultural emancipation and rejuvenation of Africa, an unflinching commitment to the liberation of countries still under colonial rule, as well as removal of remaining vestiges of colonialism in Africa (Nigeria at the United Nations: Partnership for A Better World 1991: 29).

Naturally, Africa has remained the centre piece of Nigeria's foreign policy. Nigeria's major concerns in Africa have been as follows: promotion of peace, prosperity, stability and development in Africa; promotion of political goodwill and understanding among Africa countries despite the cultural, linguistic and economic barriers erected by erstwhile colonialism; the discouragement of international intervention and presence in Africa; the promotion of rapid social-economic development of Africa through regional economic integration; the strengthening of sub-regional economic institutions and the reduction of economic dependence on extra-continental powers; the development of cultural cooperation as a means of strengthening political ties with all African countries; and finally, self-determination for all counties on the continent and the elimination of apartheid in South Africa and the eradication of all forms of racial discrimination in Africa (Ibid).

Foreign policy conceptualized Goldstein (199:147) defines foreign policy as the strategy used by governments to guide their actions in the international arena. Foreign policies spell out the objectives state leaders use as guides in pursuit of relations.

Chibundu (2004:1) defines foreign policy as a country's response to the world outside or beyond its own frontiers or boundaries, the response which may be friendly or aggressive, casual or intense, simple or complex. It comprises many elements; namely diplomatic, military, trade, economic, social, cultural, educational, sporting, etc and it varies in form and focus according to circumstances. Some countries at different times might be friends or enemies or valued allies within a relatively short or long period of time. In

effect, every country must have a foreign policy in order to live and survive as an independent state in the complex, sometimes dangerous world we live in today. Foreign policy has also been defined as a strategy with which institutionally designed decision-makers seeks to manipulate the international environment in order to achieve certain national interest.

As earlier enunciated, Nigeria's foreign Policy since independence has not experienced noticeable changes in its core principles and objectives. What is noteworthy is the modus operandi employed by succeeding governments in the country. At the very best, such continuities and discontinuities are cyclical, oscillating back, and forth in consonance with the dictates of peculiar circumstances both internal and external under which each succeeding administration in the country had to operate.

In this paper, attempts would be made to see how succeeding governments in Nigeria have pursued the country's foreign policy goals. To this extent, it becomes inevitable to situate the paper in historical context of Nigeria's march to greatness. It is by so doing that the analysis would be meaningful.

## 2. Continuities and discontinuities in Nigeria's foreign policy

Nigeria obtained her political independence from Britain on 1<sup>st</sup> October 1960. This naturally created the need for the country to forge a fresh foreign policy distinct from that of the period of internal self-government which began in 1957; in that same year, some Nigerians were recruited as the nucleus of a future Nigerian Foreign Service. They were attached to the British Foreign Service to understudy diplomatic service and practice. Such contact as well as the colonial legacy was to have a lasting effect on Nigeria's foreign policy. For instance, it has been difficult for Nigeria to take antagonistic posture against Britain beyond the rhetoric of strained relations. The civil war in Nigeria which took place just six years after Nigeria gained political independence from Britain presents a classical example. Britain refused to support Nigeria in the latter's war of unity. The Umoru Dikko Saga which would be elaborated more in the cause of this analysis also put asunder to Nigeria's relations with Britain but the relations were later repaired. In the same token, Britain was in the vanguard of Nigeria's pariah state during Abacha's regime, but when Abdulsalami Abubakar came to power, he reversed the trend.

At independence, Balewa articulated these basic tenets of Nigeria's foreign policy during Nigeria's inaugural address to the plenary of the 15<sup>th</sup> Regular Session of the United Nations General Assembly on 7<sup>th</sup> October, 1960, six days after Nigeria's independence when it became the 99<sup>th</sup> member of that body, said Balewa:

*First it is the desire of Nigeria... to remain on friendly terms with all nations and to participate actively in the work of the United Nations Organization. Secondly, Nigeria, a large and populous country of over 35 million, has no expansionist intentions. Thirdly, we shall not forget our friends, and we are proud to have been accepted as a member of the British Common Wealth. But, nevertheless, we do not intend to ally ourselves as a matter of routine with any of the power blocs. We are committed to uphold the principles upon which the UNO is founded. Fourthly,*

*Nigeria hopes to work with other African states for the progress of Africa and to assist in bringing all Africa territories to a state of responsible independence (Nigeria at the United Nations: Partnership for a Better World: page 32).*

From first October, 1960 to January, 1966 when the Balewa administration lasted, Nigeria pursued its foreign policy in the context of the professed principles and objectives. However, the country violated her non-alignment position by aligning with the West. Although, the overall performance in foreign policy lacked the expected vigour, there were occasional situations where Nigeria had to show to the world that it was really an independent state. For instance, Mallam Aminun Kano, the late legendary radical Nigerian politician, who served on the Nigerian delegation to the United Nations in the early years of independence, had cause to rebuke a British diplomat who tried to seer him to vote in a particular way. But as Dauda (2006:7) asserts, in the subsequent regimes that followed, even though the basic principles of foreign policy as enunciated by Balewa remained the same, there were new area of emphasis.

The period 1960 – 1970 was turbulent for Nigeria as an independent nation. Between January and July of 1966 there was a coup d' et al that ousted the Balewa government. The aftermath of the coup was the emergency of General J. T. U. Augisi Ironsi as the Nigerian Military Head of State. However, incoherence in the military as it affects oneness of purpose resulted to a counter coup in July of the same year. It is not the object of this paper to go into the details of the coup and the counter coup. What is imperative to note is that the coups led to the Nigerian Civil War which lasted from 1967 – 1970.

Nigeria emerged from the war with a knowledge of which countries that wanted her unit shattered. The war might have even caused the temporary abandonment of the African globalism, as Nigeria broke diplomatic relations with Cote d' Ivoire, Cabon, Tanzania and Zambia all of which recognized and traded with "Biafra" the breakaway Easter Region of Nigeria, this marked a policy shift, to some extent.

But as Chibundu (2004:1) states, countries at different times may be friends or enemies, or valued allies within a relatively short or long time. Nigeria however restored relations with those countries after the war. Britain and Unites State also did not support Nigeria during the civil war, but relations were not broken. Apart from the noticeable mutual unfriendly dispositions. It was not clear whether it was these unpalatable experiences Nigeria garnered during her war of unity, which gingered her into the introduction of radical approach in her foreign policy pursuit or something extraneous stimulated this state of affairs, broadly speaking, there was a marked difference between foreign policy pursuit dynamics employed by the Balewa government and Gowon's regime. General Yakubu Gown who succeeded Ironsi was Nigeria's civil war time leader. Gambari 1989:6 cited in Dauda (2006:13) describes the Balewa foreign policy direction as timid and uncertain and lacking in ideological values. In the same period under review, Ofoegbu (1978:117) Akinyemi (1978:97); and Douglas (1964: 147) cited in Dauda, Ibid, characterized Nigeria's foreign policy during the Balewa government as a violation of Nigeria's non-aligned principle when it actually aligned with the West politically and economically, which was clearly anti-Russia. The only point of deviation was the temporary break in diplomatic relations with France, in spite of Britain's intervention, when France tested its first nuclear device in the Sahara in 1963, an action which Nigeria considered not only harmful to the African continent but also to Nigeria as a nation.

The point been emphasized is that, the Gowon regime introduced elements of radicalism and changes in the fundamental principles of Nigeria's policy. As stated earlier, apart from temporarily breaking up of diplomatic ties with four African countries during the civil war, and also when Britain, perhaps, at that time the major source of Nigeria's arms supply refused to supply weapons to Nigeria on the pretext of humanitarian grounds, Nigeria found herself in a difficult position. France, the Netherlands, Czechoslovakia, and the United State also followed administration turned to the Soviet Union and its Satellite states for the supply of weapons. In so doing, Gowon' administration altered radically the direction Nigeria's foreign policy which it had been willing to follow. As Nigeria acquired Soviet weapons, she entered an era of friendship with the Soviet Union. Trade followed weapons. Soviet ideas which were considered subversive were allowed into country. Soviet Literature and films were freely distributed, leading to an upsurge of interest in the communist world and the proliferation of Nigeria – Soviet Friendship (Otubajo, 1989: 236 in Dauda 2006:16). It shows that Gowon administration introduced a new element of alignment.

Nigeria was in anyway overt about this foreign policy shift, as her responses to overtures by the West on virtually all issues, were blunt. There was the much talked about the 1969 episode when the United States' Ambassador to Nigeria pointed out to the Military Leaders that the Soviet Embassy had increased the number of its staff from 10 – 13 and demanded an explanation. The response by government was that the number diplomats it allowed into the country were entirely its own responsibility. Leaning her back on the East, Nigeria's military supplies and training which was exclusively an affairs conducted previously with the West was altered in favour of the Soviet Union. It was the time that Nigeria started questioning the activities of the United States, in Vietnam and Cambodia; and even turned against the Soviet Union as Nigeria voiced out against the Soviets invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. Unfortunately, before Gowon administration came to an end, Nigeria obviously creped backed to the West and her relations with the Soviet Union became estranged.

Many scholars are of the view that the enormous wealth Nigeria found herself in accounted for the excellent foreign policy performance after the civil war. Gambari (1989:7) cited in Dauda (2006: 2) states that the effective and active policy towards Africa and the world in the 1970s was enhanced by the tranquil domestic environment which was tamed by the military:

*...The Military government succeeded in effectively redressing the balance of power in favour of the central government in relation to the regions and states. The centralized and hierarchical nature of the Military Command Structure and the government decisions to divide Nigeria into twelve states helped to end regional challenges to a federally controlled foreign policy.*

Dauda (2006:23) states:

*The unique feature of Nigeria's foreign policy under Gown was the broadening of Nigeria's contact in the international system from a "Lame duck" position of an active and visible number of the international system.*

### 3. The period of astonishing dynamism in Nigeria's foreign policy 1975 – 1979

This period is often characterized by scholars as the golden period in Nigeria's foreign policy". On 29 July, 1975 Brigadier Murtala Ramat Mohammed assumed the leadership of Nigeria through a bloodless coup. Previously he was the minister of communications in Gowon's Government. Mohammed was known to be a bold soldier. His administration was dramatic and vigorous from beginning to end.

As a precursor to a vibrant foreign policy, the Mohammed Regime embarked on a cleaning exercise domestically, intended to rid Nigeria of rotten eggs that populated the civil service.

The Nigerian novelist of international repute, Chinua Achebe in tribute to the dynamism of the new leader enthused:

*The new ruler's reputation for ruthlessness was sufficient to transform in the course of only one nig, the style and habit of Nigeria's unruly capital. That character of one man could establish that quantum change in a people's social behaviour was nothing less than miraculous. But it shows that social miracles can happen (Dauda, 2006: 25).*

To put the Nigerian foreign policy on a new pedestal, the administration set up a committee with the membership drawn from the universities, the mass media and the military to reassess Nigeria's foreign policy system, substance and apparatus. At the end of the exercise, no new foreign policy objectives and principles different from what Balewa government had put in place came on stream. However, the overall policy dynamics were overhauled.

The Angolan crisis provided the leadership with the opportunity to demonstrate their new orientation in Nigeria's foreign policy. As Dauda (2006: 26) avers, antecedent to the Angolan crisis was that Portugal withdrew from Angola in November 1975 without an established central government in Angola. There nationalists groups: the popular movement for the Liberation of Angola, MPLA, the National Front for the Liberation of Angola, FNLA, National Union for the Total Independence of Angola, UNITA , all competing to capture political power. The Angolan crisis was inherited by the Muhammed's administration and for four and half months, it continued with the policy of Gowon's administration in trying to reconcile the three nationalist groups to form a national government. Pressure from two different directions mounted on the government. The United States government wanted Nigeria to maintain its neutrality and to support the moves for a national government, and from Nigeria, citizens both within and outside government circles wanted the government to recognize the MPLA. General Mohammed published the text of what he regarded as President "Ford's (of America) overbearing directives to the Head of State". He equally, pushed the text of a replay to the United States, rejecting completely this fatuous attempt by the Ford administration to insult the intelligence of African nations and scorn the dignity of the Blackman. Nigeria backed the MPLA and gave the movement "13.5 Million Naira" and military supplies to the MPLA government and galvanized diplomatic support among African States on behalf of MPLA.

Ibok (1983:162) and Akinyemi (1979:157) note that the Nigerian foreign policy which dramatically became radical brought Nigeria on a coalition course with the United States, to the extent that, twice, Henry

Kissinger, the then United State's Secretary of State was refused permission to visit Nigeria. The diplomatic pressure mounted by Nigeria resulted in victory for the Nigerian position at the 1976 Extra – Ordinary Summit of the OAU held in Addis – Ababa to discuss the Angolan problem. The way and manner the Angolan crisis was handled demonstrated that there was a change in both the style and context of Nigeria's foreign policy.

First, there was no attempt to wait for an OAU consensus to emerge before taking a decision. Nigeria was prepared to declare a position on an issue and lobby to create an African consensus around that position. Secondary, Nigeria was prepared to confront the United State over an African issue, an unprecedented feat for Nigeria's foreign policy. Thirdly, the open grant of financial and military assistance to the MPLA marked a radical break from past experience where such aid was small and not openly given. It also marked the escalation of the confrontational involvement of Nigerian in Southern Africa.

From the Angolan decision flowed other decisions. In 1975 Nigeria barred the annual meeting of the international press scheduled for Lagos because it admitted white delegates from South Africa. Furthermore, there was active involvement in the Zimbabwean crisis. This resulted to the recognition of the patriotic front which was allowed to open an office in Lagos. South – West African People's Organization, SWAPO was also allowed to open an office in Lagos. The leader of the Soweto Students Representative Council Tsei Machimini came to take up permanent residence in Lagos (Ibok, 1983: 168 cited in Dauda, 2006:27–28). The net effect of all these was that Nigeria became the Mecca for Liberation fighters in Africa... (Akinyemi, 1979: 158).

The assassination of Muhammed in an abortive coup on February 13, 1976 did not brought about a change in Nigeria's foreign policy. His successor, Lt. General Olusegun Obasanjo, had earlier in a maiden speech promised to maintain the status quo. He kept his words. When Nigeria realized that the British Petroleum (Britain then under prime minister, Margret Thatcher) was selling oil to South Africa, Nigeria Nationalized the outfit, renaming it African Petroleum; the Barclays Bank was also renamed Union Bank. This decision was also in consonant with the recalcitrance of Britain over the Rhodesian question in which Britain was opposed to changes that were to lead to a truly Rhodesian independence. This period also coincided with the leading position of Nigeria against the apartheid regime in South Africa. To assert her position, Nigeria led the withdrawal of Africa countries from the Montreal Olympics in 1976 in protest against the participation of New Zealand which had sporting link with South Africa. Nigeria, Otubanjo (1989:244) notes, also hosted the first international conference in Africa on action against Apartheid in Lagos in 1977.

As Obasanjo declared, Nigeria was:

*Compiling information on all enterprises, which depend on our raw materials and markets but continue to help our enemies. Such must decide now to choose between us and our enemies and all that goes with that choice. We have a festering sore on which these flies have landed and are feeding in all glare of the world. And when we move to destroy these flies, no one should complain. Foreign contractors who are known to have links with South Africa are already barred from taking part in tenders of any kind. An economic intelligence unit has been set – up*

*to ensure successful implementation of this policy (West Africa, 29 August, 1977: 54 cited in Dauda 2006: 29).*

Nigeria was also overt about her relations with the Eastern bloc and Obasanjo again had this to say:

*We reject the notion that African's interest or collective security needs can be discussed or determined by Western nations... The fact of the matter is that Africa was colonized by Western powers and not the Soviet. In the struggle for independence and freedom, the only single source of effective support was the Eastern bloc countries. The Soviet were therefore invited into Africa for a purpose and that purpose was to liberate the countries of cruelty, degradation, oppression and exploitation (African current 12/13 Autumn/Winter, 1978: 79 in Dauda 2006: 30).*

Under Murtala Muhammed/Obasanjo regime, Nigeria assumed the role of her manifest destiny in Africa. The period was indeed Nigeria's shining moments in her foreign policy. This was because the country influenced events in Africa South of the Sahara, being widely consulted by respectable world leaders.

#### **4. Nigeria's foreign policy down the valley**

On first October, 1979, the Military handed over the mantle of leadership to Civilians under the Presidency of Alhaji Usman Shehu Shagari. It is widely postulated that foreign policy under Shagari's administration was unacceptable and abysmally low. Nigeria practically dropped her radical posture in the pursuit of foreign policy. Many factors were said to be responsible for this:

*The oil crisis of 1981 made it necessary for the government to strengthen and deepened its relations with the Western powers. This was imperative to reschedule debts and maintain the credit lines open (Dauda 2006:34).*

This situation remained so because domestically, the opposition was not well coordinated and hence strong enough to change the hands of the government on its chosen foreign policy.... This had serious implications for the conduct of the country's foreign policy. Bassey Ate (1988:235) maintains that, as a result of Nigeria's economic and hence political dependence on the United States and Britain, Nigeria ruling strata were compelled to identify and comply with Western position with regard to Africa, thereby jeopardizing the national as well as collective African interest.

The situation was such that Nigeria became an effective instrument in the hands of the West used to divide African opinion on major African issues. The Chadian crisis is which Nigeria played along with the West readily comes to mind. Before Shagari took over power from Obasanjo, the latter's administration had waded into the crisis, mediating for peaceful end to the crisis. Shagari's administration changed the course and sent troops to Chad, but later withdrew the troops without achieving any substantial results, it was after



ward discovered that the withdrawal was influenced by the West. Libya which moved in with troops to savage the situation was later frustrated by Nigeria:

*The plan to frustrate Chadian/Libyan merger through the aegis of the OAU was reinforced by efforts at the wider diplomatic levels. The then Foreign Minister professor Ishaya Audu visited France on 26 January, 1981 and tried to correlate Nigeria's Chadian Policy with that of France. During the visit the Foreign Minister attacked the Libyan presence in Chad, as posing security threat to Africa and suggested that France and Nigeria should coordinate their objectives and pool resources.... Nigeria, the Minister disclosed was in regular contact with other anti - Libyan State such as Sudan and Egypt. He denounced Libyan demand that French troops should withdraw from African States such as Central African Republic, Senegal and Gabon, insisting that such troops were there on the invitation of those governments and affirmed that Nigeria was interested in cooperating with France in the field of Ministry equipment and nuclear power (Quoted in Dauda2006:38).*

African problems were no longer to be solved by Africans as envisaged by Gowon and later reaffirmed by Muhammed and Obasanjo. This was to have a devastating consequence on Nigeria, as Africa countries hitherto dreadful of Nigeria soon began to regard the country with contempt. Cameroon demonstrated this disrespect when according to Dauda (2006:46); on May 16, 1981 Nigeria was shocked with the sad announcement that five Nigeria Soldiers on routine patrol duties on the Nigeria - Cameroon borders along the Akpa Yafi River in Cross River State were ambushed and killed by Cameroonian gendarmes. Cameroon did not offer apology to Nigeria, and in spite of the public outrage the Shagari administration only demanded a within 7-day apology from Cameroonian government, with the alibi that Nigerian government response to the predicament was consistent with the nation character of the country's African policy. Shagari however did not explain to Nigerians whether the country's foreign policy was to allow Nigerians slew by her neighbors with impunity.

But Shagari contradicted himself when in January, 1983, perhaps, because of the biting economic crisis decided to expel three million illegal alien largely Africans from Nigeria. Expectedly, Nigeria received the most vicious condemnation from across Africa. Most bizarre was the hash response even from the West.

See what the London Daily Mail said:

*...Condemned Shehu Shagari for defying world opinion despite alarming television pictures of misery, destruction and deaths among the fleeing aliens and stated that the illegal aliens were being used as scapegoats for the political and social - economic failure of the Nigerian government. The paper further stated that the quit order was unworthy of a country which has real claims to be the natural leader of the continent against racialism in Southern Africa.*

Such commentaries no doubt are often directed at countries like Nigeria who in the eyes of the larger world has no clear foreign policy direction. One wonders how prepared is the United States that lay claim to

be the largest world economy is in accommodating illegal aliens. Not long ago South African citizens aimed with sticks and other overt harmful objects chased out other African nationals from South Africa for “taken over their jobs”. Other examples also exist.

The obvious thing is that Nigeria is the architect of her own problems. This is because in the articulation of her foreign policy, the country has not bothered to weight the far – reaching effects. It is this ambivalence that has made even those that the country usually perceived as friends usually give the country a slap in the face. Be that as it may, this paper upholds Dauda’s (2006:51) view that Nigeria’s foreign policy during the second republic was highly compromised, making it impossible for the country to take any independent course of action. The little effort made by the Shagari administration to lead a global crusade for reparation was resented because Nigeria had already fallen into diplomatic doldrums and her voice was no longer much respected in the international arena.

## 5. The return of the military

On 31<sup>st</sup> December, 1983, Nigerians woke up confronted with another reality. Another Military take over. The new helms man, major General Mohammadu Buhari while promising to remake Nigerian. On foreign policy Buhari said:

*While Africa remains the centre piece of our foreign policy, we cannot but operate within a series of concentric circle which now effectively guide our behaviour. On the African and world scene the innermost of the circles of national interests involves Nigeria’s security – territorial integrity and political independence and of the neighbours of Nigeria. The second circle involves on relations with the ECOWAS sub – region where we intend to take more active interests in developments of social, economic and political nature. Nigeria is not a global power, therefore our commitments, pre – occupation and expenditure of our resources must be made to reflect our capabilities and interest, it is for this reason that our primary focus is on the West African Sub – region since any even occurring in this area has an impact directly on Nigeria’s interest. The third circle of national interest involved supporting self – determination and dealing with larger African issues (West Africa, 22 October 1984: 2118 cited in Dauda 2006: 51).*

Gone with the winds was the general concept of “Africa is the Centre piece of our foreign policy”. As Akinrinade (1992:52) notes, the big brother posture was dropped and Nigeria was ready not to compromise her national interest even if that meant been in conflict with her neighbour(s). Indeed, Nigeria’s relation with her neighbours was to be conducted purely on the basis of gains and losses.

The first practical move by the Buhari administration was the closing of Nigeria’s land borders which according to the then Foreign Minister, Ibrahim Gambari, was done to put the economic interest of our people first and for security reasons (Newswatch 4 March, 1985:14). Nigeria’s neighbours first pretended that the closure did not affect them but when it became obvious that Nigeria was resolute about the issue, not less than 8 neighbouring government visited Nigeria, pleading for the re – opening of the land borders.

Nigerian government's response was that the borders would be re - opened when all the anomalies discovered were corrected. It is instructive to note that, that land borders were not opened until Buhari's government was overthrown.

On the economic front, the IMF policies initiated by the Shagari administration were termed to be too unpalatable, especially as it affects currency devaluation, massive removal of subsidies, privatization and liberalization of trade and payments. Bangura (1989: 142) maintains that the government took this position because it felt that the purported benefits were only a farce. In addition because of the mono-culture base of the economy and the pricing of the country's export commodities in foreign currencies under producers' organizations, devaluation was not expected to have any reasonable impact on the country's foreign exchange earnings. The debt service burden in naira terms, it was pointed out would increase and wipe out any gains to government revenue from exports on which the IMF argument was based. Finally, the government maintained that the inflation effects of devaluation would force workers to demand for wage increase in order to protect their real income. The government then turned to the Middle East where it approached Saudi Arabia for a loan of 1.6 billion dollars", but the IMF working through the United States government prevailed upon Saudi Arabia not to grant the loan (Dauda 2006:60).

By the end of the administration, counter - trade agreement had been signed, valued at more than 2.5 billion, with Brazil accounting for about 40 per cent of the deals. Discussions were ongoing with SCOA and government about similar counter - trade agreement. Several European Economic Community members, especially France, Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands with considerable balance of trade deficits with Nigeria welcomed counter - trade arrangement (Gambari, 1989:149). Expectedly, Britain was not quite receptive to the counter trade arrangement, because it threatened to diminish the volume of its trade with Nigeria. As expected Nigeria's relations with Britain started experiencing mutual suspicion, and it almost reached a breaking point with the entrance of the Alhaji Umoru Dikko Saga.

Dikko, a Transport Minister in the Shagari administration had taken a political asylum in Britain when his benefactor's administration was toppled by the Military. The Military administration wanted him back to Nigeria to answer charges of corruption. The British government was not ready to extradite the fugitive, who leaning his back on Britain had threatened to wage a jihad against Buhari's administration. As Gambari (1989:143) notes, Dikko's views were given wide coverage by the British press. On 5 July, 1984, four men one a Nigerian and three Israelis attempted to kidnap Dikko and airlift him to Nigeria, the plan was foiled by the British security network. At the time the crate containing Dikko was to be airlifted from London, a British Cal domain Plain which was already airborne on its regular flight from Lagos to London via Kano was ordered back to Lagos and was subsequently put on detention. These diplomatic tensions continued until both countries withdraw their diplomatic personnel mutually.

Nigerians, through civil society organizations called for tougher action against Britain, on the ground that Britain had planted economic Saboteurs in Nigeria and collaborated with Dikko to wreck the Nigerian economy. It was through this domestic pressure that the Buhari administration later gave recognition to the Palestine Liberation organization, PLO, with full ambassadorial status.

With the Dikko affair in his mind, Major – General Muhammed Buhari Lamented inter alia:

*Britain which has been for a long regarded by Nigerians as traditional friend has caused us once again in recent times to doubt the geniuses of this friendship. Just as we did in the 1960 when our young nation faced the greatest threat to its national unity and in the period immediately following the senseless assassination of General Murtala Mohammed in the abortive bid to replace the Federal Military Government in February, 1976. Today, as Nigeria faces the test of economic survival and the maintenance of its national unity and stability, Britain is once again sitting on the fence over the question of returning to this country all those unpatriotic Nigerians, who have contributed to bring our country close to economic and social ruin and are hiding there. Yet Britain protests its friendly intentions towards Nigeria Loudly (NIIA Lagos, December 3, 1984 cited in Dauda 2006:65).*

Nevertheless, in spite all these problems Nigeria continued to relay on Britain on Military matters, and still maintained Britain as the major trading partner.

On 27<sup>th</sup> August, 1985 General Ibrahim Babangida toppled the Burari administration. See Babangida's view on foreign policy:

*Nigeria's foreign policy in the last 20 months has been characterized by inconsistency and incoherence. It has lacked the clarity to make us know where we stood on matters of international concern to enable other countries relate to us with seriousness. Our role as Africa's spokesman had diminished because we have been unable to maintain the respect of African countries. The ousted Military government conducted our external relations by a policy of retaliatory reactions. Nigeria became a country that reacted to given situations rather than taking initiatives as it should and had always done (cited in Dauda 2006:185).*

Babangida also outlined the foreign policy objectives of his administration:

*African problems and their solution should constitute the premise of our foreign policy.... The Economic Community of West Africa States must be re-born with the view to achieving the objective of regional integration..., while we appeal to the industrialized nations to positively consider the debt plight of the developing countries and assist in dealing with the dangers that face us... (Cited in Dauda, 2006:66).*

Like Buhari, Babangida's foreign policy placed premium on ECOWAS, but at variance was Babangida's non-projection of national interest as a pre-requisite for such cooperation.

Buhari's administration closed all the land borders on account of protecting the national interest, and wanted to have in place a sound inter-border policy. This was not the priority of the Babangida administration, as it quickly reopened the borders immediately on assumption of duty. Babangida was not

mindful of the concentric circle nature of modern diplomacy, as it re-enacted the “big brother” posture Nigeria was known for in the 1970s. This, it demonstrated when with the blessing of the OUA, it played the vanguard position in the formation of the coalition of West African States, ECOMOG, when the Liberian crisis broke out.

By the time the crisis was over, Nigeria’s tax payers money in the neighbourhood of 13 billion dollars were spent. In her pursuit of Africa, as the centre – piece of Nigeria’s foreign policy, Babangida’s administration introduced the extension of Technical Aid to African countries that require it. Under the Technical Aid Corps Scheme, Nigerian Professionals whose services were required by other African countries were seconded at the Nigerian government’s expense, to those countries for a period of up to three years.

Also obvious deviation was the “Akinyemi’s principle of reciprocity whereby, without prejudice to the centrality of Africa as the centre piece of Nigeria foreign policy, the government would make it a point to consult only with African governments which seek Nigeria’s opinion and views on matters that concern them individually or collectively (Obiozor, 1993: 24).

Another veered objective from previous governments’ emphasis was the economic diplomacy of the Babangida administration. This policy has been in place ever before but the Babangida administration gave it more fillip. This strategy achieved minimal results, as it failed to redress the Nigeria economic crisis. It must be noted that foreign capital inflow, is a function of profit consideration. In their bid to maximize profit from investment, investors reduce risk especially in politically unstable third world countries by investing mainly that capital which they have mobilize locally:

*Experience has shown most of the so – called foreign investors come with little or nothing in finances; they raise internal loans from the saving of ordinary Nigerians and within months, they are devising all means of repatriating huge sums out of Nigeria in form of dividends, profits, management fees, loaded invoices etc. (Obasanjo’s comments cited in Bangura 1991:56).*

It must be acknowledge that the adoption of economic diplomacy by the Babangida regime compelled the administration to thread where the Shagari and Buhari’s administrations hesitated to do especially the administration’s decision to wholesomely implement the hash conditionalities of the IMF, as it affect devaluation of the currency, privatization and commercialization, with the attendant reduction in social spending. The new effect of this was that the economy rather experienced a more downward trend. Babangida’s administration, unfortunately failed to see through crystal ball that, investments by the industrialized countries are geared towards profit repatriation than any genuine investment in the host countries.

## **6. The Abacha administration foreign policy**

Since Nigeria’s independence in 1960, it was during General Sani Abacha’s regime 1993 – 1998 that there was a marked discontinuity in foreign pursuit of the country (Saliu, 1999: 62). After Nigeria’s war of unity,

the cancellation of the June 12, 1993 Presidential election almost turned the country up – side – down. Thanks to the resilience of God’s own country – Nigeria. The refocusing of Nigeria’s foreign policy towards the East in that tense trying time, this paper takes the position, justified Abacha administration’s stand even if the administration acted on emotions rather than on any scientific premises. It was in line with the protection of Nigeria’s external sovereignty and a rejection of real or perceived undue interference in the country’s domestic matters, both of which as noted by Oche, cited in Saliu (1999: 62) constituted reaction to political and economic pressures from Nigeria’s traditional Western allies.

It is imperative if not necessary, to look at the antecedent(s) of the drastic and radical policy shift. The factors to the change in foreign policy direction by the Abacha administration can be traced as far back as the June 12 political crisis of 1993. A Presidential election was conducted. Two contenders, Chief M. K. O. Abiola of the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and Alhaji Bashir Tofa of the National Republican Convention, NRC, both parties which were formed by government and hoisted on Nigerians, were locked in the contest. The SDP flag bearer, Abiola, was said to be leading in the electoral count, and in a twist, the Association for Better for Nigeria filled a petition alleging irregularities in the primaries that reduced Abiola as a candidate of the SDP. An Abuja High Court presided over by one Justice Ikpeme passed a verdict calling for the halt in the conduct of the election, on the premise of the judgment; the inconclusive election was annulled by the Federal Government.

The annulment of the June 12 Presidential election generated crisis and upheavals, the gravity of which had not been experienced since the end of the Nigerian Civil War. The dimension of the whole experience, however, was that in the eyes of some members of the international community, the annulment itself was perceived as a gross subversion of the democratization process on the part of the military. To this extent, target sanctions needed to be imposed on the military administration as a kind of punitive measures against the annulment of the June 12 presidential election (Oche, cited in Saliu 1999:64).

Also arising from the execution in 1995 of Ken Saro Wiwa and other eight Ogoni members for their complicity in the murder of four traditional chiefs in Ogoni Land, Nigeria faced intense pressure especially from the United State, Britain and the European Union, to the extent that even the common – wealth of Nations could not exercise patience with Nigeria as it slammed a two – year suspension on the country. Canada severed relations with Nigeria, and for the first time in history, the United Nations, on the premise of the execution of the “Orgoni nine”, passed a resolution against Nigeria, condemning the execution.

The pressure was so suffocating that Nigeria became virtually a pariah nation facing intense blockade economically and politically. It was obvious, all the actions were premeditated, because going by Nigeria’s contribution to world peace and progress, she needed to be handled not actually with kid gloves, but as a sovereign nation the country needed support to overcome the difficulties in suddenly found herself in, but unknown to Nigeria, it was payback time for the humiliation suffered in her hands during the golden days of the country’s international diplomacy. The West did not want to miss that opportunity, and if the country was not careful the fate of Yugoslavia would have befallen it. Of course, as a mortal, General Abacha might have had his shortcomings, but it is naïve to refuse to acknowledge that the problem the Abacha administration was grappling with was the legacy it inherited from the previous administration. In any case,

is Nigeria not a sovereign nation like Israel? The Israeli/Palestinian Saga is not the object of this research paper, but it is instructive to note that treating precedents with profound inconsistency in international relations is obstructive to sovereign sanctity of counties of the world. What is worse than the initiatives to undermine Nigeria's security when at the heat of the crisis bomb blasts assumed a crescendo dimension whose probe, according to Oche cited in Saliu (1999:68) "were been blocked by Britain and Spanish governments".

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These were the scenarios and the antecedents that occasioned the drastic foreign policy shift, and this Sega justified the emotional premise which was obviously pushed to the front burner in preference to any scientific premise which if Abacha had wanted to employ, probably, he would have fallen into bad history as the Nigeria leader that would have perhaps presided over the balkanization of our dear country. It was in a bid to preserve the external sovereignty of Nigeria and to protect and Preserve the independence of the country that Abacha so acted. See Abacha's words:

*The overriding aim of Nigeria's foreign policy must be to project and safeguard our national interest at all times. Against the background of our experiences, the main trust of our foreign policy has been a struggle for self-determination, the alleviation of poverty and the pursuit of self - reliant development. In response to the challenges of the emerging globalization of the international system and in expressing our right to self - determination, we have, in relevant*

*times, been looking beyond our traditional allies to diversify and cultivate new ties with countries that we consider not only friendly but display honest desire to cooperate with us in the pursuit of our development objectives. We should always welcome genuine and friendly relations based on mutual trust, respect and equality (cited in Saliu 1999:69).*

The nature of the policy shift was that Nigeria began to develop ties with the People's Republic of China. Although Nigeria and China have had diplomatic ties for a long time, the abandonment of the West was to bring about intensified relations. The patient Russia was also courted by the policy shift and that country responded quite favourably, by appointing, in Abugu's (1997:32) view, a young radical of ministerial rank, General Sergel Shoigu to head a newly created commission on Nigeria. The Guardian May 10, 1997:13 maintained that Western hostility towards Nigeria made her to pay more attention to South - South cooperation like the developing eight D - 8, earlier criticized as an Islamic body. India, Iraq, Libya Sudan, North Korea, Turkey, Syria etc. become new friends of Nigeria.

Many scholars argued that the new relationship that Nigeria entered into was not viable, as the new friends had poor economics and were competing for technical and financial assistance with Nigeria. This sounds untenable because the West had at no point spoon-fed Nigeria. The only weakness Nigeria has is her mono-economy, which has made the country's oil clients to cultivate the master/servant relationship such that overtime Nigeria found herself in paranoid that her economy could devastate if a country like the United States withdrew its cliental-ship from the country.

Relations among and between nations must be governed by the principles of mutual respect. Thus, not only economic conditions, but also considerations of prestige and self-determination were the promptings that rightly made Abacha to turn to the East.

## **7. The period of the pious democratization process**

The sudden demise of General Sani Abacha, paved the way for ascendancy of General Abdulsalemi Abubakar as Head of State in July, 1998. Abubakar's desire was to return power to civilian; he did that with profound diligence. Taken lessons from the Abacha's virtual isolation by the West, Abubakar moved quickly and mend fences. To assuage the West, he revoke all the draconian and harsh decrees, released political prisoners and detainees as well as convicted political prisoners, dropped political charges against Nigerians in self - exile abroad to enable them return to the country.

According to Chibuzor, the Abubakar administration thus embarked on engagement with the leaders of the West African Sub - region in the belief that Nigeria's interest and destiny were inevitably tied to the immediate environment. It redirected energies and resources towards the maintenance of peace, security and stability in West Africa and the African continent at large. Beyond Africa, conscious efforts were made to re-establish ties with all traditional Western nations; and strengthened her active participation in the conferences of the Non-Aligned Movement, UNO, AU, etc. the result of thee effort was that, the G - 7, G-22, the Commonwealth, European Union, ASEAN, Latin America and Canada, etc, all announced as a corollary, that they would resume diplomatic relations, and lift sanctions imposed on Nigeria.



As earlier stated, Abubakar wanted to make a quick return of power by the military to civilians. He therefore saw the hostility of some sections of the international community against Nigeria as a stumbling block, and swiftly reversed his predecessor's foreign policy direction in order to achieve the goal of his administration.

## 8. The returns of civilians

The principal benefit of General Abdulsalam Abubakar's transition programme, was chief Olusegun Obasanjo who was military leader between 1976 – 1979. Obasanjo willingly handed over power to the first – executive president of Nigeria, Alhaji Usman Shehu Shagari. Obasanjo, was among those accused by Abacha for plotting to overthrow his government, was among those tried and sentenced by the Military tribunal. When Abubakar became head of state, he introduced a dwarf transition programme and Obasanjo was dragged from prisons, anointed and crown DPD Presidential flag bearer. He won the election. When he became president – elect; he embarked on an infuriating globetrotting. At his inauguration the President said:

*Nigeria once a well –respected and key player on the international community became a pariah nation. We shall pursue a dynamic foreign policy to promote friendly relations with all nations, and will continued to play a constructive role in the UNO, the OAU and other international bodies. We shall continue to honour existing agreements between Nigeria and other countries. It is our firm resolves to restock Nigeria fully to the prestigious position of eminence in the comity of nations.*

What followed was extensive tour by the president and his foreign affairs minister; to Africa, Europe, Asia and the Americas to promote Nigeria's image; bilateral and multilateral relations, even at the expense of very strong criticisms of Mr. President's excessive overseas tours. But what is that by pursuing very "dynamic" foreign policy objectives, Nigeria now plays its traditional "prestigious" role in international affairs, that is, Nigeria is back to where it belongs doing usual business with equanimity.

It must be maintained that, through South – South Cooperation, and with the "understanding" of the West, Obasanjo combined efforts with other leaders and that resulted to debt reduction and cancellation of third world countries. Obasanjo was also one of the brains behind the formation of NEPAD. Single-handedly, Obasanjo reversed a military coup in Saotome and Principe. He however diluted the vigour of his administration when he attempts to charge the constitution in order for him to serve for a third term in office in fragrance disregard to world view. Thanks to the Senator Ken Nnamani-led Senate which killed the third term ambition.

## 9. The latest of Nigeria's foreign policy

The direction of the current Nigeria President Alhaji Umaru Yar' Adua's foreign policy as it is at the present has remained ambivalent. While government, after Balewa, openly came up fumbling or introducing

admirable innovations, visible in Yar'Adua regime was the Ojo Maduekwe's nauseating concept of citizen diplomacy which according to Onunaiju in Daily Trust 21 June 2009 is neither foreign policy nor diplomacy:

*Besides rhetoric and grandstanding, Nigeria foreign policy has not fared any better since the past two years. Foreign policy results are measureable and could be well assessed. In how many international fora is Nigeria's voice clearly heard and discernable? In how much global institutional architecture is Nigeria's mark clearly discernable? At the meeting of Group of 20 and other countries that met in Washington to discuss the global economic meltdown, Nigeria was conspicuous by its absence. President Yar'adua later bemoaned Nigeria's fate.... Since the past two years, Nigeria's foreign policy relations and diplomacy has been characterized by topsy-turvy and has absolutely nothing to show for it. ... Within Africa, Nigeria stands far more diminished after the neighboring Ghana and South Africa conducted a universally acclaimed fair and free elections.*

## 10. Way forward

Foreign policy is a survival strategy in a hostile, unstable, competitive and anarchic global environment that operates on the principle of the survival of the fittest. Thus, we cherish Salman Mahmmod view that there could be no disagreement that in order to follow an independence course of foreign policy in international area, given the complex nature of mutual inter-dependence of nations and changing dynamics of international relations, neither is it possible nor even desirable to adopt an absolute and rigid foreign policy stance, almost being, unconcerned about the changes in regional-global environment that clearly do influence a country's peace, stability and progress. As such, it could only be a balanced foreign policy pursuit which reflects fine blending of independence and pragmatism, provided it is backed by a well - informed public opinion and a broad national consensus of a country.

## 11. Conclusion

The fundamental principles and objectives of Nigeria's foreign policy invented by the first Prime Minister of Nigeria, Alhaji Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, have remained unaltered irrespective of the rapid turnover of governments. Although Nigeria has had civilian administrations, it is the first time that the nation is witnessing more than a decade of civilian rule at a stretch. Both the Civilian and Military governments have pursued foreign policy objectives with different emphasis. The difference between civilian and military regimes in pursuit of the foreign policy goals is clear. The Balewa, Shagari, Babangida, Abubakar, Obasanjo, and by extension, Yar'Adua all could be lumped together as governments whose foreign policy pursuits lacked the expected bite, although Obasanjo's Presidency stands out in the category. Gowon, Muhammed/Obasanjo, Buhari and Abacha had more assertive foreign policy pursuit with each taken a different course. The Gowon, and Muhammed/Obasanjo regimes' pundits had it that the enormous oil wealth

that Nigeria suddenly got swallowed into largely accounted for the foreign policy vigour. Buhari's regime was cut short. Abacha operated under a hostile internal and external environment, yet he braved all odds. What has, however, remained intriguing about Abacha is that one only wished he were alive to accomplish his mission in the midst of the intense antagonistic global milieu, which he had to grapple with.

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