JAJA WACHUKWU, 1918-1996: THE FIRST NIGERIAN MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND HIS CONTRIBUTIONS TO NIGERIA'S FOREIGN POLICY

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Abstract

The paper examines the contribution of Jaja Wachukwu, the First Nigerian Minister for Foreign Affairs and his contributions to Nigeria's Foreign Policy. The paper is situated against thebackground of the prominent role he played as the Nigeria foreign affairs Minister which however has not gone unrecognized. Thus, as a foreign affairs minister, Nigerian foreign policy was characterized by a focus on Africa as a regional power and by attachment to several fundamental principles: African unity and Afrocentrism; capability to exercise hegemonic influence in the region: peaceful settlement of disputes; non-alignment and non-intentional interference in the internal affairs of other nations; and regional economic cooperation and development. Through his excellent contribution Nigeria gained considerable fame and respect in the international system. Wachuku, gave a more credible and emphatic attention to the concept of Afrocentric and good neighborliness. For him, any Nigeria's foreign policy that does not connote the interest of the common man in the continent of Africa is unrealistic. The paper concluded that Jaja Wachuku and his roles as the first foreign affairs Minister cannot be overemphasized. Jaja may have passed away about two decades ago, but his contributions to Nigeria's foreign policy remain a big game-changer in Nigeria's history. The paper is however divided into four sections, the first being the breakdown of the work, followed by the introduction, his biography, and the last section deals extensively with his contributions to Nigeria's foreign policy.

Keyword: Jaja Wachukwu, Foreign Policy, Afrocentrism, Foreign Affairs, International System

Introduction

The history of Nigeria's diplomatic practice has been in the making shortly before the country's independence. To a large extent, this was more of a manifestation of British system of handing over power to her former colonies through a systematic process (Ezirim, 2011). This entailed training of personal in all facets of activities and developing the Civil Service was paramount in this approach. As a nucleus of diplomatic practice, a Foreign Service division was created in the Nigerian Prime minister's office in 1957, to deal with

matters concerning commonwealth and foreign relations (Folarin, 2015). Officers were selected to serve in this division and they were at first attached to British Emphasis and consular posts to function as Third Secretaries Vice Consuls and so on. On 1st October, 1960, Nigeria got her Independence and subsequently established a separate Ministry known as Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Commonwealth Relations (Jibril, 2004) to deal with external affairs of the government and Jaja Anucha NdubisiWachikwu was appointed as the first Foreign Affairs Minister at that time.

Jaja Anucha Wachuku, was a Pan-Africanist; and a distinguished Nigerian statesman, lawyer, politician, diplomat and humanitarian. He was the first Speaker of the Nigerian House of Representatives, as well as first Nigerian Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the United Nations. He was also the first Nigerian Minister of Foreign Affairs. His significant mark in Nigeria foreign policy and political history has made him an epitome of Statesmanship that has not gone unrecognized. Since independence, with Jaja Wachuku as the first Minister of Foreign Affairs and Commons, later called External Affairs, Nigerian foreign policy has been characterized by a focus on Africa as a regional power and by attachment to several fundamental principles: African unity and independence; capability to exercise hegemonic influence in the region: peaceful settlement of disputes; non-alignment and non-intentional interference in the internal affairs of other nations; and regional economic cooperation and development. In carrying out these principles, Nigeria participates in the African Union, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Non-Aligned Movement, the Commonwealth of Nations, and the United Nations. There are many Nigerian organizations outside the country. Prominent among them is the Houston, Texas United States-based Nigerian Union Diaspora (NUD), which is the umbrella Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) for the economic and political empowerment of the people of Nigerian descent outside Nigeria (Folarin, 2015).

At the time, Jaja Wachuku was working as the first Minister of Foreign Affairs in Nigeria after serving as the first Ambassador and Paramount Representative of Nigeria to the United Nations. Through his excellent showcase of work ethics, he had gained considerable fame and respect in the United Nations as well as established strong relations with presidents of the United States between 1960 and 1963 (Ashiru, 2014).

Notably, it was during that Wachuku forged the reputed friendship that he had with three American Presidents - namely: Dwight D. Eisenhower, John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson. He was also good friends with Martin Luther King, Jr., Marian Anderson, Nelson Aldrich Rockefeller, Henry Ford II and so many other Americans. And also Israel's Golda Meir; as well as numerous leaders and people around the world.

Wachuku, who gave a more credible and emphatic attention to the concept of Afrocentric and good neighborliness stated categorically that any Nigeria's foreign policy that does not connote the interest of the common man in the continent of Africa is unrealistic. According to him, charity begins at home, thus, the dividend of Nigeria's foreign policy should be seen in the affairs of the people. Thus, he maintained that, Africans are independent in everything, but neutral in nothing that affects the destiny of Africa. The moment Africa is affected, we are involved. We want to make this absolutely clear; Nigeria finds itself involved in anything affecting the African continent anywhere, in any square inch of the African territory – we are involved… And being a member of the African community and feeling ourselves completely bound to its destiny and accepting our involvement in everything that pertains to it… The peace of Africa is the peace of Nigeria. Its tribulations are our tribulations and we cannot be indifferent to its future (as cited in Ashiru, 2014). However, not much is known about him in the public domain as regards the prominent role he played as the Nigeria foreign affairs Minister. It is against the backdrop that the paper examines the role of Jaja Anucha NdubisiWachukwu, the first foreign affairs Minister and his contribution to Nigeria Foreign Policy.

Biography of Jaja Anucha NdubisiWachukwu(1918 - 1996),

Jaja Wachuku was born on January 1, 1918, to King Josaiah Ndubuisi Wachuku of Ngwa-Land in Eastern Nigeria which is populated by the Igbo tribe of Nigeria. His mother, Queen Rebecca NgwanchiwaWachuku is also widely known for her role as a woman's right activist and wealthy landowner years before she married into royalty. Jaja Wachuku was an intelligent man who gained several scholarships and prizes during his school years. Born into an affluent home, he received the best of education in Nigeria, Ghana and Angola until finally leaving Africa for Ireland for further studies where he successfully graduated as a lawyer.

His most distinguished awards were a high school scholarship in Lagos and becoming the first African gold medalist Laureate in Oratory of Trinity College, Ireland. He was called to the Irish bar in 1944. From 1944 to 1947, Jaja Wachuku worked extensively in Ireland working closely with fellow Africans to elevate the social status of Africans working in Europe. He gave lectures on various topics affecting Africans in Europe and represented diverse African students and associations on several international platforms. He also continued his education specialising in Criminal and Constitutional Law.

Identifying the pressing need for independence for Nigeria, Jaja relocated to his home country in 1947 and immediately got involved in governance and politics after being elected as a member and legal advisor for the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons. He then set up the New Africa Party to help institutionalise Pan-Africanism and the need for independence in Nigeria. He became the first Nigerian Speaker of the House of Representatives in 1959 and was appointed the first Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Nigeria to the United Nations when Nigeria gained independence in 1960 after successfully helping Nigeria gain admission into the United Nations. He also served as Minister of Economic Development, Foreign Affairs and Aviation until the 1966 coup.

Jaja Wachuku is recognised as a statesman with many responsibilities placed in his care. He never complained about his numerous roles but instead performed them diligently. He was recognised and rewarded for his hard work both locally and internationally. He married Rhoda Idu Oona Onumonu in 1951, and they had five children together. Jaja Wachuku retired from politics but was very active during the Biafra War helping in the struggle of the Igbo people and in Nigeria's Second Republic where he worked closely with the Nigerian Senate. He passed away on November 7, 1996, after a short illness at the age of 78. He has been featured on magazines such as Time Magazine which described him as a "Pride of Africa". In 2010, he was posthumously awarded the Golden Jubilee Independence Anniversary Award for his dedication to Nigeria and its governance by Goodluck Jonathan, the then president of the country.

Jaja Anucha NdubisiWachukwu and his contributions to Nigeria's Foreign Policy

From 1961 to 1965, Wachuku was the First Nigerian Minister of Foreign Affairs and Commonwealth Relations, later called External Affairs. On July 14, 1962, he was decorated with the insignia of the "Commander of the Order of the Niger Republic" in recognition of "services to the People of the Republic of Niger" by President Hamani Diori. As Foreign Affairs Minister, Jaja Wachuku organized the Afro/Asian group of States and worked to get Liberia voted into the United Nations Security Council, and Ethiopia into the Economic and Social Council. He also worked towards the amendment of the United Nations Charter - increasing the Security Council from eleven to fifteen - taking into account African nations (Ubochi, 2007).

It was concerning this period in Nigeria's history that Ambassador Owen W. Roberts, United States of America's 1964 to 1965 Political Officer in Lagos, Nigeria strikingly said:

> "The Nigerians, whatever their tribe, are a very strong, very assertive group. Foreign Minister Jaja Wachuku was a surprise for many American diplomats because he considered himself as having a status equivalent to the British, French, German, or Russian Ministers. Wachuku demanded that much attention and respect. The Nigerians were, and have been, very independent. Senior U.S. echelons weren't used to dealing with Africans as assertive and as strong minded as the Nigerians were. I found this nice because the Nigerians were absolutely always open with you, and would hit you over the head with whatever the problem was. They were entitled to respect and helped gain it for Africans. Ambassador Matthews was not the kind of person to go in and tell Prime Minister Balewa or Foreign Minister Jaja Wachuku how to do things (as cited in Ubochi, 2007)"

Jaja Wachuku as Foreign Affairs Minister of Nigeria preferred quiet consultation, especially with the two major Anglo-American powers: Great Britain and the United States - in search of solutions to continental and international problems. For example, there was a lot of hue and cry as a result of the Rivonia trial in South Africa in 1963 following the arrest of Walter Sisulu, Govan Mbeki, Denis Goldberg, Raymond

Mhlaba, Andrew Mlangeni, Lionel Bernstein, and others. They and Nelson Mandela, who was serving term on his 1962 conviction, were charged with "sabotage and...conspiracy to overthrow the Government by revolution and by assisting an armed invasion of South Africa by foreign troops." These charges were treasonable and carried the death penalty. Jaja Wachuku quitely invited Lord Head, the British High Commissioner in Lagos, and also United States' Ambassador Joseph Palmer II - and strongly urged them to intercede with their governments to prevail on the apartheid regime in South Africa - not to impose the death penalty on Nelson Mandela and others. Wachuku employed the same quite diplomacy on the matter with U.S. Secretary of State Dean Rusk and British Foreign Secretary Lord Home. Subsequently, Lionel Bernstein was acquitted and Nelson Mandela and the rest were given life imprisonment terms (Ubochi, 2007).

Jaja Wachuku, like Hegel's historical individual, had the capacity to stand outside the confines of his time, place and intuiting history. He sought his vindication in historical reality. The Right Honourable Prime Minister Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa recognized and appreciated Wachuku's outstanding essence; and used to tell him that he was ten or more years ahead of his government cabinet colleagues. Wachuku's uncanny historical intuition was evident from the start when, in 1947, he proclaimed Lagos an All-Nigerian city - long before that city became a federal territory. Wachuku also foresaw the danger of recognizing military coup as a way to change government: In Ethiopia, he strongly refused to accord recognition to the Nicolas Grunitzky Government in Togo after the January 13, 1963 first coup in that country. Jaja Wachuku believed that if that first African coup by the Togolese army was recogonized as a way to change government, then, coup making would spread in Africa (Postpoems.com, 2001)

In Addis Ababa, during the Inaugural Conference of the Organization of African Unity [OAU], Emperor Haile Selassie sat Wachuku down in the presence of Prime Minister Balewa and begged Balewa to plead with his "Foreign Minister Jaja Wachuku" to accept that the Togolese Government be admitted to take part in that first OAU Conference. Wachuku jokingly reminded Emperor Haile Selassie and Prime Minister Balewa that he was only number three in the Nigerian Government, and that coup plotters go for numbers one and two - President or Head of State and Prime Minister. Jaja Wachuku added that by the time coup makers got to number three, he would be

resting in his village. At the end, Wachuku refused to change his diplomatic position of not allowing Togo to participate because the Togolese Government came to power by coup. Therefore, Togo became the only independent African country that was not represented at the Inaugural Conference of the OAU. History has already told us whether Wachuku was right or wrong. Even Kwame Nkrumah who was one of the most vocal supporters of the Togolese Government of coup makers, later fell victim of the coup contagion. As for Jaja Wachuku, he had resigned from the Nigerian Parliament and Government at mid-day of January 14, 1966 - twelve hours before the first Nigerian military coup of January 15, 1966 led by Major Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu.

In a public lecture titled "Nigeria: The Blackman's Burden" delivered on February 24, 2005 at the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs [NIIA] - to mark the 28th Anniversary of the Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture [FESTAC] and the 2005 Black History Month, it was also concerning Jaja Wachuku at the founding period in Nigeria's Foreign Policy that Professor Bolaji Akinyemi, 1985 to 1987 Nigerian External Affairs Minister, said:

> "Karl Marx must have had Togo in mind when he wrote in The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon, "Hegel says somewhere that all great events and personalities in world history reappear in one fashion or another. He forgot to add: the first time as tragedy, the second as farce". In 1963, when President Sylvanus Olympio was assassinated, Jaja Wachuku, the Nigerian Foreign Minister in condemning the action added that for security reasons, Nigerian boundary was the Togo-Ghana boundary. He was roundly condemned. Looks like he was just speaking forty years out of turn. He would be pleased to know that Nigeria had caught up with him. And that should also be a lesson to those who think that Nigerian foreign policy started and ended up with them (as cited in Ubochi, 2007)."

As Foreign Affairs Minister, Wachuku attended the Philadelphia third annual conference of the American Society of African Culture [AMSAC] held in 1960. Concerning Jaja Wachuku at that AMSAC conference, The Cambridge History of Africa Volume 8 c. 1940-c. 1975 published by the Cambridge University Press , in page 106, said:

> "Continuing interest among the black intelligentia in African culture was signalled by the creation of the American Society of African Culture (AMSAC) in 1956, which restricted membership to persons of African descent...Its third annual conference, in Philadelphia in 1960, devoted itself to the discussion of `African Unities and Pan-Africanism', and can be regarded as an event in the history of the movement. Some of those present had strong links with the Pan-Africanist past, notably Rayford W. Logan, who had played an important part in the era of Pan-African congresses after the First World War; Jean Price-Mars, Haitian diplomat, philosopher of negritude, and President of the Socio-Africaine de Culture in Paris; and Jaja Wachuku, who had been at the 1945 Pan-African Congress, and who was in 1960 foreign Minister of Nigeria (as cited in Ubochi, 2007) "

Under Wachuku's leadership as the first foreign affairs minister both the Nigerian Army and the Nigerian Police Force made their debut in International Peacekeeping - under the auspices of the World Organization. During his time at the United Nations, Nigeria's Major-General Johnson Thomas UmunnakweAguiyi Ironsi was appointed Commander of the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in the Congo. Also, the first Nigerian Permanent Secretary, Mr. Francis Nwokedi was retained by the United Nations to help in the reorganization of the Civil Service in the Congo. Wachuku also secured the appointment of the first African Under Secretary-General of the United Nations - Nigeria's Mr. Amachree

January 14, 1966. the army struck thus ushering in the era of military coups in Nigeria. Wachuku's official residence, at 7, Okotie-Eboh Street Ikoyi, Lagos, Nigeria was surrounded by soldiers. His younger brother Kennedy MaduWachuku, father of Ugonna Wachuku was with him that day, Jaja Wachuku looked through the window in the early hours of the morning and asked the soldiers: "What are you boys doing here?" One of the soldiers replied: "Good morning, Sir. But haven't you heard what is happening in the country?" To which Wachuku replied: "Yes. I know you boys have taken over the Government." And the soldiers said: "Do not be afraid, Sir. We have come to protect you for being an honest Government Minister." Jaja Wachuku survived that January 15, 1966 military coup.

However,he passed away on November 7, 1996, after a short illness at the age of 78.He has been featured on magazines such as Time Magazine which described him as a "Pride of Africa". In 2010, he was posthumously awarded the Golden Jubilee Independence Anniversary Award for his dedication to Nigeria and its governance by Goodluck Jonathan, the then president of the country.

Conclusion

The paper concludes from the narrative above that whatever may be the points of argument for or against Jaja Wachuku, his role as the first foreign affairs Minister cannot be overemphasized or underrated. Jaja may have passed away about two decades ago, but his contributions to Nigeria's foreign policy remain a big game-changer in Nigeria's history.

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