IMPERATIVES OF NIGERIA'S FOREIGN POLICY UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF PRESIDENT BOLA AHMED TINUBU

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ABSTRACT
This paper explores the critical elements of Nigeria's foreign policy under the current leadership of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu. It delves into the strategic decisions, policy changes, and diplomatic initiatives so far undertaken during the last six months of his administration. Using documentary sources, the paper further examines the impact of these policies on Nigeria's international relations, economic growth, and regional stability. It also provides an analysis of the challenges encountered and the strategies employed to overcome them. The study concludes with an assessment of the effectiveness of President Tinubu's foreign policy and its implications for Nigeria's future diplomatic engagements. This paper aims to contribute to the understanding of Nigeria's foreign policy dynamics and offer insights for policy formulation and implementation.

Introduction

The African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) states that since independence, the central plank of Nigeria's foreign policy has been a focus on Africa and on some basic principles that include the continent's unity, independence, peaceful settlement of disputes and regional economic cooperation and development'. Since independence in 1960, Africa has continued to be at the hub of Nigeria's foreign policy and international relations. Nigeria's foreign policy is informed by several factors amongst which are molded by the lessons of history, psychological and image perception by its leaders which is expressed in a perceived "historic mission" and "manifest destiny" because of the geographical, economic, and demographic factors which are to the nation's advantage. Thus, Olusanya and Akindele posit that "there has been no doubt that the national consensus which has emerged in support of these broad objective reflects and underscores impact the objective national cognitive self-perception by the Nigeria Foreign Policy elite on the position of Nigeria as the most populous black state in the world and of her role as the most powerful and influential state in black Africa. However, successive Nigerian leaders have been very careful to draw a distinction between "domination" and "leadership" preferring to play a leadership but not imperial role (Olusanya and Akindele, 1990).

It is therefore instructive to point the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (as amended) S.19 in which impetus is given in the couched principles and objectives of the Nigeria's Foreign Policy. According to Jega and Farris (2010) successive Nigerian governments, especially under military rule, have striven to assume or claim a leadership position through Foreign Policy deliberations and actions and other modes of international

engagements. This commenced with Yakubu Gowon's drive for regional integration and key role in the formation of Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Under general Murtala and Obasanjo (1975 – 1979), Nigeria was a leader on African issues with an enthusiastic, some say radical foreign policy thrust. Under Generals Murtala and Obasanjo, Nigeria's foreign policy objectives were more coherently defined than was hitherto the case. Africa was made the centerpiece or cornerstone of Nigeria's foreign policy (NEEDS Assessment, 2005).

However, by 1979 to 1983, Nigeria's economy had been badly managed that our overall national power and indeed our national will had become greatly diminished, some of our neighboring countries had scant respect, if not outright contempt for us and they ventured to attack our soldiers and our citizen populations inside our borders with impunity. Gambari concludes that:

> *Nigeria's foreign policy was perceived as vague, poorly articulated and lacking vigor and direction. Thus, the old concept of Africa being the centerpiece of our foreign policy was given new expression… he quotes General Buhari, thus, 'a pattern of concentric circles may be discernible in our attitude and response to foreign policy issues within the African continent and in the world at large. At the epicenter of these circles are the national economic and security intents of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, which are inextricably tied with the security, stability and economic and social well-being of our immediate neighbors. One of our priorities is to put a more constructive look into relations with our neighbours with whom we share identical goals of regional stability and peace(Gambari, 1986).*

By 1985, Gen. Buhari was unavoidably ousted from power and the new military government of General Ibrahim Babangida opted for a new approach towards attaining Nigeria's foreign policy goals. This was muted via Gen. Ike Nwachukwu, his then Minister for Foreign Affairs which was expressed in economic diplomacy. Jega avers that, 'the pursuit of economic diplomacy as an additional plank of Nigeria foreign policy was aimed at cushioning the damaging impact of the economic crises that engulfed Nigeria in the 1980s and at assuaging the consequences of the Structural Adjustment measures which had been introduced to contain the crisis. Foreign policy was redirected from a predominantly political focus to an economic one, in which foreign policy instruments were used to advance domestic economic development objectives'(Jega and Farris, 2010).

Consequent upon the transition to democratic rule 1999 that saw to the assumption to power of President Olusegun Obasanjo, his National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) strategy was envisioned as one in which Nigeria fulfils its potential to become Africa's largest economy and a major player in the global economy. The Kuru Declaration of 2001 which was a blueprint that embodied the vision and mission of the new administration intended to blind a truly great African democratic country, politically united, integrated and stable, economically prosperous, socially organized, with equal opportunity for all and responsibility from all to become the catalyst of (African) renaissance and making adequately all-embracing contributions, sub-regionally, regionally and globally. It was an attempt at regaining lost glory and reinvent Nigeria's image which had suffered immensely under the protracted military leaderships.

It is on this note that President Obasanjo utilized the Shuttle Diplomatic approach travelling extensively to major capitals of the world, establishing ties with viable diplomatic capitals and Multinational Corporations in order to achieve participation in international organizations and the world economy, politically and economically respectively. Indeed, he has been credited to be the most travelled President, hence, the approach Shuttle Diplomacy.

Late President Umaru Musa Yar'adua was reputed to have introduced the concept of "citizen diplomacy" as the thrust of Nigeria's foreign policy. It was argued that the concept was construed to mean a focus on Nigeria's citizens, home and abroad. Yet, even after the death of President Yar'Adua, his successor, President Goodluck Jonathan's administration was perceived as an administration that continued the Yar'Adua approach to foreign policy issues. Similarly, President MuhammaduBuhari's administration and approach to foreign policy was a re-enactment of his erstwhile concentric circles approach which gave primacy to the citizens, its neighbors,

Africa and then the world at large. However, the eventual closure of Nigeria's borders to ensure the growth of the domestic economy drew ire from its neighbors. Amidst the dissatisfaction, it is observed that the administration went ahead to execute some projects that appeared to favor the neighboring Niger Republic such as the Nigeria-funded rail line from Nigeria to Niger and also thedonation of vehicles worth over a billion naira to Niger (Okafor, 2022). This gesture also drew backlash from the citizenry as the country was facing an economic meltdown, crass corrupt practices and the resurgence of insecurity.

Theoretical Approach: The Rational Actor Model

National interest has been used by statesmen and scholars since the founding of nation-states to describe the aspirations and goals of sovereign entities in the international arena- National interest is the perceived needs and desires of one sovereign state in relation to other sovereign states comprising the external environment (Nuechterlein, 1976). These sovereign entities are nation-states whom are presumed to be rational actors capable of taking decisions in the conduct of their affairs on the international scene in the pursuit of their national interests.According to Alli (2007) 'the interests of states are called national interests, and the methods and actions they employto attempt to achieve these interests are called national policies (Alli, 2007)', particularly, in the milieu of foreign relations, this is called Foreign Policy. Indeed, foreign policy is the apparatus states utilize to engage other actors in the international system. It spells out the guidelines for engagement.

States are treated as unitary actors which is likened to individuals capable of taking decisions. Hence, in the pursuit of its national objectives and interests, a state can be seen as the Rational Decision maker capable of making decisions. Citing Glaser, Schmidt and Wight (2023) observe that, "The state is assumed to be rational- it makes purposive decisions that take reasonable account of its interests, and the international constraints and opportunities that it faces.

International relations is a sphere for pursuit of power and states require some modus operandi for engagement which is saddled on the foreign policy orientation. Such orientation takes cognizance of the domestic and external environments of foreign policy. Thus, with the amount of information and awareness at the disposal of states, it weighs its priorities and makes decisions that will be favorable to its national interests.

It is the position of Cohen and Harris that "foreign policy is a set of goals, directives or intentions formulated by persons in official or authoritative positions directed at some actor or conditions in the environment beyond the sovereign nation-state for the purpose of affecting the target in a manner desired by the policy maker. Traditionally, the motives of policymakers have been treated as stemming primarily from a concern with preserving or enhancing the security of the state (i.e power) and the mechanism of choice has been assumed to be rational calculation (Cohen and Harris, 1976)". This position takes cognizance of the yardstick for analysis in international relations which is the level of analysis. There is the individual level, the state level and the global level. Rational calculations and options taken after weighing the alternatives amongst available options is an exercise of the individual leader (and expressed in the state), as such his values and idiosyncrasies affects his decision making. In any case, it is deemed that the rational actor takes decisions purposely as they represent the State. Other variables that come into play are the internal dynamics and the distribution of power and access to resources in the international system.

Also, Slantchev (2005) opines that "the rational actor model treats foreign policy choices as products of the following idealized sequences; given some problem, a rational decision maker takes into account the foreign policy goals of the nation and determines which one takes priority over others, then identifies and analyzes the various options available. The actor traces the costs and benefits associated with each option, estimate the like consequences and choose the option that is ranked highest amongst the alternatives (Slantchev, 2005)". This explains the rationale in the ordering of Nigeria's foreign policy objectives vis a vis the different policy thrusts of different leaders in the conduct of Nigeria's foreign policy.

Nigeria's foreign policy objectives have remained basically consistent despite changes in leadership, variation in style and general vicissitudes in its national life. Dr. JajaNwachukwu placed a lot of emphasis on *"Africa being the Centrepiece"* of Nigeria's

foreign policy, Prof. BolajiAkinyemi, mooted the idea of "Medium power" seeking Nigeria to reap more grains beyond the mill of being touted as a regional power. Prof. Ibrahim Gambari propagated the principles of *"Concentric Circles"* in the implementation of Nigeria's foreign policy. Gen. Ike Nwachukwu promoted *"Environmental and Economic diplomacy"* while Chief OjoMadueke promoted *"Citizen diplomacy"*. However, these approaches confer responsibility on African affairs (Chibundu 2009:11). Despite the variations in approach, the State as the Rational actor will adopt decisions consistent to its needs and germane to its National Interests. As such, the current President Bola Ahmed administration is saddled with the responsibility of directing Nigeria's foreign policy orientation of the new dispensation which will be reflective of the state as the Rational Actor responding to the internal and external environments of its foreign policy engagement. All these will be predicated on Nigeria's national interest.

THE IMPERATIVES OF NIGERIA'S FOREIGN POLICY UNDER PRESIDENT BOLA AHMED TINUBU

Africa has always found expression in Nigeria's foreign policy. Gambari (1986) noted that, as early as August 1960, Tafawa Balewa had informed his parliament that his government's policy will be clear and practical towards Africa-the Continent of our birth. Also, good neighborliness would also be the hallmark of our external relations in Africa… he further explains that, the Africa Center-piece concept was concretized by the Murtala-Obasanjo regime. It was under the regime that the Adedeji Report on Foreign Relations coined the "African center-piece concept"' (Gambari, 1986:75). The concept may have diminished over subsequent regimes, but Nigeria has always considered Africa within the orbit of its Foreign policy.

The 1999 Constitution as amended delineates Nigeria's Foreign Policy objectives as follows:

i. Promotion and protection of the national interest;

ii. Promotion of African integration and support for African unity;

iii. Promotion of international cooperation for the consolidation of universal peace and mutual respect among all nations and elimination of discrimination in all its manifestations;

iv. 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

v. Promotion of a just world economic order (CFRN 1999).

Even though Africa still finds a place in the above objectives, Nigeria is prioritized. the promotion and protection of the national interest. National interest would imply the corporate existence of the country and the prevention of its indivisibility by strengthening security and sustaining economic prosperity. Yet, in recent times the country has been faced with dire and debilitating economic adversities, including an exacerbated food insecurity, an unstable currency and a wave of internal security challenges. It has become necessary to re-evaluate the Nigeria's stance on Africa and good neighborliness in the current administration vis-a-vis the exigencies of the times.

At his inaugural address, President Bola Ahmed Tinubu cited the situation in Sudan and stated thus;

> my primary foreign policy objective must be the peace and stability of the West African sub-region and the African continent. We shall work with ECOWAS, the AU and willing partners in the international community to end extant conflicts and to resolve new ones.
>
> As we contain threats to peace, we shall also retool our foreign policy to more actively lead the regional and continental quest for collective prosperity.

Indeed, conflicts and coups could affect the stability of the sub-region, but juxtaposed to the internal security threats assailing the Nigerian state, while not remaining aloof to African problems, we observe that the country requires an overhaul in itself. Political theory attests to the fact that 'the state is an end in itself'. It hence has to subsist before engaging in high politics. Thus, we borrow and subscribe to the prescription of Chime (1987) that, *given the level*

of ambition of Nigerian foreign policy, a good defense policy is a prerequisite. This will touch on the preservation of Nigeria's sovereignty and the resuscitation of the seemingly challenged economy.

Barely two months in his tenure,President Tinubu emerged Chairman of the Authority of Heads of State and Government of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). In addressing the community, the President stated warned that the threat to peace in the West African sub-region had reached alarming proportions, with terrorism and an emerging pattern of military takeover as major contributors. He further observed that these are threats to democracy. Elumove (2023) reported that the President decried the emerging pattern of coup d'etat in West Africa, where soldiers toppled the popular mandate of the people through the barrel of the gun. Tinubu stated that;

> *we must stand firm on democracy. There is no governance, freedom and rule of law without democracy. We will not accept coup after coup in West Africa again. Democracy is very difficult to manage but it is the best form of government.*

On the contrary, Nigerian foreign policy makers must be wary of the wanton abuse of democratic tenets in the country. Nigeria must be seen to practice what it preaches.Despite an uninterrupted run of democracy since 1999, democratic institutions have been abused, especially the judiciary. Elsewhere, are reports of human rights abuses and entrenched corruption at the upper echelon of government. As such, the promotion of democracy elsewhere must be concomitant to the internal democratic needs of Nigeria.

In an article, 'Resist new scramble for Africa', the President was pointed to have told the African Union to resist any new scramblers who intend to plunder the resources of Africa. Rather, African leaders would no longer remain passive as they worked to harness their vast resources to better their respective countries (Angbolu 2023). The posture is laudable but the reality seems to be double-speak. African countries, including Nigeria, have taking their heels to neo-colonialist institutions owned by imperialist nations for loans that keep them indebted and subservient. In fact, this impinges on the politico-economic sovereignty of African states and their ability to negotiate favorable terms of trade. Therefore, it becomes imperative for the administration to look inwards and seek means of enhancing the production industry of the country in order to delink from an import reliant economy which is contingent on the fluctuations of the dollar. The President must stay true to his resolve as he stated to the executives of the AFREXIM Bank that 'that the federal government would continue to stimulate the economy with policies that support investments in areas of Nigeria's competitive advantage, particularly agriculture'. Nigeria is blessed with arable land with a huge industrial capacity for food production. Yet,climate change, banditry on farmers and kidnapping in the most productive states has led to an astronomical rise in food prices. Mechanisms to tackle this state of affairs must be engineered.

It may seem nascent for analysts to begin to eviscerate the foreign policy intention of President Tinubu, but it is timely. The several statements the President has made grants insights on the direction we anticipate his policy thrust. Despite buttressing the importance of democracy, legitimacy of governments and intolerability of coups in Africa, a military junta took over the reins of government in Niger Republic via a coup de' tat less than a month after. This bodes ill for a Nigeria which is continually pressured and plagued by separatists and ethnic nationalists.

It becomes particularly imperative that the domestic demands on which Nigeria's foreign policy would stand for its foundation must be made concrete. From the foregoing, issues of reconciling competing and antagonizing interests in the aftermath of the 2023 general elections has to take center stage. This fact impinges on the problems of Nigeria's federalism which fails to adequately integrate the various ethnicities and religions found in the State. It becomes imperative that the conduct of foreign policy in the ensuing dispensation must as a policy enhance national integration. Nweke(1986) opined that;

> *in the African context, state security should be conceived as involving national integration, maintenance of congenial domestic ethnic and class order as well as protection of territorial integrity and against external intervention. this being the case, security policy becomes a conscious strategy design to create*

> *and strengthen a particular political order which sustains both ethnic/class and state security (Nweke, 1986:11). Essentially, observance of justice and fairness with respect to federal character and quota system should me upheld.*

To further buttress the imperative of integration being germane to the conduct of foreign policy, we recall that Nigeria adopted federalism as a means to attain compromise in a heterogeneoussociety. This compromise, Elaigwu observes *is to form a balance between the opposing centrifugal and centripetal forces*. We reckon that a federal imbalance can bring about instability and affect a smooth conduct of foreign policy. Thus, he further stresses that:

> *…the extent to which a federal system survives very much depends on the ability of the political elites in a country to maintain a delicate balance between centrifugalism and centripetalism. Excessive pulls in favor of centrifugalism may herald disintegration. Yet, excessive pulls to the centre may challenge the very existence of federalism and the cocoon of security it provides for members of the society. It could also lead to disintegration (Elaigwu, 1984: 4).*

As such, the current administration must address the lingering clamors of segregation, marginalization and the calls for secession by addressing the imbalances occasioned by unfairness and injustice. It must be desirous for the nation to work towards nationhood and national consciousness.

Also, the economy is in dire straits which needs a systemic revamping. Nigeria hasn't the luxury of extending handouts. Like the President, retorted that *we are not Father Christmas* when the subsidy on oil products was lifted. The policy affected the country deeply as well as its surrounding African neighbors. The Nigerian populace still anticipates the government to make alternative palliatives to cushion the effects on their livelihoods. Nigeria boasts of over 200 million in population which is a potential for commerce. However, the cost of living could impact negatively on its populace. It can be weaponized into a ready army for revolt.

It is commendable that the borders are opened to enhance trade and revenue, however, illicit trafficking of weapons, drugs and traversing bandits must be controlled. This reverts us back to the importance of border security.

Furthermore, there is an umbilical cord linking internal and external security. Hence, there must be a reinvigoration of stamina into the country's defense policy. The security architecture must effectively be poised to manage the perennial security problems of armed robbery, banditry, terrorism, oil theft, cyber-crime, drug related crimes and the trafficking in small arms and light weapons. Concomitant to the aforementioned is the external threats involving trans-border crimes, international conflicts and the resurgence of *coup-detats* in Africa. In the spate of three years, seven governments have been toppled in Africa. In the case of Niger, Nigeria cut ties with Niger and instructed a border closure. And despite a threat by ECOWAS to utilize a standby force for intervention, another coup was orchestrated in Gabon on August 30th. Burkina Faso has expressed solidary to its counterpart *coupists* in Niger promising to provide strategic support amidst the call for the ECOWAS Standby force intervention. It therefore becomes imperative thatNigeria must weigh the pros and cons of antagonizing its neighbor (Niger) vis-à-vis its vested interests in that country and the region at large.

Both Nigeria and Niger being members of ECOWAS are also members of the Multi National Joint Task Force (MNJTF). The MNJTF's mandate is 'to create safe and secure environment in the area affected by the activities of Boko Haram and other terrorist groups'. It is profitable to be cautious that this strategic relationship be sustained. Indeed, Mali being contiguous to Niger is also a haven for terrorist elements and a route for weapons trafficking. Also, they share similar coup motivations with Niger (expelling French influence and dominance) and therefore may begin to view Nigeria as an imperialist tool for advancing western ideologies. Nigeria must be diplomatic on all fours in dealing with its neighbors to avoid an insecurity fallout in the Sahel region that will in turn become detrimental to its security interests.

More so, the trans Saharan gas pipeline project which Nigeria has also invested in is a critical area of interest. The project is worth 13 Billion USDs (with Nigeria reportedly to have

contributed 1 Billion USD) and is to transit through Niger to Algeria for onward distribution in Europe. But at period where Nigeria has cut ties with Niger, the project could be jeopardized. Thus, Akintayo observed that;

> *first, the security situation in Niger and neighboring regions poses a substantial risk to the project's stability prior to construction and post-construction… the inability of West African countries to quickly resolve the Niger Republic coup is threatening the delivery of the $13bn Trans-Sahara gas pipeline, as the project faces funding challenge… the success of the pipeline construction is contingent if Niger's junta decides to "play ball" ... also, the coup had become a threat to other gas infrastructural projects such as the $25bn Nigeria-Morocco gas pipeline and the 614 km Ajaokuta-Kaduna-Kano gas pipeline (2023).*

Therefore, Nigeria while being weary of the situationin Niger, it should hesitate on embarking any military action which will further strain relations between both countries with the capacity of engendering insecurity via our borders. Moreover, Nigeria's nationals resident and conducting businesses in Niger cannot be overlooked, thus, their security and welfare must be taken into account before they become targets for venting out hate and vengeance. It is insightful to draw from the words of Chime (1987), whom stated that;

> *it must not be thought that Nigeria's first line of defense is located at our borders. Ideally, our first line of defense must be perceived to lie within the territories of contiguous states thus affording us a viable buffer zone. And the more we commit our trade and industrial resources, **even human** in the surrounding states the more this principle of defense becomes imperative (1987: 28).*

Another important imperative for Nigeria's foreign policy is that of leadership. If Nigeria seeks to provide leadership to its immediate neighbors and Africa, the malaise of bad leadership must be dealt with. The current administration has been able to form its cabinet without tarrying and the business of governance has commenced within the first hundred days of the administration. However, the ills of corruption must be nipped in the bud. The institutions and agencies of government be strengthened to bring confidence. The arms of government must be complimentary not dependent upon the Executive. Agencies such as the Independent National Electoral Commision (INEC), the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and such other important agencies must be held accountable to be transparent and truly independent.

Consequently, in addressing the elephant in the room for the current administration in conducting Nigeria's foreign policy, a systematic and multi-faceted approach must be adopted which touches on hard and soft defense, economic policies, integrating the populace, recognizing the security, welfare and potential of citizens in diaspora and using tact in our relations with our immediate neighbors. Most importantly, a strong and resolute leadership which possesses empathy and compassion is highly desired.

Conclusion

This article is an invitation to the current administration to place primacy on the exigencies of the times in the conduct of its foreign policy. Nigeria's foreign policy objectives is captured in the Grundnorm, yet, all must be predicated and found on how the national interest is defined. The foreign policy makers are implored not to be overzealous and overambitious in defining the direction in which the foreign policy is to take. The article provides certain imperatives which could be a blueprint for the current administration at a time where the economy is in dire straits and poverty is rife. Therefore, Nigeria's national sovereignty and integrity must be preserved in a manner that takes into account its internal security and stability, national cohesion and integrity, the country's relationship with its neighbors and the importance of leadership. The article also suggests that Nigeria must be very diplomatic in managing interventionist tendencies in the affairs of its neighbors considering the nation's porous borders and a possibility of insecurity therefrom should there be a fallout in relations with Niger in particular.

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