LEADERSHIP AND NIGERIA'S REGIONAL HEGEMONIC QUEST IN AFRICA: ACRITICAL DISCOURSE

GAMBO, NanvenAudu (Ph.D)
Department of Political Science
University of Jos (Vice Chancellor, Karl Kumm University, Vom)
audugmb@gmail.com/audug@unijos.edu.ng
Phone: +2348037030894
&
PULDU,Samdi Gloria (Ph.D)
Department of Political Science
University of Jos
puldusamdi01@gmail.com
Phone: +2348034548951
&
KUMS, Simon Nankap
Department of Political Science
University of Jos
Kums43kums@gmail.com/simonn@unijos.edu.ng
Phone: +2348038647763

Abstract

The aftermath of the Cold War and the fall of the Berlin wall re-mirrored and reconfigured the nature and patterns of game and/or relations in the international ambiance. The international political system experienced an unprecedented and remarkable shift from a United States (US) led unipolar global order to a fresh wave or emergence of multiple competitors. This

changed global context has led to continuing interest in (and increasing research focus on) regions, regional order and regional powers in terms of their roles (with other regional/state actors) in the international system. However,Nigeria with its endowed numerous natural and human resources which she utilized for the betterment of Africa; prompted her to assume the leadership role which she did by leading other African countries in the decolonization struggles and the fight against apartheid regime in South Africa. Thus, Nigeria's leadership role towards achieving stability and development in Africa cannot be overemphasized. These prominent role and contribution of Nigeria to Africa qualifies it more to be a regional hegemon among other contenders in the continent; but challenges such as poor leadership, unending terrorism, human rights abuses, widespread corruption, poverty, faulty democratic/electoral processes, non-strategic foreign policy among others continue to mar and/or diminish her chances to attain the status of a regional hegemon. The study makes use of hegemonic stability theory to appraise Nigeria's role and contribution in Africa as an essential tool for the country to assume regional hegemon in the continent. This study employs a qualitative method of analysis; as secondary sources of data were used in collecting data. The paper aims at examining the strategic nature of Nigeria's foreign policy and its leadership quality in booking a place for her in her quest to become a continental hegemon. The study concludes and recommends that until Nigeria looks inward by addressing its internal dynamics and/or challenges (unending terrorism, widespread corruption, poor leadership, faulty electoral processes, acute human rights abuses, etc), its quest to become a regional hegemon remains an illusion.

Keywords: Leadership, power, hegemony, regional, and Power

Introduction

The aftermath of the Cold War and the fall of the Berlin wall re-mirrored and reconfigured the natureand patterns of game and/or relations in the international ambiance. The international political system experienced an unprecedented and remarkable shift from a United States (US) led unipolar global order to a fresh wave or emergence of multiple competitors (Prys, 2009). The global burden on the US had reciprocally inspired the appearance of a range of actors: regional middle powers such as Brazil, China, India and Russia; regional blocs like the European Union (EU); and regional powers like Argentina, Iran, Nigeria and South Africa. And Nigeria, being a 'giant of Africa' factored in her economic endowment, military capability, population and decolonization struggles enables her to play leadership role in Africa, which is different from playing a hegemonic role. Thus, hegemonic role denotes one country with a capacity to dominate and control the behaviour other states in the international system. Putting the argument straight, Nigeria finds it difficult to assume the role of a regional hegemonic because of her non-strategic foreign policy approach of Afro-centrism, idealist notion anchored on the greater good of all and poor leadership.

Worth noting is the fact that a mere possession or assumption of leadership role, military strength and endowed mineral resources alone cannot guarantee any country the status of a sub-regional, regional or global hegemon, but assertive foreign policy do. Thus, the foreign policy of a country serves as both mirror and guide; which directsher leadership, tell her when and how to exhibit military strength, and how resources

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should be deployed. This is one area where Nigeria as a country is far lacked behind; given her non-strategic foreign policy anchored on idealist notion of collective good continue to diminish her chances of assuming the position of continental police. Hypothetically, it has been established that the hegemonic presence of a powerful state is an ingredient for stability within a specific region. That Africa needs a regional hegemon capable of positively addressing the political, economic and security issue confronting the continent is not in doubt. Regional hegemonic powers, therefore, have the potential to promote order and regional stability on the continent.

Be that as it may, the foreign policy direction (either *idealist* or *realist*) of any country helps guide and define clearly the national interest of that country. It is practically impossible for any state in the 21st century to assume the role of a sub-regional, regional/continentalor global hegemon with an idealist foreign policy guide; which preaches the gospel of the greater good for all (**Kums**, **2021**). Today, countries such as South Africa, Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, Ghana and Morocco are major challengers to Nigeria's struggles, and most especially South Africa.

In spite of the roles and functions demonstrated by South Africa in the continent, many scholars such as Adebajo and Landsberg (2003), Saliu and Omotola (2008), Tavares (2011), Ogunnubi (2014), Ogunnubi and Okeke-Uzodike (2016), Dauda and Ameen (2017) among others, agreed that Nigeria qualifies to be a hegemon in Africa due to its numerous

advantage and contribution to the continent over South Africa, and other contenders. Similarly, the leadership role and function exercise by Nigeria in Africa as argued by Dauda, Ahmad and Keling (2017), Abba, Osman and Muda (2017) showcase the country's effort in the continental stability of Africa which is capable of promoting the country's chances of becoming an Africa's hegemon.

Within African scholarship, countless discussions on regional hegemony focused on Nigeria, and revolved around the question of as to whether Nigeria by any standard, giventhe many roles it plays in Africa, qualifies her to be a regional hegemon. Although Nigeria is referred to as the 'giant' of Africa, Osaghae gives it the moniker of 'a crippled giant'. Adebajo and Mustapha derogatively refer to Nigeria as a giant with wobbly feet, rendered thus by its bad governance, corruption, unending insurgency, crimes, etc and a chronic dependency on oil that has stifled growth in the country. Many such studies have considered why Nigeria should not be tagged as a regional hegemon based on the fact that, aside its 'father Christmas role' and the military capability, it lacks a coordinate leadership and foreign policy direction that will catapult her to such position. In other words, quality leadership and strategic foreign policy which this paper identified as gaps; are two key factors Nigeria must beam its search towards in order to become a regional hegemon.

At the latter of the 20th century, the celebrated re-entry of South Africa onto the international political landscape (accompanied by Nigeria's political transformation after years of military rule into an acceptable democratic civilian

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government) particularly affected the political-economic dynamics of Africa. More recently, the recalibration of Nigeria's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) base, which formally made it Africa's largest economy, has renewed debates around the hegemonic profile of Nigeria vis-à-vis other regional counterparts such as South Africa and Egypt. Within parts of Africa, there seems to be an unwillingness to accept Nigeria's unofficial 'claim' to regional hegemony, which is proposed by many Nigerian scholars on the basis of its population size, Afrocentric foreign policy, vibrant economy, and success in and high-level contributions to multilateral initiatives such as the United Nations (UN), African Union (AU) and Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), as well as the broad-based acceptance of its leadership in Africa.

It's against this backdrop that the article seeks to interrogate the nature of Nigeria's foreign policy on leadership role vis-à-vis her hegemonic quest in Africa.

Understanding Leadership, Power and Hegemony

The Concept of Leadership

The concept 'leadership' is a contentious term and is very hard to attach a particular meaning especially to the disciplines and more specifically to international relations (Destradi, 2010). Largely, when theoretically or empirically applied from different literatures on leadership in international affairs are pitched within an interdisciplinary approach. For one to understand the concept of leadership, one must first search for answers to the followings: how is leadership differentiated from power and hegemony? What qualities does one (or a state)

require being a leader and what kind of relationship exists between leaders and followers? Generally, leadership could be envisaged as the art of "influencing people, organizations, and institutions to accomplish specific purposes, such as missions that serve public and national interests". The concept of leadership has been severally constructed and deconstructed particularly from a social psychology and political science perspectives (Destradi 2010). Early studies on leadership were focused on identifying the attributes and character traits of great public personalities. For example, Northouse (1997), drawing from a social psychological perspective on leadership advances four contexts in which leadership is conceptualized. He argues that leadership is a process that involves influence and occurs within a group context. It also involves the attainment of a specific goal. On the basis of the above contexts, he defines leadership envisages "a process whereby an individual influences a group of individual to achieve a common goal". Much of these definitions have focused on leadership as an interaction between the leader and follower to achieve commonly identified goals.

Nonetheless, we would focus especially on the conceptualization of leadership within the discipline of international relations. Thus, some of the basic attributes of leadership in international relations as the absence of coercion and the mutual or reciprocal flow of rewards or gains of this relationship where one "one actor gives something of value to another without condition, without stipulated payment, now or later". He gives examples of mutual exchange of benefit such as

the establishment of a common custom union in which all members of the economic union would mutually benefit from commonly shared values. Also, an actor acts to successfully mediate a conflict between two actors to a resolution that is acceptable to the conflict parties. According to Young (1991), leadership can be conceptualized as "the action of individuals who endeavour to solve or circumvent the collective action problems that plague the efforts of parties seeking to reap joint gains in a process of institutional bargaining". Leadership in this circumstance can thus be seen from an institutional perspective focusing largely on commonality of goals and the calculated actions of individuals geared towards concerted engagements for finding common solutions to collective problems.

According to Kindleberger (1981), leadership is a function of both material capabilities and the willingness. What is clear is that over the years, the assumption of leadership role in the contemporary international system has often been conditioned by a state's superior or greater military or economic strength (GIGA 2010). Material power preponderance is therefore seen as a major precondition for leadership and this is echoed in such theories like the hegemonic stability theory which holds a materialist perception of leadership driven by the leader's capacity to provide public goods and mutual benefits in the exercise of leadership.

Cooper, et' al (2007) in contrast views submit that at the heart of any meaningful conceptualization of leadership is the centrality of the interest and enthusiasm of followers and any attempt to overlook this may prove misleading. In this sense

therefore, leadership has little to do with the strict exercise of power by the leader since the "followers' participation is voluntary and in their own interest" (Destradi 2010).

There are varied definitions and/or conceptualizations of what leadership denote but for the purpose of this research, we adopt *Kindleberger*'s definition to help convey a clearer understanding of the study.

Connectedly, hegemony is indispensable for the exercise of leadership. Both hegemony and leadership are essentially political; both rest on power, but not necessarily on the observable form of material power alone. Leadership must hence not be misunderstood as dominance or coercion. Thus, the tripartite concepts of hegemony, leadership and power are intrinsically linked and interwoven such that the discussion of one or two is impossible without the other. Hegemony means nothing more than the discursive struggle between political actors over the assertion of their particular representations of the world as having a universal significance. Ultimately, it is only through hegemony that leadership can be established and power strategically exercised.

The Concept of Power

Central to international politics and interaction lies the issue of power (Baldwin 2012). The concept of power has therefore received extensive attention from scholars of international relations about its form, nature and role in international relations though without any unanimity. According to Hans Morgenthau (1964:27), the "concept of political power poses one of the most difficult and controversial

problems of political science". There is a lack of scholarly unanimity regarding the nature and dimension of the role of power in international relations. This conceptual dilemma of power in relation with other concepts such as coercion, compellence, control, deterrence, force, inducement, influence, persuasion etc, further broadened and enriched the concept. In international politics, power is seen as the general capacity to influence the behavior of other actors in international interactions and essentially two variants exists; hard (command/relational/objective) or soft (ideational/cooperative/structural/subjective) power. According to Weber (1947), power is defined as "the probability that one actor within a social relationship will in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rest".

For (Dahl, 1957), power can based be explained as a situation where "A has power over B to the extent that we can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do". From the forgoing, it is imperative to assert the explanation given by Dahl appears limited and non-comprehensive enough to give clarity into the kind of power Nigeria needs in order to comfortably play a hegemonic role in Africa. His submission appears more of a military domination; as against perhaps economic and diplomatic instruments.According to Goldhamer and Shils (1939) contained that "a person may be said to have power to the extent that he influences the behaviour of others in accordance with his own intentions". Power is thus the major ingredient of political relationships defined in terms of who gets what, when,

where, and how on the stage of world politics. In interrogating Goldhamer and Shills' submission, which stresses power in terms of political leadership without a critical look at the nature, pattern or methods through which such power is acquired; did not give a broaderexplanation of the term power in this study. An inclusive definition of power as used in this work has to do with the ability of one state total control and/or influence over the other. This is further buttress and expanded by Holsti (1983) who in his knowledge of international relations sees it as: "the general capacity of a state to control the bahaviour of others".

The Concept of Hegemony

The concept 'hegemony' is variedly defined by different scholars depending on their orientation and background. According to Snidal (1985) and Lake (1993) who are theorists of hegemonic stability believed that leadership could be either benevolent or coercive. To them, the determinant to separate benevolent and coercive leadership is based on the level at which costs and benefits of togetherness is shared among members. There are several intellectual debates on the concept of regional hegemon and what differentiate super powers and the middle powers. Nolte (2010) credited the challenges in describing the regional hegemonic power to "general lack of analytical instruments to identify and to compare regional powers and to differentiate regional powers from great powers and middle powers." He further defines regional power to mean:

i.State which displays the material (military, economic, demographic), organisational (political) and ideological resources for regional power projection;

ii.State which truly has great influence in regional affairs (activities and results);

iii.State which is economically, politically and culturally interconnected with the region;

iv.State which influences in a significant way the geopolitical delimitation and the political-ideational construction of the region;

State which exerts this influence by means of regional governance structures;

i.State which provides a collective good for the region or participates in a significant way in the provision of such a collective good;

ii.State whose leading position in the region is recognized or at least respected by other states inside and outside of the region, especially by other regional powers;

Correspondingly, some scholars also demonstrated to the fact that there are uncontested numbers of attributes for a regional hegemon to emerge, at the same time some salient characteristics (Destradi, 2010). Ogunnubi and Okeke-Uzodike (2016) described regional hegemons as "role models and leaders within a particular region by carrying out leading activities that are general accepted by neighbouring states."

As a result of many relevant definition of what regional hegemons imply, the following characteristics could be identified in a potential hegemon of a region. These include: material preponderance (which comprised of military, economic and demographic power), that makes a hegemon to be a giant in its domain; ability to initiate economic development

that would have positive impact on all states in the region; harmonious relationship with other states with in the region in the areas of economic, political and cultural; implementing its favourable foreign policy for the benefit of the states in its region; readiness to play a leading role towards attaining development in the region, its ability to influence regional affairs through its economic, security and political agenda among many.

Research Methodology

This paper employed the position of Merriam (1988) also supported by Marshall and Rossman (1989) that collection of data and analysis in a qualitative research is a simultaneous process. This is done to gain an insight into the impact of Nigeria's leadership on its hegemonic quest in Africa and the categorical imperatives. The researcher used content analysis to examine the issue of leadership and Nigeria's regional hegemonic struggles. The paper which is theoretical in nature draws its argument basically from secondary data which includes journal publications, textbooks and internet sources. To improve on the reliability and validity of the paper, multiple secondary sources were used to minimize risk of error.

Theoretical Anchorage

In order to give the work a strong standing vis-à-vis logical submission, we employ the *hegemonic stability theory* to help substantiate our argument. This theory has its roots in the work of a famous scholar; Kindleberger (1973) and other scholars

such as Gadzey (1994), Gilpin (1987), Keohane (1984, 1989), Modelski (1987) and Webb and Krasner (1989). The notion of hegemony owes much to Antonio Gramsci, the General Secretary of the Italian Communist Party, who was imprisoned for his political inclinations in 1926 and died in prison in 1937. His main argument is that since states are rational egoists seeking to maximize their own interests and welfare defined in material terms, there is a need for a single leader to ensure the public good of international stability. International economic stability is only possible when there is a clearly identifiable preponderant power/state in terms of material capabilities.

Thus, the stability of the international system rests on a single dominant state that is able to articulate and enforce the rules of interaction among the most important members of the system. Kindleberger classifies a number of preconditions for a stable international economic system: provision of a market for distress goods, producing a steady flow of capital; maintaining a rediscounted mechanism for providing liquidity when the monetary system is frozen; managing the structure of foreign exchange rates; and providing a degree of coordination of domestic monetary policies. For a state to be a hegemon, it must therefore have the will and capability (based on a large and growing economy, economic and technological dominance and massive political power with evidence of superior military strength) to enforce the rules of the system and commitment to a system perceived to be mutually beneficial to major states.

Given the close correlation with power, the hegemonic stability theory is partly a mutation of realism and structuralism.

Be that as it may, realists would elect a hegemon from the 'asymmetrical distribution' of power among different states (Prys 2010). While the concept of power is still tightly attached to who qualifies to be a hegemon, types of power have changed over time.

According to Lake (1993), hegemonic stability theory is more or less a combination of two analytically distinct theories; leadership and hegemony theories. His argument is that the theory of leadership emphasizes the provision of public good and international economic infrastructure in an atmosphere of international stability while hegemonic theory on the other hand argues that "the politics of international economic relations arise from the different structurally derived preferences over trade policy possessed by competing states… and the assumption that states possess the objective of political power or security".

In recent times, South Africa has been grossly referred to and celebrated as Africa's hegemon (Alden and le Pere, 2004); particularly since the erosion of the decades of apartheid rule. Nigeria, on the other hand, has also been widely regarded as the 'giant' of Africa or Africa's Gulliver even though this cliché seems to have dwindled at an accelerated pace since the start of the post-apartheid era in 1994 coinciding also with Nigeria's comparative economic decline around the same period (late 1980s). This no doubt implies an accession to both countries' position as potential or definite regional hegemons in Africa. The literature is rife with the claim that both countries perhaps hold the key to unlocking Africa's economic wealth and political recovery (le Pere, 1998; Adeniji, 2000).

Though it is true that the hegemonic stability theory was originally conceived to explain global great-power behavior and may not explicitly capture regional power relations, this study attempts to extrapolate and apply its basic assumptions in its analysis of hegemonic order in Africa. This theory is evaluated in terms of its coherence and consistency, parsimony and explanatory power to capture regional power realities in the African region with Nigeria as a case in point.

What makes a Regional Hegemon?

Recently, there is a great deal of attention on the concept 'regional powers' and this has provoked debates on the categorization and merits of any state to be classed as a regional hegemon. Scholars have attempted to draw a distinction between regional powers and other classifications of international power status such as global powers, superpowers, middle powers and pivotal powers. Considerable intellectual debates also exist on the geographic context in which the concept of regional hegemon is used in the contemporary analysis of regional interactions and for any meaningful theoretical explanation. Nolte (2010), for example, acknowledges the 'general lack of analytical instruments to identify and to compare regional powers, and to differentiate regional powers from great. Some scholars also concede that there are a number of uncontested assertions about what constitutes a regional hegemon, but recognise that various salient features are still largely contested and under scrutiny. The relevant literature makes clear that there is no general consensus

about what makes a regional hegemon, since there are numerous approaches to describing the empirical relationship between power and leadership. More so, the term 'regional hegemon' has been used in several different contexts, leading to confusion and misuse of the term.

An attempts to define the term 'regional hegemony' was first coined by Østerud (1992), who referred to the notion of a 'regional great power' being a state which is: geographically part of a delineated region; able to stand up against any coalition of other states in the region; highly influential in regional affairs; and, contrary to a middle power, might also be a great power on the world scale in addition to its regional standing.

In the submission of Lemke (2002), regional hegemons can be considered as role models and leaders within a particular region by carrying out leading activities that are generally accepted by neighbouring states. Similarly, regional hegemons, or what are sometimes termed 'regional leading powers', have also been perceived as states that are influential and powerful in certain geographic regions or sub-regions. In his estimation, regional powers not only possess superior power capabilities and exercise leadership within the region but are also able to convince other states (both within the region and beyond) to accept their leadership.

Flemes (2007) in his opinion strive to distinguish regional hegemons by using four vital measures: 'claim to leadership, power resources, employment of foreign policy instruments and acceptance of leadership'. Accepting the role of regional leadership means that the state in question has taken

upon itself the responsibility of entrenching peace and stability and crafting policies for economic initiatives. The constructivist paradigm for global or regional power entails that fellow nations in the international system accept one of their own as a fitting leading power.

A far-reaching list of the characteristics of regional hegemons is as follows: material preponderance (based mainly on its economic, military and demographic power), which makes it a giant in its region; decisive impact of its economic development on the economic fortunes of other countries in the region; close interconnectivity with other states in the region in political, economic and cultural terms; having various instruments of foreign policy at its disposal to assert its interests and equip it for a pre-eminent role in and on behalf of its region; the expression of an ambition, claim or willingness to play these dual leadership roles; predominant influence in regional affairs in terms of setting security, political and economic agendas; and the recognition and respect of other states; both within the region and beyond as a leading state in and on behalf of the region.Though scholars have varied ideas about the exact attributes of a regional hegemon, they are generally in agreement about some of the features.

For the benefit of this research, we define a regional hegemonic power as a state with superior power advantages and capabilities relative to its regional sphere, which has considerable influence on its regional neighbors through a robust foreign policy, and which enjoys a measure of acceptance, legitimacy and recognition based on its ideational

leadership. We apply this understanding of regional hegemonic power to Nigeria so as to enable us analyse the extent to which the country satisfies these necessities.

Impact Assessment of Nigeria's Leadership role on Regional Hegemon Quest in Africa

The nature and patterns of games in the international system have revealed the reality of political leadership; as this has resulted in the creation of different theories and criteria of leadership globally. Whereas the USA remains an undisputed though insufficient global leader; thus, recognizing regional or middle powers is not easy. Widely considered as a failed state in many quarters a decade ago, Nigeria has come to be classified as an emerging economy and frontier market (Kehl, 2007; Radelet, 2010). Added to its status as Africa's biggest economy with a GDP of over US$509.9b and the 26th largest economy in the world (National Bureau of Statistics, 2014;(Okonjo-Iweala, 2014); this substantial economic prowess gives Nigeria the material base to intervene in regional conflicts to maintain political stability and foster development.

From the foregoing, it's imperative to assert that the Nigeria's economy has been oscillating, rising and falling and this hasn't grown beyond the 2014 NBS report that placed the country's GDP at USD$509.9b. 2020 NBS report placed Nigeria's GDP at USD$432.3 billion meaning that Nigeria needs to strategize on how to improve on her GDP so as to give her an advantage over others.To a considerable extent, Nigeria's diplomatic behavior is rooted in concrete terms in its economic

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strength, which affords it the opportunity to play a subtle hegemonic role by providing leadership for the African continent. This, for instance, is displayed over the years in its active commitment to the eradication of slavery, colonialism, apartheid and all forms of racial oppression and continental transformation (Ogunnubi, 2014). In interrogating Ogunnubi's submission, it's strategically clear that some of the above aforementioned roles Nigeria played during colonialism (fighting for other countries to be independent) and its fight against apartheid regime in South Africa which to a large extend captures the centrality of Nigeria's foreign policy; we argued does not fit into the contemporary game of international relations where states hold soar her selfish national interest. In other words, Nigeria's foreign policy needed to be rejigged and/or reviewed, and quality leadership should be held sway among others, then Nigeria will find it easier to assume the position of a continental leader. A strategic foreign policy tells a country's who should be given aids and why, and answer this question “what do I stand to gain by assisting this country?” and not playing a “father Christmas role” under the disguise of the 'giant of Africa' without anything to show for.

Without its challenges, Nigeria's strong growth rate, many have queried how and why the dividends of economic growth have rarely deciphered into a positive standard of living for its citizenry (Enweremadu, 2013). Critically looking at Enweremadu's position, indeed the country's foreign policy approach is to a large extend responsible for low standard of living of its citizenry. Here, we

also argued that Nigeria should think towards reviewing her foreign policy to reflect citizen-centered approach rather than relying on the old idealist notion of foreign policy that is anchored on collective and/or greater good for all. As some have blamed persistent corruption for Nigeria's economic paradox, others have set out to envisage poor leadership and bad governance, as major culprits. Though, this is not a yardstick in determining the hegemonic prowess of a country, it has helped compounded Nigeria's woes in becoming a regional hegemon.

African countries look to Nigeria as a possible leader; however, this tag often comes with negative perceptions that cause suspicion about the latter's leadership intent. Poor governance, widespread corruption, non-strategic/rigid foreign policy, Haram's unending insurgency, banditry and kidnapping, fulani-herders rampaging are some of the many examples that analysts point to of Nigeria's incapacity to adequately address the overwhelming domestic problems that confront its people (Mustapha, 2008). The above position helps to understand the internal problems Nigeria is presently confronted with in her regional hegemonic struggles, but failed to look at more biting issues in human security (such as poverty, hunger, feelings of social discrimination, loss of sense of national patriotism, etc), heavily anchored on bad leadership have today contributed more in diminishing the country's chances of becoming a regional police. Emphatically, these debilitating factors detract any possible hegemonic disposition for any country becoming either a regional or global hegemon.

The decision to make Africa the central focus of

Nigeria's foreign policy was precipitated by two main factors. First, is the geo-political location of Nigeria within the African region and the perception that it is served by destiny with the political and economic responsibility of taking obligation for the continent (Adebajo and Mustapha, 2008). Secondly, Nigeria is unarguably the most populous black African nation in the world. Statistically, with a population of over 200 million people and more than 250 ethnic groups, Nigeria accounts for over 50% of the nearly two hundred million population of West Africa.

Reference to Nigeria as the natural leader and messiah of the African continent (Bach, 2007) has thus been engrained in the country's foreign policy conduct since independence. We argue in this work that Nigeria's putative continental hegemonic character evident in its Afrocentric policy has mostly been borne of an altruist motive and sympathy for the problems faced by the continent. This explains why, in many instances, Nigeria is unwilling to derive any direct material benefits from its contribution to the progress of the continent to the chagrin of its own people. Nigeria has often being criticized for having a foreign policy that places Nigerians in the background and highlights the advancement of black Africa (Mustapha, 2008; Ogunnubi, 2014). Given assurances that it is able to tackle Africa's problems through its enormous human and material resources, the implication had been that Nigeria's conception of its role in Africa is triggered by a genuine idealist persuasion and moral suction (Amusan, 2006: 7). From a theoretical perspective, Nigeria's involvement as Africa's 'big brother' is signposted in two major arguments

carved, firstly, in an idealist orientation of seeking the greater good for the rest of Africa and, secondly, in a realist argument of furthering its national interests. It appears in Nigeria's case based on the above submission that the realist standpoint in defining Nigeria's foreign policy is at the moribund stage. This theoretical dilemma makes it difficult to reach firm conclusions on the motives underlying Nigeria's engagement with Africa. To a large extent, Nigeria's foreign policy in Africa does not fit with the Western Realist School of International Relations, which argues that a state's foreign policy strategy must necessarily be guided by its national interests.

However, this research aligns itself with the realist paradigm which argues that a state's foreign policy strategy must be guided by its national interests; without which a country only plays 'a father Christmas role' and finds it so hard to play a dominant role of either a regional or global hegemon. No wonder, Nigeria's embrace of the idealist perspective to the greater good of the African continent (embedded in its foreign policy) is one-singular factor inhibiting her from assuming the position of a regional hegemon. Nigeria's foreign policy disposition failed to subscribe to the Western realist notion that any policy that is not based on the national interest is useless. Therefore, Nigeria did not originally define its national interest in terms of a narrow perspective, but as one connected with the rest of Africa. According to its leaders, 'whatever happens to one black man happens to Nigeria' (Fawole, 2013). The strategic question now is; is Nigeria willing to play a dominant role in Africa? And what costs is she likely to incur if she accepts this

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role?

Practically, Nigeria's foreign policy trajectories show no evidence of a country willing to play a dominant hegemonic role in Africa. Rather, armed with its vast resources relative to other Africa states, the country seeks to provide regional leadership. This contrasts sharply with Amusan's (2006) thesis that Nigeria has always 'wanted to play the role of a hegemon in Africa'. Instead, Nigeria perceives itself as a country that is uniquely placed to offer leadership in Africa in concert with other states that share similar objectives. Among other factors, Nigeria's capacity to play a hegemonic role has yet been hampered by its economic inferiority to South Africa, as well as enormous internal and external challenges (Mustapha, 2008). Nigeria had every opportunity to become a regional hegemon but its rigid hold on the idealist notion, poor management and use of her resources, non-strategic foreign policy, have made blurred its struggles. This she demonstrated for instance; in the formation of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the largest contributor to the ECOWAS fund, as well as the largest economy in the sub-region; the formation of the Organisation of Africa Unity (OAU, now AU); the establishment of the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), when Liberia combusted and ECOWAS decided to intervene. At that time, all West African countries acknowledged that no country except Nigeria had the required troops, equipment and funds to bankroll such an operation. At the time, more than half the West African countries had armed forces of less than 10,000 officers and men. Nigeria

had more than 100,000 soldiers under arms and considerable experience in UN peacekeeping operations around the world.

On the whole, Nigeria's inability to understand the contemporary international politics (i.e national interests driven) vis-à-vis to review its foreign policy to reflect the 21st century pattern of the game makes it difficult to exercise hegemonic influence within the continent, despite its superior material capability. The recent incident of xenophobic attacks of foreign nationals in South Africa, especially Nigerians and the Nigerian government's reaction to it clearly reveals the idealistic notion of the country's foreign policy. Since Nigeria is unable to effectively demonstrate control over other states in economic, political or ideational terms and it does not have the capacity to unquestionably bully its way throughout the continent, it is doubtful whether the hegemonic stability theory can be effectively extrapolated into an African regional context.

Based on the reviewed literature, it was discovered that no research has been conducted seeking the review of Nigeria's foreign policy; and as argued in this work that Nigeria should review her foreign policy to reflect current reality in the international system. Thus, a policy that is Nigeria-centric; upholding more of the tenets of realist notion than the idealist approach of greater good of all, if she must become a regional hegemon. A call for quality leadership, strategic deployment and effective use of resources (as form of aids to African countries) are also identified as a missing link; which the paper attempts to fill.

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Conclusion

The research findings clearly revealed that Nigeria's foreign policy is not strategic enough to book for her a place to becoming a regional hegemon. We argued that it needs to be reviewed toreflect Nigeria-centric approach (Nigerians first); anchored more on realist notion. Quality leadership is also another factor Nigeria augment to enable her attain the status of a continental police. The country's internal challenges (such as bad leadership, non-strategic foreign policy, human rights abuses, etc) are also issues to be considered in her struggles to assume the position of a regional hegemon.

Conclusively, until Nigeria looks inward by addressing the above listed pitfalls, better still adopts **SWOT** analysis mechanism (**S**= *Strength*, **W**= *Weaknesses*, **O**= *Opportunity*, **T**= *Threats*) in mirroring her conundrums, her quest and struggles to attain the position of a regional hegemon is nothing but a mirage.

On the basis of the findings of this research, the following recommendations were proposed and if looked into will help address challenges raised. They are as follows;

Though leadership problem is a common phenomenon within the African continent, Nigeria should distinguish herself by selecting, electing and appointing competent persons (through rank and file) in positions of authority, people without questionable characters, and persons with proven integrity who can help change the narrative of Nigeria and Africa at large.

Nigerian government should intensify her anti-graft war via her anti-agencies (Economic and Financial Crime Commission, Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related

Offences Commission). The agencies should be non-partisan and allow to operate independently.

The Nigerian government as a matter of urgency needs to review and re-strategize her foreign policy approach to reflect the reality of the 21st century. Nigeria should review her foreign policy to be Nigeria-centric, anchoring on realist approach that first address the country's internal problems.

The Nigerian government should to ensure that fundamental human rights are respected and protected, strict adherence to the rule of law and sanitize her electoral institution and processes to align with liberal democratic ideals; as revealed by the findings.

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