Nigeria, Afro-centrism and Conflict Resolution: Five Decades After—How Far, How Well?

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Abstract: This paper interrogates Nigeria’s interventionist role in Africa over the last five decades (1960-2010) by examining the interplay between Nigeria’s Afro-centric foreign policy drive and its conflict interventionist role in Africa. The paper further reviews the essential ingredients embedded in Nigeria’s foreign policy articulation, including its ‘much publicized’ shift to citizen diplomacy. And argues that, having being a major force for/of peace and stability in Africa, Nigeria should strive for a balance between its commitment to Afro-centrism, and the country’s homegrown challenges; particularly, in the light of its declining socio-economic realities and the seemingly unending Boko Haram insurgency.

Introduction

Nigeria represents a major regional force in Africa, not only because of its size, but also because of its political and economic role on the continent. Apart from being the largest economy on the continent, it also ranks among the world’s major producers of crude oil. Similarly, its leaders have mediated conflicts in Africa, while its troops have played lead roles in the quest for peace and stability in troubled regions all around the globe. Perhaps, a better testimony to Nigeria’s commitment to the success of its peacekeeping endeavors is its ranking among the top five troop contributors to United Nations Peacekeeping missions in the world. Therefore, and as Alli observes, Nigeria’s approach to sub-regional security and conflict resolution in Africa is often seen as inextricably tied to its international role conception by its leaders. This role conception has become the defining paradigm for the country’s foreign policy engagement, and

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http://www.africa.ufl.edu/asq/v15/v15i4a1pdf

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ISSN: 2152-2448
has conferred on it the role of a “natural leader” with a “manifest destiny” and the responsibility to promote and protect the interests of Africa.\(^5\)

It has equally been argued that the decision by Nigeria to make Africa, the core of its foreign policy focus are also attributable to a number of other factors, such as: geo-political consideration which sees Nigeria strategically located within the West African sub-region, demographic explanations, which credits the country as the most populous black nation in the world, with an estimated population of over 170 million people, and economic arguments which sees Nigeria accounting for more than 51 percent of the entire West African Gross Domestic Product (GDP), with an estimated value of about $521.8B.\(^6\) Others have contended that this decision also stems from the need to protect Nigeria’s security, given its cultural, geographical, and historical experiences with other African states, and also because of transnational security concerns, defined by the way Nigeria’s security is affected by what happens around its contiguous states.\(^7\)

Others have situated the argument along the camps of the Prestige/National Interest and the Economic Diplomacy/Hegemonic schools of thought.\(^8\) Proponents of the Prestige/National Interest school of thought argue that Nigeria’s Africa-centered foreign policy concentration is been pursued without any specific regard to the country’s domestic interests and economic woes. The Economic Diplomacy/Hegemonic Stability group on the other hand, maintain that Nigeria; by virtue of its huge socio-economic and military resources, has the responsibility to intervene in conflicts within its immediate sub-region (West Africa) and in Africa.\(^9\) This group perceives Nigeria as a regional force on the continent, and has having a responsibility to lead in the promotion of peace, and in the championing of Africa’s socio-economic and political development.\(^10\)

This assertion is perhaps what informs Ebohon and Obakhedo’s observation that:

Playing such a noble role in the economic construction and reconstruction of the region presents Nigeria with an opportunity to assert her dominant position in the region as a matter of prestige; analysts argue that if Nigeria fails to do so, other credible and contending regional challengers such as Ghana, Egypt, Cote d’Ivoire (formerly Ivory Coast) and South Africa would take on such responsibilities.\(^11\)

Consequently, in examining Nigeria’s role in conflict resolution in Africa, proponents of the economic diplomacy/hegemonic stability school of thought views the assumption of such a role as capable of contributing meaningfully towards ending the plethora of intra and interstate crises that have become the defining characteristics of most states in the West African sub-region and Africa.\(^12\) Therefore, and in achieving this, Nigeria is expected to treat its sub-region as a natural base from which it is to project its national interests and by extension, further expand its regional influence.\(^13\) It is in view of the forgoing that this paper seeks to historicize and examine the nexus or otherwise between Nigeria’s role in conflict resolution in Africa, and its foreign policy objectives; particularly, its principle of Afro-centrism over the last fifty two years (1960-2012).

In doing this, the paper employs the interplay between regime type, and leadership orientation to explain Nigeria’s commitment to its foreign policy principle of Afro-centrism,
including an extant assessment of the country’s purported gravitation towards Citizen Diplomacy in 2007. Further to this, the paper also undertakes an empirical analysis of Nigeria’s rising home grown socio-economic and domestic realities, and argues the need for the country to strike a balance between its conflict interventionist role in Africa, its competing domestic realities, and the yearnings and aspirations of its citizenry. Together with this introduction, this paper has been divided into five parts with the first serving as introduction. The second part undertakes a conceptual debate on the interplay between conflicts, conflict resolution, and its nexus with Nigeria’s interventionist role in Africa.

The third, explicates the essential issues embedded in Nigeria’s foreign policy, while the fourth examines the interface between regime type, foreign policy orientation and Nigeria’s commitment to Afro-centrism, including an assessment of the country’s purported shift to Citizen Diplomacy. The paper concludes with some empirical analyses as to why Nigeria should redefine its Afro-centric interventionist role in conflicts in Africa. This is has become particularly necessary given the country’s changing socio-economic realities, notwithstanding the recent rebasing of its economy which saw it overcoming that of South Africa as Africa’s largest economy, and also in the light of the growing Boko Haram insurgency the country has been struggling to contain.

**Conceptual Clarification: Conflict**

A conflict, for the purpose of this paper is defined as “the existence of non-compatibility or disagreements between two actors (and this could either be individuals, groups, organizations or nations) in their interaction over issues of interests, values, beliefs, emotions, goals, space, positions and scarce resources”. Accordingly, and as similarly expounded by Golwa, a conflict resolution process revolves round the “the limitation, mitigation and containment of violent conflicts through the use of both forcible (coercive) and non-forcible (non-coercive) instruments to stop the occurrence/recurrence of humanitarian emergency situations”. Crucial to any conflict resolution process therefore, is the identification and resolution of the underlying causes of conflicts, through the striking of balance between common interests, and the overarching goals. These goals are what Snodderly, describes as the: fostering of positive attitudes, the generation of trust through reconciliation initiatives, and the building or strengthening of institutions and processes through which warring parties can peacefully interact.

However, where a conflict has escalated beyond the capacity of the mediator, the application of a conflict management process then becomes inevitable. This process, is what Wallenstein, describes as “an attempt to bring a fighting to an end and/or the process of limiting the spread of a conflict through its containment”. In situations where a conflict is not responding positively to a non-violent resolution process, there may be the need for the application of some subtle force. Such force and its subsequent application are what Boutros Boutros-Ghali refers to as peacekeeping; a phenomenon which has been the crux of Nigeria’s interventionist mechanism in Africa. It follows therefore that in resolving conflicts; different kinds of mechanisms are involved, including the use of diplomatic/military intervention. The point to note from the above is that, any conflict, which does not subscribe to a peaceful form of negotiation or what Crocker, calls diplomatic intervention would have to be resolved through a
military intervention; a phenomenon which has grown to become a central feature in Nigeria’s conflicts interventionist role in Africa.\textsuperscript{18}

Therefore, when located within the framework of the above elucidations, Nigeria’s role in conflict resolution in Africa is often premised on the need to protect Nigeria’s National interest, defined here in terms of Nigeria’s commitment to its foreign policy principle of Afro-centrism; a doctrine often adduced as a basis for Nigeria’s intervention in conflicts. It is however imperative to note that there are some other factors which further explains Nigeria’s frontline role in conflict resolution in Africa. These factors are what Aluko identifies as the centripetal and centrifugal determinants of Nigeria’s foreign policy; a synopsis of which is provided below.\textsuperscript{19}

**Centripetal and Centrifugal Determinants of Nigeria’s Foreign Policy**

Broadly speaking, the general idea behind classifying foreign policy into centripetal and centrifugal notions is rooted in the belief that there are domestic and external issues involved in any country’s foreign policy formulation. In the case of Nigeria, the centripetal factors involved in its foreign policy formulation are generally built around its notion of four concentric circles of National Interest. At the heart of this notion, is the expectation that Nigeria, in the course of its engagement with the international community, must protect its own security, independence and prosperity. As previously observed by Gambari, the essential arguments embedded in the first circle recognize the need for Nigeria to maintain a spirit of good neighborliness with its contiguous states—Benin, Cameroon, Chad and Niger. The second, concerns Nigeria’s relations with its West African neighbors; the third, emphasizes the country’s commitment to continental issues relating to peace, development and democratization; while the fourth circle, spells out Nigeria’s relations with organizations, institutions and states outside of Africa.\textsuperscript{20} This concept is vital to the formulation of what was later to become Nigeria’s foreign policy thrust.

As similarly argued by Aluko, issues such as: the colonial heritage and the legacy the country inherited from the British, the leadership orientation of its successive governments, Nigeria’s foreign policy machinery, its post-civil war experience and the primacy of its national and economic interests, have also been adduced as some of the centrifugal factors that have helped in shaping Nigeria’s behavior towards its neighbors in Africa and the rest of the world.\textsuperscript{21} Lending her voice to the discourse, Ogwu equally identified: political considerations, the Nigerian constitution, bureaucratic tendencies, economic variables, military interests, and the idiosyncratic elements of its leaders as other probable factors that have helped in shaping Nigeria’s foreign policy direction over the years\textsuperscript{22}. Commenting further on her interrogation of Nigeria’s external relations, particularly with regards to the Western world, Ogwu noted that the ability of Nigeria to determine its productive forces and its very low reliance on foreign aid accounted for the robust state of its foreign policy between 1960 and 1980.

She averred thus:

The improved state of Nigeria’s economy bestowed on it a leverage which it did not possess in the first decade of independence. More significantly, perhaps was
the government’s ability to determine its own policies independent of external influences.\textsuperscript{23}

The above reference was perhaps motivated by Aluko’s observation of Nigeria’s foreign policy vibrancy between 1960 and 1980, that:

The phenomenal growth of the economy largely as a result of the oil boom has strengthened Nigeria’s influence in Africa and indeed the rest of the world, such that neither of the superpowers (US or USSR) could make use of foreign aid as a political leverage on Nigeria... heavy American dependence on Nigeria’s oil means that Nigeria is free not only to criticize the United States but also to put pressure on her.\textsuperscript{24}

In line with these assessments, it is believed that a concise elucidation of the fundamental principles encapsulated in Nigeria’s foreign policy objectives is crucial to understanding how these objectives connect with Nigeria’s Afro-centric drive; particularly its commitment to Peace building and Conflict Resolution in Africa.

\textbf{Fundamental Principles of Nigeria’s Foreign Policy}

A first glimpse of the shape which Nigeria’s foreign policy would take was provided by Nigeria’s first Prime Minister, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, on the occasion of the country’s admittance as a member of the United Nations. In his acceptance speech, Balewa stated inter alia:

It is the desire of Nigeria to remain on friendly terms with all the nations and to participate actively in the work of the United Nations Organizations. Nigeria, by virtue of being the most populous country in West Africa has absolutely no territorial or expansionist ambitions. We are committed to upholding the principles upon which the United Nations is founded. Nigeria hopes to work with other African countries for the progress of Africa and to also assist in bringing all African countries to a state of independence.\textsuperscript{25}

Therefore, on October 1, 1960, Sir Tafawa Balewa on assumption of office as Prime Minister, pronounced the following as the core principles of Nigeria’s foreign policy: (1) Non-Alignment with any of the then existing ideological and military power blocs, especially NATO and the Warsaw Pact; (2) respect for the legal equality, political independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of all states; (3) respect for the doctrine of non-interference in the domestic affairs of other states; (4) seeking membership of both continental and global multilateral organizations based on their functional importance to Nigeria; and (5) the recognition of Africa as the centerpiece of Nigeria’s external relations.\textsuperscript{26} These principles were later to be adopted into Section 19 of the country’s 1960 independence constitution and have been reviewed and sustained over time in the 1999 constitution of Nigeria.

Therefore, according to Section 19(1) of Nigeria’s 1999 constitution, the five essential foreign policy concerns of Nigeria are:
1. Commitment to the Principles of Non-Alignment;
2. Respect for the Legal Equality, Political Independence, Sovereignty and Territorial Integrity of all States;
3. Respect for the Principles of Non-Interference in the Affairs of other States;
4. Seeking Membership of International Organizations as a means of promoting functional cooperation, and;
5. Africa as the Center-piece of Nigeria’s foreign policy.

Expounding the Principles

Nigeria’s Commitment to the Principles of Non-Alignment

This principle was informed by the bipolarity in world politics at the time of Nigeria’s independence in 1960. As observed by Fawole, the world was precariously bifurcated into two antagonistic ideologies of capitalism, as supported by the United States (US) and communism which was championed by the former Soviet Union (USSR). Mindful of this situation, and informed by the desire to protect its nascent independence, Nigeria opted to be non-partisan in the power play between the Western and the Eastern blocs. However, some scholars have argued that this principle was respected more in theory than in practice. For example, “even the government of Prime Minister Tafawa Balewa, the progenitor of the idea did little to respect it” Balewa, he added was “so rabidly pro-British and concomitantly pro-Western”. He cited Nigeria’s signing of a bilateral Defense Pact with Britain (a very strong ally of the United States of America) in 1960; this was intended to allow the British to establish a military base in Nigeria. The Defense Pact he noted was later abrogated in 1962, following the stiff parliamentary opposition mounted against it and the overwhelming disapproval of the Pact by Nigerians.

Respect for the Legal Equality, Political Independence, Sovereignty and Territorial Integrity of all States

This principle has been interpreted to mean the expression of Nigeria’s willingness and readiness to conduct its external affairs with other states according to the civilized rules of international engagement and interaction. The principle often enables Nigeria to affirm its belief in the United Nations (UN) as the legitimate supra-national authority capable of guaranteeing a just world order, through its respect for, and execution of the decisions reached by the UN. Therefore, Nigeria believes that by abiding by and adhering to the dictates of international law and civilized rules of behavior is vital to guaranteeing the security of the newly independent, but relatively weaker states within its sub-region in a world laden with intense competition between the Eastern and the Western powers. Perhaps, another motivating factor was Nigeria’s desire to assure its contiguous states (Benin, Chad, Niger and Cameroon) and other states in Africa that the country would not at any point in time impose its authority on any of its neighbors in Africa.

As Balewa puts it:
We shall never impose ourselves upon any other country and shall treat every African territory, big or small, as our equal, because we honestly feel that it is only on that basis that peace can be maintained in our continent.\textsuperscript{33}

Balewa’s assurances to Nigeria’s neighbors and the rest of Africa appears to have been ostensibly intended to prevent any of these nations from falling into the embrace of the then power blocs (the United States and the USSR) and more importantly, to protect its hard-won independence and that of its contemporaries from the overtures being made by Kwame Nkrumah, through his Pan African movement. Balewa had argued that this idea would lead to a loss of sovereignty and as such return Africa to the pre-colonial age. Noting further that “Nigeria was big enough and does not need to join others and that if others wish to join forces with the country; their legal standing and positions would be made clear to them in such a union”.\textsuperscript{34}

Respect for the Principles of Non-Interference in the Affairs of other States

This principle explains Nigeria’s readiness and desire not to interfere in any domestic dispute that could arise in other African countries, although the principle has often been challenged by Nigeria’s commitment to the protection of the national interest; a development which often compels the country to intervene in its quest to ensure peace amongst and within its contiguous states. However, Nigeria appears to justify its intervention in the affairs of other nations within the context of what Peen Rodt, elucidates as an exercise of the ‘Responsibility to Protect’ (R2P).\textsuperscript{35} This development has seen Nigeria getting involved in what would have been a negation of its policy of non-interference, although such interventions have been largely executed in its capacity as a non-state actor, as demonstrated in its Peace-keeping missions. Examples of which include its interventions in the Congo in 1960, its support for a number of liberation movements in Southern Africa between 1970 and 1994, and its role in the resolution of the Liberian (1990-2003), the Sierra-Leonean civil wars (1998-2002), among others.

Seeking Membership of International Organizations as a means of promoting functional Cooperation

Nigeria’s subscription to this principle has been influenced by the overriding advantage which functional cooperation has over a subscription to an African political union which at that time could not guarantee a certain future for a newly independent country like Nigeria. Therefore, Nigeria had hoped that its commitment to working with other non-state actors would guarantee it protection, particularly given the bipolarity that existed at that time.\textsuperscript{36} As a consequence of this principle, Nigeria, over the past fifty-two years (1960-2012), has demonstrated its support for, and commitment to a host of international organizations, including the United Nations (UN), the Commonwealth of Nations, the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries, (OPEC) the African Union (AU), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), among others.

Africa as the Center-piece of Nigeria’s foreign policy
Following the announcement of Nigeria’s intention to make the African cause its top priority, made by Prime Minister Balewa at the UN General Assembly, the principle has over the years grown to become the cornerstone of Nigeria’s foreign policy thrust. Nigeria’s commitment to a radical Afro-centric policy focus from independence is seen more as a product of the psychological belief in, and concurrence with what Dr. Nnamdi Azikwe called Nigeria’s historic mission in Africa and its manifest destiny to rule and dominate the continent. Long before its independence and the economic/oil boom of the early 1970s which catapulted Nigeria to an enviable economic height in Africa, its leaders have always believed that the country was preordained to play an important and leading role in African affairs.

This notion did not only germinate in the minds of Nigerians; it was also believed and validated by the membership of the international community who saw Nigeria as being capable of making a difference in the world on account of its vast potential. Similarly, it has been argued that Nigeria’s foreign policy, right from independence, has been fashioned to meet the requirement for political stability and development in Africa, and this perhaps explains why barely one month after independence, “one of its first efforts was the dispatch of Nigerian troops to the Congo for peace keeping”. It is important to add, however, that the amalgam of this potential and the leadership aspirations of Nigeria’s past and present leaders, to a large extent have helped in sustaining and securing the continuing pursuit of this cause.

Bearing the above in mind, it is believed that a tabular illustration of Nigeria’s involvement in peacekeeping and conflict resolution in Africa would help in putting into broader perspective, Nigeria’s commitment to this Africa-centered ideology.

**TABLE 1: NIGERIA’S PARTICIPATION IN GLOBAL PEACE MISSIONS, 1960 – 2011**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Code Name</th>
<th>Operation</th>
<th>Start date</th>
<th>End date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Congo</td>
<td>ONUC</td>
<td>United Nations Operation in the Congo</td>
<td>July 1960</td>
<td>June 1964</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chad</td>
<td>OAU Peacekeeping Force, Chad</td>
<td>1979</td>
<td>1982</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
As shown in table 1 above, Nigeria has participated actively in a host of peace-keeping missions in Africa both under the auspices of the ECOWAS, AU and the UN. While it could be argued that these interventions are believed to be in consonance with its age-long adherence to Afro-centrism, there are other specific role(s) which variables such as regime type and leadership orientation play in Nigeria’s commitment in conflict resolution in Africa. This is the lacuna which the succeeding explanation aims to fill.

**Regime Type, Foreign Policy Orientation and Commitment to Afro-centrism**

As captured in existing literature, the essential ingredients embedded in Nigeria’s national interest includes: National self-preservation, defending national sovereignty and independence, protecting the socio-economic and political interests of Nigerians, ensuring the defense, preservation and promotion of democratic norms and values, enhancing Nigeria’s standing and status in Africa, and the promotion of world peace. Similarly, it has also been argued that Nigeria’s national interest is best considered from the perspective of its regional and continental leadership drives. These ambitions represent the underpinning philosophy and overriding impetus which led to Nigeria’s adoption of a policy of four concentric circles as espoused earlier. Prominent among Nigeria’s achievements include its contribution to the birth(s) of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1963, and ECOWAS in 1975, the attainment of independence by Angola and Zimbabwe (formerly Rhodesia) in 1975 and 1980 respectively,
including Nigeria’s participation in peacekeeping and conflict resolution in Africa and its role in the resolution of the civil wars in Liberia, and Sierra Leone, and in the eventual demise of apartheid in Namibia in 1988 and later in South Africa in 1994, among others.

Regardless of these successes, this Africa-centered foreign policy concentration has not been without flaws. These flaws were soon to become evident in the downturn experienced by the country in its hitherto strong and viable economy and in the neglect of its own domestic responsibilities, specifically the fulfillment of the social obligations expected of a government to its people. The resultant effect of this has been a steady decline in the nation’s oil revenue owing to a culture of poor maintenance, corruption and the extensive projects executed by Nigeria in other African countries. For example, in Benin Republic, Nigeria, as noted by Osuntokun, was reported to have signed a trade agreement with the country in 1972, this was followed up with the granting of an interest-free loan worth about #2 million (approximately $1.2 million in 1972), to be repaid over a period of 25 years, reconstructed the Idiroko—Porto Novo highway—a distance of 24 kilometers, uniting the two countries for #2.7 million (approximately $1.7 million then) in 1972, and also in 1989, provided the sum of $2.5 million to Cotonou for the payment of the outstanding salaries been owed public servants by the Béninois government.43

This is besides the establishment of the two joint ventures in 1975; the Onigolo cement works, and the Save sugar industry. Perhaps, it is imperative to note that these projects were undertaken at a time when the country was still reeling from the harsh economic effects and huge costs associated with the funding of the liberation movement in Southern Africa, the cost of prosecuting its civil war from 1967 to 1970, thus earning the foreign policy articulation of Gen Yakubu Gowon the appellation described by Gambari, as an era of ‘Naira Spraying Diplomacy’.44 Similarly, the period between 1976 and 1978 saw Nigeria calling the bluff of former United States’ President Gerald Ford, over its recognition of, and support for the Jonas Savimbi led UNITA rebels against Nigeria, and the OAU’s preference for the nationalist aspirations of the MPLA, led by Augustine Neto. Nigeria also nationalized some British interests in the country; this development, subsequently led to the transformation of Barclays Bank to Union Bank and British Petroleum, to African Petroleum by the Obasanjo/ Sheu Yar’ Adua regime of 1976 to 1979. The move was seen as a response to the infamous toothless dog insinuation ascribed to the Obasanjo government by Iron lady Margret Thatcher, the then Prime minister of Britain.45

Between 1985 and 1998 in Nigeria’s foreign policy history and practice was described as the beginning of ultra-nationalism, xenophobia and the beginning of isolationism in Africa,46 except for the short lived regime of Gen. Buhari (1984-1985) and that of Gen. Babangida (1985-1993), both of whom were noted for their radical ultra-nationalist and interventionist foreign policy disposition. The Babangida regime was particularly noted for its ‘zero tolerance’ for conflict in West Africa; a policy which Babangida executed through the instrumentality of the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) as evidenced in Nigeria’s commanding role in the civil wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone.47

The essential foreign policy thrust of the Babangida regime was anchored on the need to protect the national interest, commitment to Afro-centrism, ensuring good neighborliness among its contiguous states, and the pursuance of greater economic integration within the West African sub-region. Notable among the defining moments of that administration were the
introduction of the Technical Aid Corps Scheme under the supervision of the then Minister of Foreign Affairs, Bolaji Akinyemi, the tactical adoption of economic diplomacy as the country’s new foreign policy drive, and the renewed bite which the administration gave to the campaign against apartheid in South Africa, as well as the commencement of diplomatic ties with Israel and the over bearing role it played in the resolution of the Liberian crisis.

Nonetheless, the succeeding regime of General Abacha plunged Nigeria into what Osaghae and Fawole, calls “Nigeria’s era of foreign policy isolationism”; a ‘feat’ achieved courtesy of the dictatorial and totalitarian regime of Gen. Sani Abacha.\textsuperscript{48} Abacha’s style of foreign policy administration was characterized by a high degree of inconsistency and incoherence judging by its ambivalence and quickness to react to international issues without taking cognizance of the cost implications of such decisions. For example, the junta expended a needless amount of energy on trying to maintain its monopoly on the country while fending off every attempt by the international community to categorize it as a pariah state. As observed by Osaghae, “Abacha saw it more as a ‘struggle for survival’ and the Nigerian state witnessed a foreign policy era in which ‘isolationism’ was the rule rather than the ‘exception’ thus seeing diplomacy being replaced by bull fighting, while the country was counting more enemies instead of making more friends.\textsuperscript{49}

Following Abacha’s death on June 8, 1998, Abdul-Salam Abubakar took over the reins of power, midwifed the country’s return to civil rule and also made appreciable impact to restore sanity into both the domestic terrain and the country’s external relations. On return to democracy on 29 May 1999, and that of Olusegun Obasanjo as Presidents, Nigeria’s attempt to reposition its foreign policy focus towards citizen diplomacy did not fully come into play until the election into office of the late president Musa Yar Adua and the subsequent appointment of Ojo Maduekwe as Minister for Foreign Affairs.

Deconstructing Nigeria’s Notion of Citizen Diplomacy: Political Rhetoric or a Call to Action?

Our foreign policy has come of age and the age of innocence is over. We remain proud of our track record from Tafawa Balewa up till now. The country that is the largest black Nation in the world could not have done otherwise. A world where one in every six black men in the world is a Nigerian could not have done otherwise, or where one in every four African is a Nigerian could not have done otherwise. We should ask ourselves some hard questions: to what extent has our foreign policy benefited Nigerians? To what extent has our foreign policy put food on our tables? In other words where is the citizen in our foreign policy?\textsuperscript{50}

The above excerpt represents the justification provided by Ojo Maduekwe, Nigeria’s erstwhile Minister for Foreign Affairs under the Yar Adua civilian administration often credited for the introduction of citizen diplomacy. Arguing further, Maduekwe noted that Nigeria carries an enormous burden which requires it to be the symbol of the success of the Black nation and that there could never be a Black story, “unless it is a Nigerian success story”. Thus citizen diplomacy according to Maduekwe implies ensuring that Nigeria’s foreign policy becomes the most powerful way to express who Nigeria and its people are.\textsuperscript{51} Following this announcement, there has been a number of attempts by scholars to define the notion of citizen diplomacy as coined by Maduekwe. For example, Eze, views citizen diplomacy as the act of being people
oriented through the prioritization of the overall interest of Nigeria and its people over any other sub-regional or continental considerations.\textsuperscript{52}

For Mbachu, the approach represents “a structured action that government takes in order to fast-track the foreign policy objectives of a state as set by policy makers”.\textsuperscript{53} Arguing further, he noted that these policy objectives must take into cognizance the wellbeing and aspirations of the people in whose interests they were established, and also portray a re-invigoration of Nigeria’s foreign policy pursuit in a way that the people are made net beneficiaries of its end product.\textsuperscript{54} In their contribution to the discourse, Okocha and Onwuka argues the central idea behind the concept of citizen diplomacy as involving the protection of the image, integrity and interests of Nigeria and its people, while also reacting against countries that are hostile to the Nigerian cause and that of its people, including those who brand Nigeria as corrupt.\textsuperscript{55} Lending credence to this assertion, Ogunsanwo noted that for the approach to be successful, it is needs to be structured to prioritize the interest of Nigerians at home and abroad, and used as a tool to further Nigeria’s national interest in its engagement with the rest of the world.\textsuperscript{56} Arguing further, he noted that any diplomacy that does not take this into consideration will be running contrary to the basic tenets of the concept. For Akinterinwa, the citizen diplomacy approach need for the Nigerian government to take beyond rhetoric, by employing the policy to address problems such associated with the denial of entry visas to Nigerians with legitimate documentation and reasons for wanting to travel, the shabby treatment Nigerians at home and abroad are confronted with and the need to ensure that Nigerian business entrepreneurs benefit from the country’s regional and sub-regional peace-making and peace-building efforts.\textsuperscript{57}

Inferring from these considerations, it seems apparent that, at the heart of this citizen diplomacy drive is the overall prioritization of the interest of Nigerians in the country’s interaction domestically and with the rest of the world. However, when situated within the context of governmental support and execution, it remains to be seen how well this policy has been brought to bear on the Nigeria’s domestic and foreign policy. Perhaps, a better testimony to this assertion availed itself in 2007, when Dr. Ngozi Ugo, a career diplomat was nominated for the position of UN Ombudsman and the Deputy special representative of the Secretary-General in 2007.\textsuperscript{58} As part of the requirement for the confirmation of her appointment, she was required to secure the diplomatic endorsement of her home government—Nigeria. Unfortunately, this was not to be, because both the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the office of the Attorney-General of the Federation kept foot dragging until she eventually lost the position.

This indeed calls into question the manner of citizen diplomacy Nigeria claims to be practicing when it cannot defend the interest of its citizens. As Mahmood observes:

Dr. Ugo’s presence in the UN System would have enhanced Nigeria’s position for the UN permanent seat. Other more serious countries campaign for their citizens and that is why the highest ranking African in the UN system is a Tanzanian woman. Go to the Commonwealth Secretariat in London you may think you are in India’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs because of the number of Indians there. And this is where our own Chief Anyaoku served for almost four decades. When is Nigeria going to stand and recognize its own? It is sad, unfortunate and indeed painful.\textsuperscript{59}
Similarly, while commenting on what we argue as an exhibition of a charity of foreign policy diplomacy by Nigeria, Monday noted that even at the level of the Economic Community of West African States, an institution Nigeria hosts and substantially funds, and at the African Union were Nigeria was/is a founding and strong financial member, it remains to be seen how well the Nigerian government has protected the interest of its citizens, notwithstanding the advent of its much publicized citizen diplomacy drive. The above scenario was succinctly captured this way:

Not only did the country (Nigeria) donate substantially towards ECOWAS, set up costs including the Secretariat, it regularly paid its annual contribution of approximately 32.5 percent of the Community’s budget which was subsequently revised upwards to 40 percent. In the ECOWAS Community Court of Justice only 7 percent of the staff are Nigerians, and it is situated here in Abuja. At the African Union since 2003 when Obasanjo fielded two female candidates from Nigeria for the same post, making the country look unserious, no Nigerian has been elected in the AU Commission for the last six years. A nation that has the largest population in Africa is not represented in the African Union Commission. Burkina Faso defeated Nigeria in 2007! Really, what manner of citizen diplomacy is this when its citizens lack representation?

A similar case in point is the plight of Nigerians who are still resident in the Bakassi Peninsula; an area which used to be part of Nigeria, but was ceded to Cameroon following the verdict of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) which awarded the oil rich region to Cameroon. Following this development, it has been reported in some quarters that some Nigerians who have not fully left the region are being treated by the Cameroonian authorities in a manner not befitting of a people whose government has been more than cooperative, particularly judging by the way it accepted the ruling of the ICJ. These are just a few examples of the way the Nigerian government pursues its citizen diplomacy drive.

Equally, the Nigerian government’s seeming lack of response over reported incidences of xenophobic attacks on Nigerians in South-Africa in 2008 further calls into question the country’s claim and subscription to a citizen diplomacy propelled foreign policy approach, if it cannot use same to defend the interest of its people as earlier advanced by Maduekwe. This scenario perhaps, provides once more, an opportunity for the Nigerian government to put to test its widely publicized citizen diplomacy. Evolving from these discourses, the paper concludes with a laconic consideration of some of the major social-economic challenges (Poverty, Unemployment and Nigeria’s spiraling debt profile) confronting the Nigerian state, including an analysis that further re-enforces the need for the Nigerian government to strike a balance between its interventionist role in conflicts and the current state of its economy.

Nigeria’s Changing Domestic and Socio-Economic Realities in Perspective

Drawing from the insights provided by a 2012 report conducted by Nigeria’s House of Representatives Committee on Aid, Loans and Debt Management, it has been reported that between 2005 and 2012, The Nigerian government borrowed a total of $4.4 billion in external loans in the past seven years from the World Bank. The report also notes that Nigeria has also
risen to become the largest recipient of disbursements from the International Development Agency (IDA) between 2009 and 2012, and currently has the largest outstanding IDA portfolio in Africa, ahead of Kenya and Tanzania. These borrowings, according to the debt management office, were ostensibly meant to finance capital projects and human capital development initiatives in the country. As shown in Table 2 below, Nigeria’s lending rate as at April 2013 was estimated to be in the region of $715M as against the total sum of $1,373.72B obtained as loan in 2012. If figures emanating from Nigeria’s Debt management office is anything to go by, Nigeria’s public debt profile appear to have taken a turn for the worse as evidenced in the 31 March, 2015 report of the country’s Debt Management office which puts Nigeria’s external debt at over $9.4Tr. The danger these figure portend is a possibility of 2016 figure exceeding the amount borrowed in 2016, if not effectively contained.

**TABLE 2: NIGERIA’S BORROWING BY VOLUME (IN MILLIONS OF USD--JANUARY 2009 AND MAY 2013)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Borrowing (in Millions of USD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>1,760</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>901.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>541.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>1,373.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>715</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Deducing from the above table, it seems the economic analogy of borrowing to finance public expenditure ostensibly to stimulate growth and improvement in human capital development in Nigeria seems to defy logic. As evidenced in Table 2 above, notwithstanding the obtainment of a $1,760B loan in 2009, the number of Nigerians living below poverty level between 2009 and 2010 still stood at 77.5 million a development which further contradicts the basic logic of a corresponding relationship between human capital development and improvement in the standard of living of the people. This much, was also evident in the Adult Equivalent (poverty) rate in Nigeria, which gives a far more alarming statistic. For example, between 2003 and 2004, as shown in table 3 below, 60 million out of every 80 million adults live below poverty line, while between 2009 and 2010; 77.5 million out of every 100 million Nigerian adults are still living below poverty line. This official poverty line as noted by Litwack is drawn on the basis of income sufficient for per capita consumption of 3000 calories a day plus other
essential non-food item. This statistics were obtained from the headcount data gathered from a comprehensive household survey conducted between 2003-2004 and 2009-2010.

TABLE 3: NUMBER OF NIGERIANS LIVING IN POVERTY (2003-2010) ESTIMATES (IN MILLIONS)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Per capita</th>
<th>Adult Equivalent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2003-2004</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-2010</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Similarly, Nigeria’s unemployment statistics between 2006 and 2011 are by no means encouraging, as it represents a classic expression of the ailing nature of its economy and a perfect description of the internal dysfunctions confronting the Nigerian state. As depicted in table 4 below, while the official percentage of unemployed persons in Nigeria was put at 12 percent of the working population, the actual percentage of the unemployed Nigerians within the working age population (18-65 years) stood at 33 percent of the entire population. This figure was soon to rise to a 22.5 percent unemployment rate and to 44 percent for those within the working age population in 2011.

TABLE 4: UNEMPLOYMENT IN NIGERIA: 2006-2011 (PERCENT OF WORKING POPULATION)


Perhaps, a more corroborating assertion to the declining state of human and social capital accessibility in Nigeria is the report released in May 2013, by the Statistician-General of
Nigeria’s National Bureau of Statistics (NBS). This report according to him has put the official rate of unemployment at 23.9 percent.\(^{68}\) This implies that one out of four Nigerians are unemployed and unemployment rates have been steadily increasing, from 12 percent in 2006 to close to 24 percent in 2011, while younger Nigerians are encountering increasing difficulty in finding gainful employment.\(^{69}\) Also, the number of Nigerians living in poverty said to be on the increase, thus revealing a sharp contrast between the nation’s economic statistics on rapid economic growth and minimal welfare improvements for much of the population, particularly in rural areas.\(^{70}\)

Similarly, and as noted in the United Nations Human Development Index for 2014, Nigeria presently occupies the 152nd position out of the 187 countries ranked in the survey with the life expectancy rate at birth put at 52.5 percent.\(^{71}\) These alarming statistics, no doubt reflects the changing realities of Nigeria’s prevalent socio-economic anatomy; a fact which further reinforces the need for Nigeria to strike a balance between what the paper argues as a charity of foreign policy diplomacy, and the domestic needs of its people, particularly, its home grown domestic challenges. Of a fact, nothing more can be more compelling and justifiable for a rethink of Nigeria’s Africa-centered conflict interventionist approach other than the seemingly unending Boko Haram insurgency which appears to be threatening Nigeria’s unity as a people, and its continuing survival as a state.\(^{72}\)

Conclusion

This paper has interrogated the essential issues that have influenced Nigeria’s conflict resolution mechanism in Africa, particularly from the perspective of its foreign policy over a period of fifty years. The paper also reveals an inextricable connection between Nigeria’s foreign policy and its interventionist role in Africa. Besides the constitutional provision which recognizes Nigeria’s Africa-centered ideology, the paper also established that Nigeria’s conflict interventionist role in Africa can be situated within the context of its leadership orientation and the political ideology of the individual in power. However, and notwithstanding Nigeria’s commitment to peace keeping and conflict resolution in Africa, it remains to be seen how well this Afro-centric policy has helped in the protection of the interests of Nigerians both at home and abroad; particularly when located within the purview of the hate and disdain with which Nigerians are been confronted with, in most of the countries that have benefited from the policy.

At the very best, what the government seems to have succeeded in achieving is a policy documentation rather than actual execution. Nigeria is encouraged to learn from the socio-economic and political considerations often attached to intervention by the likes of the United States (US), United Kingdom, (UK), France and South Africa when intervening in conflicts. Given this development, this paper argues the need for Nigeria to remain more proactive and responsive to the plight of citizenry in the light of this supposed gravitation to a ‘people first approach’ as exemplified in the cardinal objectives of its citizen diplomacy focus. More than anything else, Nigerians both at home and abroad need to be better assured that the welfare and well-being is of paramount concern to their government, both in theory and in practice.

Similarly, having spent the larger part of its over five decades of independence for Africa, the paper advocates for a major overhaul and/or expedited review of these afro-centric
objectives to reflect the prevailing socio-economic and political aspirations of the Nigerian people as demonstrated above, through the embrace of a more citizen oriented and economically meaningful interventionist approach to conflict resolution. While it may be true that foreign policy gains are not usually susceptible to quantitative analysis, it is nevertheless imperative for foreign policy as Secretary Kerry noted, to reflect a continuation of a country’s economic policy, and this according to Trotsky must have strong resonance with a nation’s domestic policy.  

The paper further submits that given the mounting threat posed to Nigeria’s stability as evidenced by the Boko Haram insurgency; Nigeria needs to first re-assure its citizenry of its capacity to protect their lives and property before focusing on securing the socio, economic and security challenges facing other African states, as its age-long Afro-centric policy seems to suggest. This much has become necessary given the fact that the Boko Haram group has killed tens of thousands of innocent Nigerians, and as admitted by Nigeria’s former President, Goodluck Jonathan, the insurgency, credited to members of Boko Haram (BH) “has so far claimed over twelve thousand lives, with more than 8,000 persons injured or maimed, not to mention the displacement of thousands of innocent Nigerians”.

More specifically, since the first quarter of year 2014 Nigeria has witnessed tremendous escalation in attacks mounted by the Boko Haram group; with its cruelest attack (since year 2009 when the sect commenced its terrorist operations) been the recent abduction of over least 270 girls from Government Girls Secondary School, Chibok, Borno state, Nigeria. Another of such fatal attacks on the Nigerian state are the bombings of a Motor Park in Nyanya, located close to about 8 km south of Abuja, and the city’s busiest shopping mall, EMAB Plaza, located side by side with Banex Plaza in Nigeria’s capital city. If anything at all, these attacks have exposed the seeming capacity of Nigeria’s leadership to handle its home-grown security challenges; a development which has been further made worse by the emerging pointers to Boko Haram’s international connections with other terrorist organizations.

Most notable among such speculations is the perceived involvement of Samantha Lewthwaite, a British-born Al-Shabab operative, in the Nyanya attack to avenge the killing of Al-Shabab’s terror leader, Makaburi (aka Sheikh Abubakar Ahmed), by the Kenyan Anti-terror Police Unit. And the contention that members of the Somalia militant sect, Al-Shabab, aided Boko Haram militants in carrying out the attack on Nyanya Motor Park. It has indeed been argued that Al-Shabab, which has strong links with Al-Qaeda, and that the former had moved from providing technical assistance to Boko Haram to fighting alongside the insurgents in some parts of the North-East. Indeed, this growing international alliance has the capacity to compound the challenge of defeating terrorism in Nigeria, and also further limit the country’s capacity to provide regional leadership to other African states; a possibility, which is already beginning to manifest following Nigeria’s recall of about 800 of its troops from Darfur to assist the country in its ongoing war against the Boko Haram group.

It perhaps bears mentioning that Boko Haram had also in March 2015, pledged its alliance to the Islamic State (IS), furthered its attacks on the civilian population, and also raided a number of Military formations, including the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) base, located on the outskirts of Baga in Borno State, Nigeria. Perhaps, a major watershed for the Nigerian government in its campaign against Boko Haram, and its often touted Giant-like
stature in Africa is its resort to the black market, particularly between 14 February and 28 May 2015, for the procurement of arms, and its purported employment of mercenaries’ from South Africa in the fight against Boko Haram.\textsuperscript{81} As at the time of writing this paper, Nigeria has witnessed a change in leadership and government, with Muhammadu Buhari, a former military ruler, emerging as President.\textsuperscript{82} While the foreign policy direction of his government remains too early to call, what is however clear is that, the evolving socio-economic and security developments as contended in this contribution, particularly since its return to Participatory Democracy in May 1999, suggests that Nigeria is struggling with a plethora of home-grown systemic challenges. Inarguably, the country needs to do more to take care of these challenges, before all other considerations.

**Notes**

1 For more on these, see: Bloomberg News, 07 April, 2014, and Bloomberg News, 11 March, 2011.
3 Ibid.
4 Matunhu, Jephias. 2011, p1.
5 Ibid.
7 Yoroms 2010, p. 27
8 Idisi and Idise 1996, p.171
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid.
11 Ebohon and Obakhedo, 2012, p.163
12 Ibid.
13 Ate 2011, p.90
14 Fink 1968, p.456
15 Golwa 2009, p. 279
16 Snodderly 2011, p.17
17 Wallenstein 2002, p.53
18 Crocker 2001, p.31
19 For more explanations on the centrifugal and centripetal determinants of Nigeria’s foreign policy, see the piece written by Aluko 1977, The Determinant of the Foreign Policies of African States.
20 Gambari 1989, p.2
21 Aluko 1977, p.2
22 Ogwu 1986 also noted these factors as very central to the shaping of Nigeria’s foreign policy articulation.
23 Ibid, p.2
24 See also Aluko, 1981, p.1 for more on this.
26 Fawole 2003, p.42
27 Constitution of Nigeria 1999, Section 19(1)
28 Fawole 2003, p.42
29 Fawole 2003, p.43
30 Ibid.
32 Fawole 2003, p.44
33 Balewa, 1960 cited in Fawole, 2003, p.42
34 Ibid.
35 For more on this argument, see the article written in 2011 by Peen Rodt on The African Mission in Burundi, the Successful Management of Violent Ethno-Political Conflict.
36 See Fawole, 2000, p.45 and Gambari 2008, p.58 for more on this.
37 Fawole 2003, p.47
38 Ibid.
40 Oluyemi-Kusa, 2007, p.140
42 For more on this argument see also the writings of Idang 1973, Ogunsanwo 1986, Fawole 2003, Gambari 2008 and Adebajo 2008.
43 See Osuntokun 2008, p.148 for more on Nigeria’s response to correct what he described as the ‘Benin neglect’
44 See Gambari 1989 for more arguments on Gowon’s foreign policy era of Naira Spraying diplomacy
45 See also Fawole 2003 and Osuntokun, 2008,
46 Fawole 2003, Pp127-146
47 See Osaghae 1998, and Adebajo and Mustapha’s 2008, contributions for more on Babangida’s approach to foreign policy issues and conflict related issues in West Africa during his regime.
48 Osaghae 1998, p.194 and Fawole 2003, p.27
49 Osaghae 1998, p.194
50 Maduekwe, cited in Ogunsanwo, 2007, p.2
51 Ibid.
52 Eze 2007, p. 8
53 Mbachu 2007, p. 9
54 Ibid.
55 Okocha and Onwuka 2007, p.3
56 See Professor Alaba Ogunsanwo presentation titled Citizen Diplomacy: Challenges for Nigeria’s Foreign Policy’. A Paper Presented at the One-Day Seminar on Citizen Diplomacy organized by the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs, Lagos for more on this analysis.
57 See also Akinterinwa Bola’s 2010 book title ‘Nigerian Citizen Diplomacy: Theoretical Genesis and Empirical Exegesis, Ibadan’ for a more comprehensive explanation.
58 Mahmoud 2009 cited in Monday 2010, p. 8
59 Ibid.
60 Onyearu, 2009 cited in Monday 2010, p. 8
61 Ibid.
62 Babatola 2012, Pp. 9-10
63 Matunhu, 2011.
64 ThisDay, 31 December 2013.
65 Leadership, 30 June 2015.
67 Ibid.
68 ThisDay 09 May, 2013.
69 Ibid.
70 Ibid.
72 Boko-Haram is a Hausa language expression which literally translates to western education is forbidden. It is a name given to a radical Islamic sect cum jihadist terrorist organization was formed in 2001 by Mohammed Yusuf. The movement has been responsible for a series of destabilizing and debilitating attacks which has claimed on many Nigerians, particularly in the North-eastern states of Borno, Yobe and Adamawa.
77 Punch 21 April, 2014.
78 See for instance: 800 Nigerian Soldiers Return To Boost War on Terror, available on http://www.channelstv.com/2014/08/01/800-nigerian-soldiers-return-to-boost-war-on-terror/
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