

Foreign Policy and Nigeria's Domestic Environment: An Assessment

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Abstract

This paper examines the impact of domestic environment on Nigeria's foreign policy. Foreign policy is a reflection of domestic policies that are externally projected, which are fundamentally drawn from domestic aspirations and can be utilized as a potent force for positive international image. At Nigeria's return to democratic rule in May, 1999, state actors came up with a new foreign policy direction to drive the country's external relations in reaction to the prevalent domestic situation and international image of the country, the said goal found expression in shuttle diplomacy. In recent time, foreign policy making and implementation is influenced by a range of factors within the domestic environment. This study primarily focused on the impact of some domestic factors such as; economic viability, military strength, character of political leadership, political crises, domestic situation of the country and mass media on the conduct of Nigeria's foreign policy. It adopted Decision-Making Theory as its theoretical framework while data collected were analysed qualitatively and was complimented by the use of semi-structured interview. The study discovered that insecurity, debt burden, political instability, military capability among others has undermined the conduct of Nigeria's foreign policy and therefore recommends the need for Nigeria to re-define her foreign policy objectives by paying strategic attention to the domestic environment through need centered policy formulation and implementation.

Keyword: Foreign policy, Domestic, Environment, Nigeria, International

Introduction

Foreign policy of most nations of the world is carefully crafted with the goal to achieve the country's national interest. Interesting to note that, a nation can go to war, sponsor terrorism or employ other strategies domicile within their jurisdiction to achieve their goals. National interest is not vague or an imaginary desire but an aggregate of a nation's domestic aspirations and demands embodied. Relatively, Aluko (cited in Okolie, 2015, p.92) equates national interest as "the sum total of all national values which constitutes national ideology, preservation of a state's independence and sovereignty". Therefore national interest is the vision that drives foreign policy and foreign policy is the extension of domestic policies, thus the two cannot be separated operationally.

Nigeria's foreign policy focus since return to democratic administration in May, 1999 seems to have gradually tilted toward domestic security concern. The prevailing domestic concerns of

insecurity, internal politics and agitations in the country seem to have redirected the country's foreign policy posture from 'Economic Diplomacy' to Security Diplomacy as one of the domestic circumstances bedeviling the nation.

This paper is an attempt to appropriately examine the interplay of domestic components on the conduct of Nigeria's Bilateral and Multilateral engagements in the global community with a focus on some identified variables. Furthermore, the paper adopts a combination of historical and descriptive analytical approach as its method of study; to critically examine the impact of domestic environment on the conduct of Nigeria's foreign policy. The paper uses both primary and secondary sources to provide detailed information regarding the variables under study. The study employs a qualitative research approach, involving the use of semi-structured interview as the primary method to compliment the secondary method.

The Concept of Foreign Policy

The universality of foreign policy definition has remained an academic concern within the discipline of International Relations (IR). However, experts attempt to define and describe the concept. Henry Kissinger (cited in Abegunrin, 2003), described foreign policy as policy that begins where domestic policy ends. In other words, the foreign policy of a nation is a product of a variety of her domestic interest conceptualized as national interest.

Foreign policy to Okolie (2015) "refers to specific decision making aimed at protecting, maximizing and promoting the prescribed national interest of a given state". Okolie (2015) also viewed foreign policy as the totality of the acts, strategies and manipulation by a given state in her process of internationalizing domestic resources. One of the central key in the definitions of both Frankel and Okolie is the internationalization of state policy. In light of the aforementioned, Eze as cited by Okolie (2015) reinforced the argument that in the international environment, states act as dominant actors irrespective of the roles of non-state actors like the non-governmental organization. He further asserts that foreign policy therefore, is the policy pronouncement of states geared towards achieving the national interest of states in their relationship with states in international political environment.

On the other hand, Aluko and Lawal (2016) argued that foreign policy is unpredictable and has no specific domestic or international boundary. To them, the scope is not static because issues in foreign policy are continuous. Therefore, no government unconsciously designs her foreign policy outlook, the focus of any foreign policy would depend heavily on events in and around the nation and Nigeria is not an exception.

Foreign Policy and Domestic Environment

Foreign policy making shares attributes of domestic political decision making and, in addition faces some constraints which have their sources within and outside the country (Okolie, 2015). Sule Lamido (2012) based on his experience observed how domestic issues define and shape the



way they articulated Nigerian foreign policy within the international space, and also influenced how they pursued the objectives. He further argues that, the domestic space largely determines results that could accrue from the implementation of the foreign policy. For instance, the economy of a nation is an important vehicle that drives the foreign policy which in turn determines the viability of its implementation. Eze (2015), described the economy as a pivot on which the wheel of any foreign policy rotates. He added, irrespective of national leadership, Nigeria's economy is one of the universal factor that affect the country's foreign policy. The economy witnessed a robust moment during Obasanjo's first government in the late 1970s which is attributed to the oil boom. Nigeria was able to take an independent position on issues bordering on African liberation (Durotoye, 2014).

Durotoye (2014) noted that, in 1999 when Obasanjo returned as a civilian president, the economy has almost gone under. This could be traced to the long haul of uninterrupted military regime. He further asserts that, domestic influences in foreign policy could include, the military, government organization: Democracies and Bureaucracies, Democratic Institutions, with the assumption that more actors are involved and authoritarian establishments with the assumption that authoritarian leaders often make decisions by themselves. In this regard, the personality of leaders has been a core of foreign policy analysis. That, at the top of every government sits a leader, or leaders, who have the authority to make foreign policy. Characteristics of leaders are generally more important when they have significant latitude in shaping policy and the situation is ambiguous, uncertain, or complex. Under these conditions, which occur frequently in foreign policy making, a leader's personality and beliefs may shape what the state does (Durotoye, 2014). Similarly, Eze (2015), argue that personality factors had conditioned Nigeria's foreign policy since independence.

Aside the personality traits of actors highlighted by Durotoye and Eze, Oti and Tolu (2016) in their summation added, 'in the area of foreign policy decision-making in Nigeria, civil society groups have sometimes influenced decisions, even during military era. For instance, the June 12, 1993 presidential election believed to have been won by Moshood Abiola and which was annulled by Ibrahim Babangida attracted the attention of civil society groups, who resisted the annulment and even organized a protest to show their grievances. Their protests attracted international attention, as media, both home and abroad engaged in reporting of the wrong and partial decision of the Head of State (Oti & Tolu, 2016). Also, the civil society group campaigned for the diplomatic isolation of Nigeria given the incessant Human Rights abuses of Abacha, the height of it being the death of Ken Saro Wiwa in 1995. Such campaign no doubt contributed in the declaration of Nigeria as a 'pariah' state (Oti & Tolu, 2016). In this regard, the shuttle diplomacy of Olusegun Obasanjo in 1999 made adequate attempt to restore the image and integrity of the country.

Thus, the foreign policy of Nigeria like other countries' is formulated in a highly complex and dynamic environment. Among the important factors that influence the external policy of a state are the strength of the economy, national sentiments and aspirations, the level and quality of information at the disposal of the government, leadership perception, etc. (Saliu, 2006, in Okolie,

2015). Sule Lamido (2012) conclusively argued, there was a clear link between their successes on both fronts, further reaffirming his position that their foreign policy was a reflection of the domestic policy. In an attempt to measure the impact of domestic factors on Nigeria's foreign policy Eze (2015) agrees to the opinion of Saliu, Lamido, Okolie, Oti and Tolu among others that, domestic factors are central in positioning Nigeria's external relations. In other words, the domestic environment has also impacted Nigeria's foreign policy negatively. This includes, leadership inconsistency, political instability, mismanagement of the nation's resources and maladministration of policies by both political and bureaucratic leaders (Eze, 2015).

Theoretical Consideration

Attempting to analyze factors that influences decision making, Snyder categorized them into three major sets of stimuli; the internal setting, external setting, and the decision making process.

Internal setting includes many elements some of which are the nature and functioning of the social organization such as political parties, pressure groups, non-governmental organizations, public opinion, agencies helping the formation of public opinion, nature of the political system etc. All these elements enter into the domain of decision-making process. In a democratic society social, political and other types of organizations enjoy freedom in their day to day activities.

There is external set up or setting. This condition is especially important for the policy maker who makes decisions for the external relations of the state. It is known to all the students of international politics that today the term international society has earned wide publicity and all the nation-states are the members of this society. When the decision-maker of a state makes a policy/decision he must be aware of the fact that his decision must be in conformity with the policies and objectives of other nations and this should not lead to conflict among nations. If this were the objective of the decision-maker, he cannot make policy according to his personal preferences.

Snyder in his quest, studies the personality factor of a decision maker and the various agencies and processes involved in decision making (Calicut, 2011). Furthermore, decision making approach enormously advanced the course of foreign policy making which serve as lens in understanding why actors behave the way they do in international politics. Studies have shown that beyond being just a response to external stimuli, Nigeria's foreign policy is shaped largely by domestic variables.

Enemuo (2015, p.25), argued that decision-making approach has its weakness 'for requiring an analyst to take cognizance of too many factors and for attributing too much rationality to the process of decision-making by assuming that officials carefully weigh the implications before making a decision'. Furthermore, the approach is seen as putting much emphasis on decision making processes above the outcomes. Despite the weakness of the approach, it is argued that Decision-Making approach remains instrumental in the field of foreign policy analysis.

Decision-making approach is relevant to this study because the paper is centered on decision-making, decision makers, the processes, institutions involved and its impact on the state. Decision-making approach was adopted to systematically explain Nigeria's foreign policy within the context of study.

Impact of Domestic Environment on Nigeria's Foreign Policy

The argument of Okpokpo (2000) indicates that, internal political events are crucial in the analysis of foreign policy, because foreign policy does not operate in a vacuum. There cannot be foreign policy without domestic policies. Therefore, foreign policy is seen as a strategy with which institutionally designated decision makers seek to manipulate the international environment in order to achieve national objectives (Bamalli, 2007). Traditionally, foreign policy of a country is to an extent determined by its domestic structure.

Aluko (2016) and Gambari (2012) among others share similar view in their analysis of Nigeria's foreign policy. To them, there is no inherent incompatibility between democratic principles and successes in foreign affairs (Bamalli, 2007). Consequently, they attempt to demonstrate that various constituent elements in political system, the government, the political parties, pressure groups, the civil service, the political elites, public opinion and the press operating within the democratic process provided by the constitution exert direct or indirect influence in the shaping of Nigeria's foreign policy. Gambari (2012) on his part examines the domestic political structure and process. To him, they are critical to an understanding of the nature of Nigerian foreign policy, largely because they serve as the channel for internationalization of international environment (Bamalli, 2007).

That is to say, the impact of the instantaneous domestic setting is constant and predictable. In most cases, the political, economic, social and historical circumstances of a nation are some of the decisive factors that configure its foreign policy. In Nigeria, some of the decisive domestic factors that have influenced Nigeria's foreign policy are the nature of Nigeria's acquisition of independence, the civil war and the general perception of Nigeria as a powerful black African nation among others (Patrick, 2008). However, the advent of democracy in 1999 under the political leadership of President Olusegun Obasanjo changed the posture of Nigeria's foreign policy, described as 'New Paradigm' (Personal Communication, 2018). The new thrust of foreign policy sought to position the country's foreign policy postures to the realities of Nigeria's domestic circumstances which were characterized by economic difficulties and dictatorship. Also, while Africa remains the focus of Nigeria's foreign policy within this period attention was being focused on issues of managing conflict and promoting African integration. There was a continued emphasis on African development, peace and security. Despite the global dimension of Nigeria's foreign policy, much roles were played in the African continent (Personal Communication, 2018).



There are some specific factors that are key in determining the direction of Nigeria's foreign policy which includes; the political structure of the country, structure of the economy, form of government, the military might, the media, domestic situation, and the character of political leadership.

1. **Domestic situation:** Domestic circumstance of a country determines the kind of policy she pursues at a time. A stable political system is imperative for pursuing a dynamic and coherent foreign policy. Akinboye (2015) argue that, 'during the 1960s, Nigeria was in a state of political instability and could not play active role in global politics'. For instance, in 1967 to 1970 Nigeria's diplomatic relations with Cote d' Ivoire, Gabon, Tanzania and Zambia broke during the civil war because they relate and traded with Biafra. During the civil war, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) had openly supported Nigeria while the United States of America (USA) supposedly supported Biafra, as a result Nigeria moved from over-dependence on the West to a pragmatic relationship with the two dominant blocs in the international system. This neutral position was given greater impetus with Nigeria's active participation in the Non-Aligned Movement. Furthermore, the Nigeria-Cameroon border conflict over Bakassi Peninsula was another domestic issue regarded as the vital interest of Nigeria. Consequently, the acceptance of ICJ's judgment by President Obasanjo was seen as a diplomatic blunder considering the historical underpinnings of the people of Bakassi. While the National Assembly consider his decision over the Bakassi as unilateral. These acts, like others, were regarded as a disregard for structures and institutions put in place for foreign policy making and implementation.

Moreover, the Government of Nigeria under the leadership of president Obassanjo, Jonathan Goodluck and Muhammadu Buharihas been accused of failing to effectively address both the security element of the Boko-Haram as well as the underlying socio-economic problems which reflected on Nigeria's diplomatic proficiency. The biggest concern to the international community is the large number of violations of human rights and international law that the military has perpetrated in its fight against Boko Haram and which have largely been denied. The military was accused of massive retaliations and brutality, including burning down villages and conducting extrajudicial killings. United States of America's policy to counter Nigeria's Boko Haram, offers a sober assessment of the security situation in northern Nigeria. It argues clearly that the best route to stability is through the establishment of accountable and effective democratic institutions (Campbell, 2014). More to that, during Abacha's regime Nigeria was seen as a pariah state, which affected her diplomatic ties with the external environment. These were some of the domestic circumstances that conditioned the county's external relations.

2. **Political crisis:** Political crisis is a phenomenon in Nigeria's political system where the outcomes have most times been disastrous to national growth and reputation. Political violence in particular, has been a disruptive and destructive tool in Nigeria through its use as a means of contesting for power and recognition between individuals and groups in the society. During Babangida's administration political analysts argued that his regime gave



a blow to Nigeria's image abroad and its foreign policy in particular, giving the instance of the financial waste but omitted human rights abuses and the cancellation of the June 12 election at a time when most advanced nations made democracy, good governance, and human rights essential determining elements in international politics and in their relations with developing countries. Afterward, no official inside Babangida's government was capable of giving cogent reasons for the annulment of the June 12 elections and accusations concerning human rights violations. The international community, therefore, perceived the Nigeria's top military officers were up to something. The issue of June 12 had not been resolved when General Sani Abacha pushed the transition president Chief Ernest Shonekan out and took his seat without any agenda on how to improve relations between Nigeria and the international community outside its traditional African brother countries (Okpokpo, 2000). In his summation Okpokpo (2000) argue that, the annulment of the June 12 presidential elections and the hanging of the "Ogoni nine" were two lethal blows that those regimes gave to Nigeria's image abroad. Nigeria's bad image has not been repaired and those who contributed toward this should be humble in their utterances against the choices made by a democratically elected government.

Despite the nation's claim to democratic rule, the country has so far failed to measure up to the principles of democracy. The political parties, especially the dominant parties; the People's Democratic Party (PDP), All Progressive Congress (APC) are bedeviled by intra-party crises. The crises have arisen because of the refusal of the party leaderships to respect their own party constitutions, the due process and party discipline. This in turn exact some influences on the political leadership.

3. **The media and public opinion:** The media is another factor that influences foreign policy of most countries. Although actors may not admit that sometimes their decisions are influenced by the media's information or criticisms, the media still has a role to play in the conduct of foreign policy. The media through constant reporting of an issue could mobilize public opinion against a particular government and its policies, which could result to such government losing popular support (Oti & Tolu, 2016). It is a platform where propaganda is promoted. As noted above, while civilian government may be sensitive to the views and concerns of the people, the military government rarely gives room for public opinion.

Public opinion on the other hand had not been a strong factor in the formulation of foreign policy during the military rule. Government merely reacted to public opinion under military regimes. Nonetheless, the advent of democracy in 1999 ushered in an era whereby public opinion has become more strident and the government may not be able to continue to ignore it when formulating foreign policy. The media bridged the gap of information and communication between the Nigerian government and the citizens on diplomatic matters (Personal Communication, 2018). According to the interviewee, the media always put government on her toes during the 'Bring Back our Girls' campaign because it attracted the attention of international community.



4. **Character of political leadership:** Akinboye (2015, p.389) opine that, one of the major determinant of Nigeria's foreign policy is the character of the political leadership, particularly at the federal level. Furthermore "the degree of dynamism or otherwise of the country's foreign policy is dependent on the type of leadership the country has at a given time". This was indicative in Nigeria for instance, when Balewa's foreign policy was largely seen as conservative and pro-Western, while the Murtala/Obasanjo's government had a dynamic, active and aggressive foreign policy. Eze (2015), describe it as 'personality factors' which to him have influenced several shifts in Nigerian foreign policy. That "arising from the interplay of personality traits of Nigerian political leaders is a replay of the diplomacy thrust of the democratically elected leaders like Olusegun Obasanjo's economic and shuttle diplomacy and citizen's diplomacy of Musa Yar'adua". Contextually, the political structure of the country played roles in the foreign policy. 'The political elites who have almost unrestricted control of the country's foreign policy are products of the multi-ethnic and traditional forces'(Akinboye, 2015; p.388). Thus, their interest and ideology to a large extent determine the direction of the country's foreign policy. Similarly, "the marriage of political bureaucratic leadership is fundamentally positioned in the formulation and implementation of Nigeria's foreign policy" (Eze, 2015; p.40).
5. **Economic viability:** The major drive of a country's foreign policy is her economic structure. Some scholars argued that, the economy is the life of every foreign policy. Level of economic development influences state's foreign policy in diverse ways. For instance, advanced countries play dominant role in world politics, and formulate their foreign policies to maintain such superiority simply because they have a sustainable economic system. Akinboye (2015) on his part argue that, Nigeria is largely a dependent economy; this in turn limits the country from pursuing robust and dynamic foreign policy objectives. He further posits that, Nigeria only pursued dynamic foreign policy in the late 1970s when the country's economy was buoyant due to the increase in the oil price. Nigeria's abundant natural and human resources gave it a relative advantage over other African nations. However, despite Nigeria's role in her regional economy, the country is still a dependent and a consuming economy which straps her in debts and left at the mercies of IMF, World Bank, Paris Club and the producing nations.
6. **Military strength:** Military might of a state play a central role in the country's foreign policy. According to Morgenthau (2012, p.139) in his 'Politics among Nations' "what gives other factors their actual importance for the power of a nation is military preparedness...such ability derives from a number of factors which are significant". Furthermore, "the power of a nation in military terms is also dependent upon the quantity of men and arms and their distribution among the different branches of the military establishment" (Morgenthau, 2012; p.142). In this regard, militarily capable states exercise greater independence from external forces policy. "A fundamental aspect of Nigeria's national interest is the nation's security, which makes the military factor an important determinant in understanding the country's character and external behaviour" (Akinboye, 2015; p.389). The economic boom of the 1970s and the radical views of



Murtalawas said to have brought out an activist stance to the liberation of Africa, this was the period when Nigeria first toyed with the idea of using its military might in furthering its foreign policy objectives by supporting liberation movements in South Africa forcibly. The activism of the Murtala's era (1975-1976) continued during the General Olusegun Obasanjo's era (1976-1979) but with more caution. Nigeria is seen as the 'Giant of Africa' because of her economic strength and interventions in most African countries through the use of her troops. Akinboye (2015) note that, Nigeria armed forces have grown appreciably in both size and quality. The military strength of the country during the first Republic was abysmally low. However, the crisis in the north has starkly revealed the weakness of the Nigerian army, long regarded as one of the most powerful in the continent. Today, the Nigerian security forces are deemed incapable of dealing with the insurgents. For example, the former governor of Borno state, Kashim Shettima, claimed that Boko-Haram are better equipped and more motivated than Nigerian soldiers. Shettima's position may not be true in a way but the question of 'will power' of Nigerian government should be the right question.

Conclusions

Nigeria's domestic environment is a key determinant of the country's foreign policy because foreign policy starts where domestic policy ends and is considered as the projection or advancement of domestic policies. Aside the factors discussed above, there are other factors that shaped and conditioned Nigeria's foreign policy from independence such as; population, technology, geographical position of the country among others. In a democratic setting, domestic environment is a fundamental determinant and motivation of foreign policy. Nigeria under Buhari's administration for instance is driven by the domestic circumstances, Boko-Haram terrorism, bandit attacks, IPOP agitation, debt burden, political instability among others. These factors left Nigeria with no option than to engage in Bilateral and Multilateral relations in order to mitigate these domestic confrontations. Worthy of note, proactive foreign policy is determined by a healthy domestic environment.

Recommendations

This study has established that domestic environment plays a significant role in determining and shaping the foreign policy of a nation. Consequently, Nigerian domestic environment is clouded by a range of factors that guides the conduct of her external relations. This paper therefore recommends the following options for the country in her bid to conquer the domestic challenges:

- Nigerian government needs to re-define her foreign policy objectives, paying strategic attention to her domestic environment through need centered policy formulation and implementation.
- Nigerian government needs to identify and address fundamentally the factors responsible for the increasing domestic issues with a view to create a friendly investment climate for FDIs. Both the federal and state governments must make serious efforts in providing security and basic infrastructures for Nigerians.





- Lastly, government should pay considerable attention to Nigerian Foreign Service because of her role in the making and implementation of the country's foreign policy. Nigerian foreign policy machinery should henceforth be placed in the hands of experts.

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