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Nigeria's Foreign Policy and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: A Perspective

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Abstract
The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of Nigeria's foreign policy behavior on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict of 1999- 2018. Specifically, the study is an attempt to highlight the various factors that have influenced Nigeria's foreign policy on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In addition, it examines the political foundations as well as the implications of Nigeria's foreign policy on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Snyder's Comprehensive (Internal and External Settings) Model was utilized as a framework of analysis. The study found that Nigeria's foreign policy on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been partisan and not that of neutrality as some scholars and even citizens are meant to believe and that Nigeria's foreign policy on the conflict has been influenced by the perception and ideology of the successive Nigerian government and its policy makers. It equally discovered that the domestic political structure of Nigeria has also influenced the policy responses of the Nigerian government on the conflict. It is recommended that the Nigerian government and decision makers can initiate an African Peace Committee to mediate on the Israeli - Palestinian conflict. The concert of medium powers if initiated can ensure the neutrality of Nigeria's foreign policy on the Israeli- Palestinian conflict. Also, the John Burton's strategy on conflict resolution was recommended in resolving the conflict.

Keywords: Foreign Policy, Conflict, Politics, Israeli-Palestinian.

Introduction

The foreign policy of any nation at any given time is intricately related to its domestic politics, it is fundamentally the projection of a country's domestic policy to the outside world

(Idang, 1973). Considerably, the foreign policy of a country is determined by internal factors (such as geographical variables of location, size, topography, and population, economic or natural resources, interest groups; as well as the type of political structure and the system of government) and external factors (including the regulations and policies of other states, international law, norms and principles of regional and international organizations as well as the behavior of non-state actors).

Nigeria's foreign relation with the Arabs and the Jewish state of Israel dates back to the 1950s and 1960s, although her emergence on the international scene as a legal political entity goes as far back as 1914 (Adeniran, 1985). Principally, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been how to reconcile harmoniously the conflicting demands of both the Jews and Arab Palestinians within a common territory or landscape.

Globally, the Israel-Palestinian conflict stands as a major issue, specifically when looking at the relations between the West and the Islamic world. It also remains a strategic issue and a protracted war undermining peace, security, and political stability in the modern history of the Middle East, apparently since the aftermath of World War II. Indeed, after several years of war and failed peace efforts since the United Nations General Assembly resolution 181 in 1947, the Zionist Jews appear to have systematically dominated the Arab and enshrined in their age long nationalistic ambition resulting to the ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian. In recent years however, what became a priority for the Palestinian is to achieve their long-awaited national aspiration of a sovereign state. To the Israeli, the survival of her state against the continuous resistance from its Arab neighbors thereby aspiring for the status of a regional leader tying up the equation of self-determination and state security between both actors (Okechukwu, 2018).

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict intruded adversely into the domestic politics of Nigeria even more than any other country in the world. Not only that, Nigerian leaders took sides in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict during the First Republic (October 1960-January 1966). Moreover, Nigeria has never acted against Israel directly over its attack on Egypt (an African country) or over its atrocities against the Palestinian Arabs nor has Nigeria acted against the United States of America which is the greatest supporter of Israel and the largest consumer of Nigeria's crude oil (Adeyemo, 2012).

Shortly after the end of the Nigerian-Biafra war, the Yom Kippur war broke out on October 6, 1973, when Arab States attacked Israel. Israel won a decisive victory against the Arabs. This war served as a catalyst for actions taken by African leaders including Nigeria. On October 9, 1973, General Gowon blamed both sides for not scrupulously observing the UN Security Resolution 242, of November 22, 1967 (Adeyemo, 2012). On October 12, 1973, the Federal Military Government issued a statement condemning Israel and supporting the Arabs. On October 25, following an OAU decision, Nigeria broke diplomatic relations with Israel as it claimed that Egypt was an African sister state whose land had been occupied and also due to Arab pressure. To this, Ani (2011) opined that:

> The OAU member countries took the collective decision to break diplomatic ties with Israel because a part of a member country's territory was being occupied by Israel after inflicting a crushing defeat on her. In the heat of the general outcry against Israel, the OAU's decision must have been beclouded by emotion, and anger at the total military defeat of Egypt and her Arab collaborators. Otherwise, clear logic would have shown to the OAU leaders that the

> organization was never meant to be a military alliance in which member states undertake to aid member in military conflict with a non-member state or even boycott trade relations with such belligerent country.

The policy of neutrality adopted by Balewa administration and Gowon's regime were to contain the varying sentiments in the country. This is because the Northern Nigeria easily identifies with their Muslim brothers of North Africa than southern Christians who are derogatorily regarded as infidels. Balewa saw the tension generated by the loan saga immediately after independence and probably knew that the newly independent country needed to be nurtured and opted for neutrality. Ironsi after the coup that led to his accession to power, sent Northern leaders to Middle East. This, it has been muted was part of his assuaging mechanisms of placating the Northern elements who were still aggrieved over the loss of their political and military leaders during the January military putsch of 1966. So also, General Gowon maintained neutrality over Israel-Middle East crisis until the Yom Kippur war on October 25, 1973 when Nigeria cut diplomatic ties with Israel (Neuberger 2009).

Thus, Neuberger (2009) argued that the consideration on the part of Nigeria, for cutting off diplomatic ties was her quest to identify with Egypt. Thus, this move by Gowon led regime has no national interest at the back of their minds. This is a period when Nigeria could have gained much from Israel in technological and technical assistance. Unfortunately, after Gowon's regime, subsequent administrations in Nigeria remained pro-Arab and maintained pro-Arab foreign policy in Israeli-Palestinian conflict. When Major General Shehu Musa Yar'Adua became second in command to Obasanjo after the demise of General Murtala Muhammed, he visited Saudi Arabia in 1979 and preposterously declared that "our friends are the Arabs, we shall always support them" (Omotere, 2011). This declaration lacks pragmatism as many African countries had already restored relations with Israel and Egypt in the same year signed the Camp David Accord with Israel. Thus, the non-normalization of relations with Israel even after Egypt restored diplomatic ties with her appears like crying more than the bereaved. Religious sentiments would appear to have beclouded Nigeria's better sense of judgment. It is against this backdrop that this paper attempts an examination of Nigeria's policies on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict alongside the factors that had influenced such policies

Statement of the Problem

In spite of the fact that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has continued to intrude adversely into the domestic politics in Nigeria, the country has opted to stand with the Arabs irrespective of the fact that Nigeria remains a multi-religious state therefore breaking the neutral posture it once held. The problem of this research is primarily what has informed Nigeria's foreign policy behavior on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict? And what are the political foundations as well as the implications of Nigeria's foreign policy on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict? Nigeria's decision to take a pro-Arab stance in spite of her earlier policy of maintaining neutrality in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has attracted both applause and condemnation altogether. But the dilemma as well as the implications of taking a clear stance on the conflict is huge, Nigeria will risk losing one powerful ally particularly if it is clearly for or against any of the states. America for instance, one of Israeli's staunchest allies had threatened to cut foreign support for nations that will go against its stance to recognize

Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. Nigeria did not abstain, she voted out rightly against the move anyway in spite of what may follow.

Most Nigerian leaders in the past have often expressed the desire of government to maintain good foreign relations with both parties involved in the Middle East conflict, but in most cases such leaders abandoned the neutrality stance midway and even went ahead to take decision that suggest Nigeria is backing the Arab world and therefore taking sides in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. For instance, Nigeria had consistently in the past voted at the United Nations against the state of Israel and went ahead and became a member of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC). The only policy shift was by way of Nigeria abstaining from voting to support either Israel or the Palestinian state in a resolution that would have seen the Palestinian state gain full statehood beside Israel, but even Nigeria's abstention had its limited implications because of the timing.

However, Nigeria resumed her pro- Arab voting pattern on the UN decision to maintain the status quo and set aside President Trumps resolution to unilaterally recognize Jerusalem as the Capital of Israel and also the event of Buhari's promise to join Nigeria's military with the Saudi-led military coalition of Sunni Muslim countries (ISMAT). These were some of the events that underscored Nigeria's foreign policy on Israeli-Palestinian conflict in recent times.

An in-depth interrogation is needed to understand what has informed the recent pro-Arab Nigeria's foreign policy direction, as well as the economic and political implications of maintaining such a stance shifting from neutrality in spite of the consequences that such a stance may hold. This study is therefore directed at making a contemporary assessment of Nigeria's foreign policy choices on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Theoretical Framework

Snyder's Comprehensive (Internal External Settings) Model

Snyder developed in 1954, what is perhaps the first published explicit theoretical model on foreign policy decision-making. As James N. Roseanu, who was Snyder's student at the time described it, Snyder's was the first extended and systematic attempt to conceptualize the role of decision-making in the formulation of foreign policy and in the process of international politics. Snyder and his colleagues- Bruck and Burton Sapin were concerned with how to find ways of grasping the complex determinants of state behaviors. They argued that this can be done by developing a comprehensive model encompassing all the sets of variables that could determine the behavior of all states, and therefore, of any state (Asobie, 1990).

Snyder and his colleagues built their model on the central concept of decision-making process. The argument here is that to understand international politics that is the actions, reactions and interactions among political entities called national states; there is a need to embark on process analysis. Analysis of process involves, above all, explanation of decision-making process because it is decision that leads to policy, produce conflicts and foster co-operation. To throw light on any sequence of international political actions and reactions, therefore, the makers of the decisions leading to actions and reactions must be identified, and more importantly, an evaluation must be made of the intellectual and interactive processes by

which the decision were reached (Asobie, 1990). This applies to Nigeria's decision makers in the foreign policy realm as their actions resulted in whatever position the country adopted the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Conceptual Analysis of Conflict and Conflict Resolution

Conflict is a universal feature of human society. It takes its origins in economic differentiation, social change, cultural formation, psychological development and political organization – all of which are inherently conflictual and becomes overt through the formation of conflict parties, which come to have, or are perceived to have, mutually incompatible goals.

Conflict is as old as mankind. It is a salient feature of the human society. Men must fight even if they do not possess arms or when tools of violence are not within reach; and as Morgenthau (1948) posits, when there are no arms to fight, men will fight even with their bare fists. From birth, a baby begins the journey of conflict by crying, which is a flash of conflict. As he grows up, he bites with his teeth or scratches with the nails on his tiny fingers when he is upset. This presupposes those men will continue to fight as long as they have emotions that have the potential to love or hate; to be happy or sad; to be pleased or angry. So long as man has other men around him, there will be issues of disagreement, because interest differs and interests do clash, which may lead to disagreement or confrontation. A community or society of men thus creates room for explosive attitudes and relations.

Viewed from an extreme and religious perspective, conflict represents one of the two natures of man: 'evil'. Cooperation, its opposite, embodies the second, which is the 'good' nature of man (St. Augustine, 1950). Conflict thus manifests in disagreement, anger, quarrel, hatred, destruction, killing, or war. Any untoward attitude capable of charging up the political or social environment is likely to culminate in conflict. Greed, covetousness, self-centeredness, discontent, envy, arrogance, rudeness, impunity, among other acts, are capable of producing a breakdown of human relations. In a way, these vices are innate attributes of the 'conflict nature' of man.

In politics, conflict is more explicitly defined. Conflict is said to exist when two or more groups engage in a struggle over values and claims to status, power and resources in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralize, injure or eliminate the rivals (Jeong, 2000). Conflict is a demonstration of cross-purposes of distinct or similar political groups which often ends in political violence, and political violence, when contextualized in the Weberian sense, according to Anifowose, in his *Violence and Politics in Nigeria* (1982), is an acceptable weapon to ventilate anger.

An important point to note from the outset is how early theorists in the field such as Morton Deutsch (1973) distinguished between destructive and constructive conflict, suggesting that the former was to be avoided but the latter was a necessary and valuable aspect of human creativity. Conflicts have been variously defined in relation to 'fights, games and debates' (Rapoport, 1960).

This remains controversial; for example, some have used 'conflict' to refer both to 'consensual' conflicts over interests (disputants want the same thing) and to 'dissensual'

conflicts over values (disputants do not want the same thing) (Aubert, 1963). Others, however, have called the former 'disputes' that require settlement and have reserved the term 'conflict' for deeper struggles over unsatisfied human needs that require resolution (Burton, 1990).

Johan Galtung (1969) sees conflict as a dynamic process in which structure, attitudes and behavior are constantly changing and influencing one another. As the dynamic develops, it becomes a manifest conflict formation, as parties' interests clash or the relationship, they are in becomes oppressive. Parties then organize around this structure to pursue their interests. They develop hostile attitudes and conflictual behavior; and so, in Galtung's view, the conflict formation starts to grow and intensify. As it does so, it may widen, drawing in other parties, deepen and spread, generating secondary conflicts within the main parties or among outsiders who get sucked in. This often considerably complicates the task of addressing the original, core conflict.

Eventually, however, resolving the conflict must involve a set of dynamic changes that mean de- escalation of conflict behavior, a change in attitudes, and a transformation of the relationships or clashing interests that are at the core of the conflict structure. John (2003), downgrades conflict resolution in comparison with conflict transformation on the grounds that it is content- centered rather than relationship- centered, aims at immediate agreement rather than long- term process, and is committed only to de- escalation rather than also including escalation to pursue constructive change.

This is something of a caricature of the field and is reminiscent of the way in which in an earlier period John Burton caricatured 'dispute settlement' in comparison with the deeper process of 'conflict resolution', which he defined in much the same way as Lederach and others now define conflict transformation. Michael (2006) in his curves of conflict, conflict resolution is an equivalent term for post-conflict peace building and is associated with de-escalation from crisis to unstable peace and stable peace, involves assisting in the termination of conflicts by finding solutions to them. In this study therefore, we view "conflict" to mean the widest set of circumstances in which conflict parties perceive that they have mutually incompatible goals and conflict resolution will involve resolving the disagreements.

Concept of Foreign Policy

It is important to have conceptual clarity on the meaning of foreign policy which is a major element in international interactions all over the world with various interpretations and meaning. Pedelford and Lincoln (1962) defined foreign policy as the element in the flow process through which a state translates its objectives and interests into concrete courses of action geared towards the achievement of these objectives and safeguarding (or serving) its interest. This definition hit the central point for foreign policies of nations. Millar (1969) defines foreign policy as the sum of all policies that have effect on a national government's relations with other national governments. Miller's view runs the risk of implying foreign policy as having no boundary at all with domestic policy even though we know that there is no water-tight separation between foreign policy and domestic policy. Pedelford and Lincoln (1962) held that foreign policy consists of decisions and actions which involve, to some extent, relations between one state and others (Frankel, 1967). Simply put, foreign policy is

about national objectives to be achieved and the means for achieving them. It is designed to promote, protect and defend a country's national interest within the international system.

Pragmatism: History and Advent of Nigeria's Policy on Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

The foreign policy of any nation evolves and develop over-time and through different administrations or regimes. The development of Nigeria's foreign policy and interface with the Israel and Arab states dates back to the colonial period (September 30, 1960) but for the purpose of this study we shall focus on developments between 1999, to 2018. The policy of Nigeria just like any other African country evolved and developed gradually from independence to post-independence periods. From independence the foreign policy behavior of Nigeria has shown a gradual movement from what used to be a complete neutral stance (policy of Neutrality) to a more pragmatic foreign policy informed by domestic and external factors having strong connections with the Israeli - Palestinian conflict. But by and large important to the country's foreign policy is freedom and equality for peoples and nations.

Nigerian Government Pronouncements and Actions Before 1999

Starting from the first government of independent and sovereign Nigeria, the official pronouncements and actions of government have manifested the neutral nature of Nigeria's policy in the Middle East. Fawole (2012) in his review of the Balewa Administration observed that during the Balewa regime (1960-1966), even though the North and South were polarized in opposition to and support for Israel respectively, the central government allowed Israel to establish a diplomatic office in Lagos. Nigeria, however, had no diplomatic mission in Tel Aviv (Israel). The presence of Israeli mission in Lagos was partly to please the NCNC Coalition partner and Southern part of the country that was essentially Christian. Moreover, Eastern and Western Regional governments were allowed to have commercial and technical links with Israel. The North, however, had nothing to do with Israel, preferring to interact with Arab states. The literature argued further that the Balewa government sent the Federal Minister of Finance, Chief Festus Okotie-Eboh, to Israel in 1960 during which visit, he negotiated for Israeli support in certain development programs, and succeeded in negotiating a loan facility for Nigeria. The loan was rejected by the North, but the central government insisted on its constitutional authority to borrow money from abroad for the development of Nigeria. The Federal or Central government could not reject foreign aid meant for the country's development and wellbeing on the ground of Northern opposition that was in sympathy with Arab cause.

Akinyemi and Otubanjo (1989) noted that when the Ironsi government came into being following the overthrow of the Balewa government on January 15, 1966. Ironsi was Igbo from the Christian East (South). Thus, the North and Arab world were apprehensive over the direction of Ironsi's Middle East policy. To allay their fears, Ironsi's government sent a large delegation of prominent Northern Muslim leaders to the capitals of Arab nations. Regrettably, there was no time for the Ironsi government to manifest independent posture on the Middle East situation as it was overthrown in a countercoup within six months on July 29, 1966.

The Arab nations supported the Federal Government throughout the civil war in the task of maintaining the territorial integrity of Nigeria, while Israel supported Biafra (the Eastern region). This singular incidence made Nigeria to begin to review her foreign policy

from what used to be completely neutral to a more pragmatic foreign policy. In 1971, General Gowon was a member of an OAU mission of 4 African Heads of State that visited Egypt and Israel. Their objective was to see how best the Organization of African Unity could contribute in any small measure to the efforts of the United Nations and others towards a just and peaceful resolution or at any rate the reduction of the tension of the explosive situation since one of its member nations was involved in the Middle East conflict. This visit was highly valued by Egypt and especially Israel which was beginning to feel isolated psychologically by Africa whose nations were seriously criticizing the Jewish state (Fawole 2012).

From Neutrality to Pragmatism: The Politics of Change in Nigeria's Policy on the Israeli – Palestinian Conflict after 1999

Perhaps the best point to begin is the advent of the Nigerian Civil War where the Arab nations supported the Federal Government in the task of maintaining the territorial integrity of Nigeria, while Israel supported Biafra (the Eastern region). This singular incidence made Nigeria to begin to review her foreign policy from what used to be completely neutral to a more pragmatic foreign policy in which Nigeria opted to isolate Israel and maintained warm relations with the Arabs. The Obasanjo Presidency in 1999 gave Nigeria another diplomatic lifeline with Israel by reawakening friendship with the state of Israel. Nevertheless, the Israeli - Palestinian conflict has continued to intrude adversely into the domestic politics of Nigeria even more than any other country in the world. Not only that, Nigerian leaders have sometimes abandoned the neutrality stance and even went ahead to take decision that appear as if they are taking sides in the Israeli - Palestinian conflict. For instance, Nigeria has consistently in the past voted at the United Nations against the state of Israel (Oshodi 2011).
During the Yar'adua Administration there was no major government pronouncement and activities that bordered on the Israeli - Palestinian conflict beside the continuous pilgrimage missions to both Mecca and Jerusalem with Nigeria maintaining her trade and diplomatic relations with both Arab states and the state of Israel (Oshodi 2011).

In contemporary times, Nigeria had consistently voted in favor of the Palestinian state, with the only exception being the Jonathan led administration in which Nigeria had to abstain from voting on 20th October, 2011. However, for some Nigerians, Jonathan's late decision not to vote was a tactical move to return to its neutrality posture, for some it was in favor of Israel because it was the last expected vote that will seal the fate of the Palestinian statehood at least for a long while. It was the original sin for them particularly that Nigeria had always voted in favor of Palestine and the Arabs. But in reality, Nigeria wasn't ready to lose Israel's bilateral security support, particularly in a time Israel was offering Nigeria an alternative to the US arms in dealing with domestic insurgency.

Discussion of Findings

The data collected revealed that Nigeria's foreign policy on Israeli-Palestinian conflict have not been on neutrality as some citizens believed, instead it has been partisan. Hence, successive Nigerian government has supported Israel or Palestine depending on the perception of the personality in government. Nigeria's voting pattern at the United Nations also tows the line of partisanship. The basis of partisanship is that Nigeria has vast Muslim and Christian population, belongs to OPEC (dominated by Arabs), and upholds the United Nations ideals especially peaceful settlement of disputes, respect for human rights, and

maintenance of international peace and security. Nigeria also sends Christian pilgrims to Israel annually.

It should be noted that majority of our respondents (39.50%) preferred to describe Nigeria's foreign policy on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as being that of partisanship than neutrality, a development supported by oral interview which also revealed the same. The establishment of Nigeria Israeli - Palestinian diplomatic links dates back to the early 1960s. Ever since then, scholars of foreign policy have produced research works on the bilateral relationship that exist between Nigeria and the Middle East. However, these relations were not as robust as those with other developed countries such as the United States of America.
The Review of related materials on Nigeria Israeli - Palestinian relations shows that there have been fluctuations in their relations particularly the relations with Israel. From 1966, beginning with the military coup d'états, Nigeria entered a phase of unstable peace relations with Israel. The relations equally suffered a great set back because of the civil war that bedeviled the nation for about 30 months which exposed in great measure the Israeli support for the defunct Republic of Biafra. Thus, between 1966 and 1972, Nigeria-Israeli relations suffered a great deal (Omotore, 2011).

Conclusion

Nigeria has much to gain than to lose in the amicable resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. If the conflict persists, the entire Middle East sub-region will continue to witness political instability, more violence, suicide bombings, terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism which may have a destabilizing effect on Nigeria. Resolution of the conflict, on the other hand, will lead to improved bilateral, political, economic, and cultural relations. It will also boost economic/trade relations and tourism between Nigeria and the Middle Eastern countries especially Israel, Syria, Jordan, Egypt, and Saudi-Arabia. Instead of war, the region could become an oasis of economic prosperity.

However, without national consensus policy and domestic support, it may be difficult for Nigeria to have any meaningful impact on the Palestinian- Israeli conflict. The Al-Qaeda presence in Nigeria had, until their infiltration in the Niger Delta in October 2004, been limited to the extreme Northern parts of Nigeria. Both the Northern parts of Nigeria and the oil-producing areas of the Niger Delta are now the legitimate targets of the Al-Qaeda men in their war against the Western powers led by the United States of America. It is thus in the interest of Nigeria to pilot itself into a position of being an active player in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict resolution. This can be achieved through mobilizing internal support for the resolution of the conflict, hosting peace conferences between both countries with the purpose of achieving justice for Israel and Palestine by recognizing Israel, and advocating for an independent and secure homeland for the Palestinians.

Recommendations

The Nigeria political leaders and analysts should focus on security as an end to violence, even though that is a worthy objective. The significant reason must be to find a better way for peaceful co-existence that will be acceptable to the majority on both parties. There should be a law to regulate the partisanship of Nigerian leaders on Israeli-Palestine conflict and the issue of religion should be properly addressed by the Nigerian policy makers.

The Nigerian government should encourage both sides to realize that their conflict will not be resolved by violence nor the use of force (military solution) but by negotiated settlement (political / diplomatic solution). The Israeli's and Palestinians both have human needs to be met, the most apparent being security and stability, as well as identity and recognition. The government of the parties involved in the conflict can reach a peace agreement through negotiations.

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