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MINDING THE GAP: OBASANJO AND RE-IMAGING OF NIGERIA'S FOREIGN POLICY PRACTICE

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ABSTRACT
The study examined the impact of Obasanjo's foreign Policy and Nigeria's Image in the International System. The study is essentially qualitative in approach, secondary data and documentary sources were the major source of data collection. This study simultaneously relies on desk review. The study indicated that despite the recovery of looted funds, debt cancellation and the promotion of foreign direct investment; there was neglect of the pursuit of vital national interests which include protection of territorial boundary and the lives of Nigerians. The study found that despite the great success recorded in the country's foreign policy in the fourth republic, there are challenges that often drag the country into the mud. Such as; corruption, ceding of Bakassi and steps to improve foreign direct investment. The study concluded that the introduction of democratic rule in Nigeria was a critical success factor, which made the world very eager to welcome the country back into fold.

Introduction

The success of any interstates relations, world politics, and foreign policy practice, is predicated on professional diplomacy achieved through the art and scale of negotiations and dialogue. This is because numerous actors are involved, which makes the conduct of international relations and world politics a rather complex affair and enterprise. States engage in bilateral and multilateral relations with one another with a view to achieving socio-economic and political objectives.

However, a country's standing in the international system is highly dependent on its image perception being positive or negative. A good image results in respect, influence and prestige while a bad or negative perception of a country's image implies that such a country lacks respect, influence and prestige in the international system (Chidozie, 2014). Such standing of a country is dependent on some factors such as country, trade, investment, leadership/policy support, financial aid and development assistance cooperation. (Chidozie, 2014) could affect the achievement of its foreign policy objectives.

Thus, during most of its years as a democratic state, Nigeria enjoyed a positive image with members of the international community as an independent country, which has been a fundamental aspect of the country's foreign policy among other determinants that dictate the level of influence and relevance of a nation in international politics (Adeniyi, 2012).

Nigeria considered positive image building to be an integral part of global politics and devoted her time and resources as well as committing huge financial support to decolonization process in Africa through liberalization struggle movements and dismantling of apartheid regime in South Africa, with commendation (Kolawole, 2005). Above all, the peace keeping operations Nigeria embarked upon attested to her profile and made her a major force in promoting conflict resolution and security around the world.
The promotion of friendly relations in Nigeria's foreign policy was mapped out initially during the late Alhaji (Sir) Abubakar Tafawa Balewa regime the first Prime Minister after independence. This process continued with the subsequent regimes both authoritarian and

democratic rulers with little or no changes. Though most of this period vis-a-vis the supply Nigeria rendered to African states and its operation in Africa, the country enjoyed a very good standing in the international system and among the comity of Nations.

However, General Sani Abacha military regime was a clear departure from its predecessors, largely due to Nigeria's bad image standing especially from the perspective of Nigeria's western friends including the USA and European allies, both foreign and domestic policies became problems such that Nigeria was unable to consolidate the gain of her positive image. This led to making Nigeria a Pariah state and isolated by its erstwhile U.S. and western friends.

Following the death of General Abacha in June 8th 1998, and the subsequent emergence of General Abdulsalam Abubakar, Nigeria's image was full of crisis. Internally there was crisis of governance and externally Nigeria was perceived as a pariah state and was treated with suspicions in international system. Thus, when Obasanjo assumed power, the new president was faced with addressing this challenge as a condition for effective democratic governance and international engagement in order to revitalize the country's image vis-a-vis improve its economic growth development and douse the tensions among various activist and ethnic religious groups. This study investigates the implications of Nigeria's image crisis and explain foreign policy strategies adopted by President Obasanjo in quickly restoring the country's bad image, and how such strategies not only improve Nigeria's political standing among the comity of Nations but also helped Nigeria to strategically improve its bilateral and multilateral relations with other actors in the international system.

METHODOLOGY

This study is purely qualitative and therefore, relies heavily on desk review of relevant data drawn from books, journals and news -papers. The format of analysis is largely qualitative and accordingly the thematic process which involve sorting and cording of the data. And content analysis as a form of qualitative data analysis was also used.

The Concept of Foreign Policy

Foreign policy, as a concept, are general objectives that guide the activities and relationships of one state in its interactions with other state. The development of foreign policy is influenced by domestic considerations, the policies or behaviour of other states or plans to advance specific geopolitical designs. (Encyclopedia Britanica 2025). Though different scholars have defined it from different points of view, each of these definitions could be said to have stemmed from, and influenced by, peculiar ideological strands. The concept of foreign policy is of utmost interest and importance to every nation, according Dunmoye, Njoku & Aluko (2007:12), 'it connotes formal decisions/positions of sovereign states towards their counterparts, defined in terms of political, economic, cultural/social and strategic realms of inter-sovereign relationships, bilaterally and or multi-literally.' Foreign policy essentially deals with the relations between sovereign actors in international system. Foreign policy objective therefore can be understood as a range of intended actions as well as set of strategies adopted by a sovereign -states with the purpose of influencing the behaviour of other sovereign actors within the international system.

The Concept of Nigerian Foreign Policy

Having conceptualized foreign policy, it will be much easier for us to explain what constitutes Nigerian foreign policy. Nigeria's foreign policy can be defined as an effort made by Nigerian government or her policy makers to attain level of international rapport that would favour the national ideology. Simply put, it is the policy that decides the Nigerian stands on inter-dependence of nations, that is Nigerian stand on certain international issues,

such issues that affect the country's image (Omale, 2015).

Ibezim (1996), explains that the formulation of Nigeria's foreign policy is done by the present minister and the ministry for foreign affairs, Nigerian Diplomats, experts from the universities, the business world and the armed forces. Usually, these formulators of foreign policy are guided by the history of her colonialism and, geographical location. Within Africa.

However, Nigeria's foreign policy direction has been very clear for instance, Africa for a long time has been the centre piece for Nigeria's foreign policy initiatives. This is inspired by the need to enshrine the tenet, of justice, equity political emancipation of the oppressed and the true independence of African states (Saliu, 2006). To be sure, it is generally asserted that, there have been continuity in the substance content or forces, meaning the principal objectives of Nigeria's foreign policy since independence remains unchanged. (Akinyemi, 1989; Akindele, 1990; Akinboye, 1993; (Gambari 1986; Akinboye, 2013). But whatever differences there has been, is by and large, a matter of style, emphasis, personality, institutional reform and historical circumstances within and the outside Nigeria.

Objectives of **Nigeria's Foreign Policy**

Accordingly, Ogwu (2006:6) argues that the ultimate objectives of any foreign policy are to achieve short-range or long-range goals that ensure the superiority of one sovereign national actor over another. That is, foreign policy could be perceived as the pursuit of national interests. The milieu within which foreign policy is contrived and executed could be dichotomized into three main realms; the psychological, the domestic and the external. The psychological realm denotes the mental process of the decision maker(s) and all the factors that shape the conception of the policy. The domestic realm on the other hand is beyond the decision maker(s), but within the territorial bounds of the state. The external realm deals with the international system into which the policy is directed and this could be significantly unpredictable. The interface of the trio therefore is essential in the formulation of foreign policy.

The Principal objective of Nigeria's foreign policy is as provided for in Section 19 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic and others that predated it. These objectives are as follows:

(a) Promotion and protection of the national interest;
(b) Promotion of African integration and support for African unity;
(c) Promotion of international co-operation for the consolidation of universal peace and mutual respect among all nations and elimination of discrimination in all its manifestations;
(d) Respect for international law and treaty obligations as well as the seeking of settlement of international disputes by negotiation, mediation, conciliation, arbitration and adjudication; and
(e) Promotion of a just world economic order (Anthony, 2017; FGN, 1999).

These objectives are to protect the country's national interests in its interaction with outside world and relationship with specific countries in the international system. Thus, Olusanya & Akindele (1986:2)

The Concept National Interest

The concept of national interest is a very complex one. Hence, there is no generally accepted definition of the concept. Scholars however, have put forward various definitions of the concept based on their understandings. They have also argued on how to determine national interest or who actually determines national interest. Decision must constantly be made about which goals to emphasize and which to neglect. The definition given to the national interest is a major factor affecting which value will be favored. This is because not all foreign policies and the values to protect are compatible with a given definition of national interest.

National interest is an elusive term which has been described in various ways. Kaplan (1967) defined it as the interest which a national actor has in implementing a defined system terms of action. Morgenthau (1976), conceived it, as simple as politics among nations. To Jones (1970), National interest is, a term use in politics debate within a country, to signal the case that the term of policy suggested will bring benefits not merely to its proponent but also to its opponent.

The Concept of Image

National image both at home and abroad, is an ethical issue. It may appear intangible but the benefit and advantage flowing from a good image are inestimably unquantifiable. The perception of a country by members of the international system, how a country, pursue its relations with others and particularly the behavior of its citizens at home and abroad combined to determine the country's image (Zimako, 2009). Thus, image making is an essential feature of a nation's foreign policy.

Holsti (1985), defined image as an individual's perception of an object, fact or condition in terms of badness or goodness as well as the meaning ascribed to or deduced there from, if we explore from that, we can conclude that image building must necessary constitute a fundamental element of a nation’s foreign policy suggesting that the way a country is perceived especially in the 21st century, is a function of her national image (Ademiji, 2012).

Also, country's image is defined as the total of all descriptive inferential and information belief one had about a particular country. After a perception process, image of a person or a particular country in the memory of others are shaped. Personal judgments on many things like subject’s individual behavior towards others and object etc. became the main component of perception process on culture, environment, political structure, history and other factors etc. (Afri.org/image). A positive image (i.e. good behavior, respect of sovereignty, free from all social vices by its citizen, promotion of good governance and maintaining friendly relations with other countries) is important to all countries (Tunca, 2010).

Accordingly, image building forms an essential element in the strategy for foreign policy formulation and implementation in any country, when well-focused, foreign policy initiative help create and reinforce favorable image of a country to the external world.

Image and its Role in International Relations

Folarin (2010), argued that role theory as one of the most compelling instruments bridging individual behavior and social structure. According to him, role which is in part dictated by social structure and in part by social interactions, guides the behavior of the group or individual. He concluded that group in turn, influences the norms and expectations. And behaviors associated with roles.

In the 21st century of globalizing world, image can help to lift up a nation, and this is exactly why many nations are very protective of their image." Image" is also used as a tool of international relations in promoting a country's national interest as a whole. Image is inevitably subjected to where the realities exist. In diplomatic functions or international relations of a country, the desired ways in which the nation state is accepted by other members of the international community is reflected though the good image projected by the country. The image of a nation might as well be the destiny of a nation.

Origin and Natureof Nigeria’s Image Crisis at International Arena

Nigeria’s image crisis is rooted in her history, nature of her independence, character of her federalism and complexities of her ethnic composition (Agbodike, 1998; Ayoade, 1998; Tamuno, 1998). In short, it is rooted in the “national question” as a recurring and nagging

issue in her national discourse (Alapiki, 2005; Nnadozie, 2005; Olufemi, *et al,* 2015). An understanding of Nigeria's national question is an understanding of her image crisis. Onuoha (2005) captures the interpenetration of the concept of national question and foreign policy enterprise most succinctly thus:

Essentially, the national question involves not only the territorial integrity of Nigeria, power sharing and management of Nigeria's resources in terms of access, control and distribution, but also the issues of minority interests, ethnicity, citizenship, revenue allocation, the creation of states as well as religious, linguistic, cultural and educational policies. It is about resolving the antagonistic contradictions between the majority and minority ethnic groups, combating tribalism, racialism and any form of ethnic chauvinism.... the central question is, to what extent does the issues of national question influence external relations between one country and another? (Onuoha, 2005:406-407).

The point remains that a critical view of the above array of contradictions contained in the national question discourse portray the stark reality about the origin, nature and indeed dynamic character of Nigeria's image crisis. It should also be noted that domestic factors are the determinants of foreign policy of any given country. Hence, it could be safely posited that the origin of Nigeria's image crisis is the violent electoral politics in the First Republic that culminated in the first military coup of January 15, 1966 (Ademoyega, 1981; Akinsanya, 2005). Indeed, this was followed by a counter coup on July 29, 1966 culminating in series of political drama that ultimately resulted in the civil war of 1967 (Achebe, 2012).

Theoretical Frameworks

This study adopts Concentric Circles Theory as a framework of analysis. The major proponent of this theory is Ernest Burgess into the field of foreign policy analysis. The analysts were Gambari (1980), Adeniji (2003) and Akinboye (1993). The major idea underpinning the Concentric Circles Theory was to provide effective defense necessities within the West Africa's Sub region. According to the theory, the first circle represents Nigeria's own security, independence and prosperity and is centered on its immediate neighbor-states that are contiguous, which could constitute a basis for the defense of West Africa. At this level, the theory advocates a foreign policy of re- assessment, self-appraisal and defense of Nigeria's strategic interest before West Africa and then the continent. The second circle takes into consideration the strategic interest of the states in the West African sub region or Nigerian involvement on continental African neighbors. The third circle involves foreign policy involvement on continental Africa issues of peace, development and democratization; and the fourth circle involves Nigeria's relations with organizations, institutions and state outside Africa (Gambari, 1989).

This study is premised on the first circles to evaluate Nigeria's foreign policy and engagements under the civilian administration of President Obasanjo. Nigeria's role expectations at different ''concentric circles" of her foreign policy have generated multiple role perceptions, thus leading to unintended role conflicts. The theory has been criticized for oversimplification and neglecting historical and cultural context of the image crisis in Nigeria.

Historical Context of Nigeria's Foreign Policy and Her Image in the International System

Since independence in I960, Nigeria external relations has been focusing on Africa as a regional power and by the attachment to several fundamental principles: African unity and independence; capability to exercise hegemonic influence in the region: peaceful settlement of disputes; non alignment and non- intentional interference in the internal affairs of other

nations; and regional economic co-operation and development (Akindele, 2013).

In carrying out these principles, Nigeria participates in the Organization of African Unity (QAU) now African Union (AU), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Non-Aligned Movement, the Commonwealth of Nations and the United Nations Organizations (Aluko, 1981; Akinyemi 1989). Thus, generally, Nigeria's foreign policy trends (the development and formulation) since 1960, has consistently been guided by the same principles and objectives. Although while the main thrust of the country's foreign policy, is the promotion of her national interest and the policy of afro- centricity, remained permanent, the strategy and emphasis for such protection by successive regimes varied from one to another. While the substance of Nigeria's foreign policy remained largely the same, from regime to regime however, witnessed various adjustments and modifications depending on the orientations of the political leaderships. In addition, the prevailing domestic (political, economic and socio-cultural realities) and international environments have been major determinants in Nigeria's foreign policy trends over the years. The development (formulation and execution) of Nigeria's foreign policy, has been specifically under the past eras or regimes, namely; the Balewa Era 1960 - 1966; the Ironsi Era - 1966; the Gowon Era 1966 - 1975; the Murtala/Obasanjo Era - 1975 - 1979; the Shagari Era - 1979 - 1983; the Buhari Era 1983 - 1985; the Babangida Era - 1985 -1993; the Shonekan/Abacha Era- 1993 - 1998; the Abubakar Era 1998 - 1999; Obasanjo (civilian) Era 1999 - 2007.Which era is the main focus of these study.

OBASANJO ADMINISTRATION AND RE-IMAGING OF NIGERIA PRACTICE

Consolidation of democracy in Nigeria impacted on re-imaging Nigeria during Obasanjo's era. Repositioning Nigeria as a champion and defender of democratic values flow from the belief and conviction that desirable political stability in Nigeria as well as in any other country, could best be actualized and enhanced only under a regime of democratic governance and culture, demanded and venerated by the international community (Rafiu, 2000).

Arguably, to drive home the anachronism of dictatorial military rule in the new millennium and to underscore the close connection between peace and development on the one hand and democratic (good) governance on the other, president Obasanjo wasted no time in condemning the military coup in Pakistan and Cote d'Ivoire and in joining other to endorse and float the doctrine that governments that have come to power through the barrel of the gun must not only be kept at a distance but must also be asked to show why they should be allowed to continue to participate as members of international organizations to which they belong, given the fact that democracy is the name of the governance- game that nation - states play then.

Obasanjo Economic Diplomacy

The evidence of Nigeria's return to the international arena and recognition was also reflected in the Obasanjo administrations' pursuit of economic diplomacy. These include the pursuit of the recovery of funds looted and stashed abroad by the late General Sani Abacha and others, campaign for debt forgiveness, as well as the attraction of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) into the country.

Debt Relief

Nigeria's external debt servicing when Obasanjo come to power stood at 28.54 Billion dollars as at Sep. 30 1999. (Country Report on Economic Policy and Trade Practices1999). Obasanjo pointed out that external debt burden and large unsustainable debt service obligations of African countries (especially Nigeria) constituted a major impediment to their quest for social

and economic development. The concerted efforts of Obasanjo, the ministry of finance, national assembly, Debt Management Office, the Economic Management Team, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and other stakeholders, and the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEED) Started yielding results as the creditors and multilateral financial institutions such as; Paris Club and IMF began to position and consider Nigeria for debt relief. His campaign for debt relief started shortly after he was inaugurated as president in 1999. And in 2005, the G8 finance ministers reached an agreement to relief Nigeria of the debt she owed the Paris Club (Enweremadu 2012).

Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)

Apart from image and confidence building abroad Nigeria also gained more foreign water supply that can encourage foreign investment.In terms of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), Nigeria is a small player in the globaleconomy. With GDP at $100 billion, the country accounted for 0.28 percent of world'sGDP in 2005 (Oshikoya, 2008). The GDP of South Africa is more than twice that ofNigeria, the economy of the latter ranks 49th in the world, up from 55th in 2000(Oshikoya, 2008). UNCTAD (2005) indicates that Nigeria's FDI inflows performanceranking improved from 82 in 1999-2001 to 44 in 2002-2004 - ahead of all its peers,including China, which ranked 45 (Oshikoya, 2008).

Anti-Corruption Campaign

Hence, Obasanjo's effort to recover the looted funds yielded positive results to some extent due to the support he got from both within and outside the country. Pham (2007: 34) posits that:

> During the Gulf crisis of the early 90s, about $12 billions of Nigeria' oil windfall went missing. In five years alone (1993-1998) General Abacha salted away as much as 5 billion dollars in Swiss, German, UK and American banks, among several other countries.

President Obasanjo civilian regime in continuation of the efforts of President Abdulsalami Abukakar administration reported recovery or freezing of some of the loot (as much as $2 billion as at year (2000) especially from and in Swiss banks, some directly from Nigerian crooks and the partners (Pham, 2007). Swiss officials said that about 120 accounts in Zurich and Geneva have been frozen. In early April (2000), Swiss officials charged a businessman for falsifying documents to open a bank account in Geneva for the Abacha family (Pham, 2007).

According to the (New York Times,2000), the unidentified businessman is Dharamvir of New Delhi, India. In mid-May, 2000, Obasanjo announced that his government has recovered $200 million public funds looted by former Nigerian dictator-Abacha and his associates. In July, Nigerian authorities announced that Swiss officials have transferred $64.36 million of the looted money to the Central Bank of Nigeria (Enweremadu, 2012).

In 2005, Nigeria recovered $500 million from Switzerland. According to Okonjo- Iweala, "Switzerland has actually been quite good. They returned $500 million. But there is still money lying in other parts of Europe". Enweremadu (2012) posits that by the time Obasanjo left office in May 2007, he had secured the recovery of approximately 2 billion USD in assets and triggered some vital international initiatives against money laundering. All these, success is achieved through the establishment of anti-corruptions agency which includes, EFCC and ICPC and also the enactment of laws that allow for the anti -corruption crusade in the country.

The Judgmentof International Court of Justice (ICJ) on Bakassi in 2002

These, controversial decision was taken by President Obasanjo to cede Bakassi to Cameroon in compliance with the ICJ verdict. Data drawn from oral interviews and other documentary sources indicates that most Nigerians see Obasanjo's decision with regards to the ceding of Bakassi as hasty. The action by President Obasanjo seemed to be part of the opportunity cost for Obasanjo's quest for international statesmanship and acceptance. There was no proper consideration of the pain and agony of the inhabitants. The issue of the Bakassi was centered on oil and its resources and not on the people. This is part of the poor citizen diplomacy of the Obasanjo administration. Annoyingly Obasanjo and other African leaders allow the West to exact undue influence that is almost always disadvantageous to their people. Furthermore, some African states also inflict damage on Nigeria's image, citizens of other countries commit certain atrocities and claim the identity of Nigerians and unjustifiably attacking Nigerians travelling to other countries despite the effort of the country in ensuring independence and peace across the region.

Conclusion

Nigeria was described as a pariah state due to idiosyncrasy, personality trait, and the mode of operation of the then military junta headed by late General Sani Abacha. However, the advent of democratic government that ushered in President Obasanjo in 1999 couple with the various reforms the government embarked upon domestically and internationally such as NEEDs, NEPAD, and shuttle diplomacy actually brought out Nigeria out of the messy situation that late General Sani Abacha led the country into. The alternative strategy of negotiation process adopted by the regime has, to a greater extent shaped the Nigerian foreign policy and regained Nigeria's image within the comity of Nations.

In addition, there is no doubt that Obasanjo succeeded in re-lunching Nigeria into the orbit of international politics, from her pariah status of the past Authoritarians regime. Probably his personal clout, contact and commitment helped a lot in this regard. However, it must be pointed out that the introduction of democratic rule in Nigeria was a critical success factor, which made the world very eager to welcome the country back into fold, in order to perform her natural role as a leader in the West African sub-region and indeed Africa.

Recommendations

On the part of citizens, patriotism should be the watch word. Anything capable of tarnishing the image of Nigeria should be avoided. Bribery and the diverse criminal acts that Nigeria is now' known for cannot take the country to the level that advanced nations have attained. Building an enviable foreign policy in Nigeria requires the concerted effort of both the leaders and the followers. But the leaders should always be aware that to whom much is given much is required, there is need for every leader to keep the country domestic sectors in good shape before inviting for foreign investors. For example, Obasanjo was busy encouraging countries of the world to come and invest in Nigeria without considering the need for Nigerian government to heavily invest both within and outside the country. It would probably have been more effective as a development strategy than overwhelming reliance on seeking debt relief, important as that task was. Hence, there is need for the leadership of Nigeria to use both human and material resources for the pursuit of national priorities in a way that could enhance development in all sectors of national life.

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