

Global Politics and the Dynamics of Nigerian Foreign Policy: A Research Note on the Guiding Principles

Ambose Ihekwoaba EGWIM

Department of Political Science, Redeemer's University, Ede, Osun State, NIGERIA

Abstract

Various regimes since the 1999 return to democracy have tried to think or restructure Nigeria's foreign policy guiding principles, necessitating the fears that Africa may no longer be the centerpiece of the nation's foreign policy. This paper argues that Nigeria's foreign policy review is imperative mainly because of four interlocking realities: globalization, the end of the Cold War, the decolonization of the African continent, the end of white minority rule in South Africa and the weak security and economic realities at home. The changes in the Nigerian foreign policy guiding principles are not necessarily a departure from the country's traditional foreign-relations approach; however, while maintaining her Afrocentric strand, Nigerian foreign policy refocuses on Nigeria's interest first. The moves entail that while Africa remains the centrepiece of Nigeria's economic and foreign policy, things will be geared towards protecting a clear vision of national interests, unlike the former 'big brother' approach.

Keywords: African politics, citizen diplomacy, Cold War, economic diplomacy, globalization, Nigerian foreign policy, Non-alignment

Introduction

This paper argues that Nigeria's foreign policy review is imperative mainly because of four interlocking realities: globalization, the end of the Cold War, the decolonization of the African continent, the end of white minority rule in South Africa and the weak security and economic realities at home. While maintaining her Afrocentric strand, Nigerian foreign policy refocuses on Nigeria's interest first. Various regimes since the 1999 return to democracy (Olusegun Obasanjo (1999-2007), Umaru Musa (2007-2010), Goodluck Ebele Jonathan (2010-2015), Muhammadu Buhari (2015-2023) and Bola Ahmed Tinubu (2023 -) have tried to think or restructure Nigeria's foreign policy, necessitating the fears that 'Africa may no longer be the centrepiece of the nation's foreign policy' (Elumoye, 2023a), a pivotal shift from historical Afrocentrism to a more globally relevant foreign policy strategy (Ikpeama, 2023, Ukaogo et al., 2020:11).

Nigeria's historical adherence to Afrocentrism foreign policy since independence has been undergoing scrutiny in recent years due to evolving realities, shifts in Nigeria's status, and changing relations with the international community, causing a strategic shift toward intentional, dynamic, and value-driven foreign relations (Ikpeama, 2023). The new modifications may not necessarily be a departure from the country's traditional foreign-relations approach; however, the policy is being rebranded for many reasons. According to Adamu Ibrahim Lamuwa (in Ikpeama, 2023), despite the transmutation of Nigeria's foreign policy since independence in 1960 to the present, Africa has continued to be at the centre:

Nigeria's foreign policy from the 1960s to the present, ranging from Sir Tafawa Balewa's progressivism of the 1960s to the Murtala/Obasanjo's African dynamism of the 1970s, the Babangida's economic diplomacy of the 1980/early 1990s, the Obasanjo's investment-oriented foreign policy of 2000s, the Yar'Adua/Goodluck Jonathan's Citizens centred diplomacy of the

late and second half of 2000 and to the present Tinubu's Doctrine of 4-Ds Foreign Policy Concepts of Democracy, Development, Demography and Diaspora, despite these apparent transitions, the enduring fundamentals of Nigeria's foreign policy based on concentric circles, reacting to developments in immediate neighbours, the ECOWAS sub-region, Africa, and the global world (in Ikpeama, (2023).

However, the new moves entail that while Africa remains the centrepiece of Nigeria's economic and foreign policy, things will be geared towards protecting a clear vision of national interests, unlike the former 'big brother' approach in ever-changing international diplomacy.

The Dynamics of International Diplomacy

For decades after independence, Nigeria's approach to the world was shaped by its historical experience of colonialism. The anti-colonial posture of Nigeria was demonstrated in Africa, which was the centre of Nigerian foreign policy in the liberation of African territories from the shackles of colonialism. Under an Africa-centered foreign policy framework, Nigeria got involved deeply in the decolonization struggles in Angola, Mozambique, and Namibia, as well as anti-apartheid struggles in South Africa. Nigerian political thinkers and politicians perceived race and colonial imperialism as common problems requiring a coordinated strategy on a continent-wide scale. This determined the support for pan-African nationalism, which sought to guarantee moral, political, and material assistance to freedom fighters and the Organization of African Unity (O.A.U.) membership.

The move to establish a union of African countries (a politically united free Africa) dates back to days before the birth of the O.A.U, with two influential schools of thought: the Casablanca group commonly referred to as 'radicals' (wanted a politically united free Africa) and the Monrovia group widely referred to as 'functionalist/regionalists' (wanted a free Africa, which would be in a functional way united - a piecemeal approach to African political unity). Incidentally, Nigeria was a member of the Monrovia group that tinkered with the idea, favouring gradualism in the movement towards the African Union. 'The position of that group then was that African nations needed to appreciate and benefit from the rewards of the independence before getting into a larger union, that for Africa to be united, it must start from regionalism within West Africa, East Africa, Central Africa, North Africa and Southern Africa. The thinking was that with time, an African integrated union would come into being' (Egwim, 2018:49). To institute some form of economic cooperation and integration in the West African sub-region, Nigeria led the inauguration of ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) in Lagos on May 28, 1975 (Olatunde, 1980:571).

The emphasis of O.A.U. was on political rather than economic issues. Most African countries have gained political independence from the Western colonial powers (except Western Sahara under Moroccan internal colonialism). However, many challenges remain, including poverty, underdevelopment, disease and conflict in parts of the African continent, propelling a shift from O.A.U. to A.U. (Organization of African Unity to African Union) to emphasize support for African stability and development in the era of globalization. The new era also forces a slight nuance or shift in Nigeria's Afro-centric foreign policy approach. According to Olukosi (2004): "The end of colonial rule and apartheid was interpreted as marking the end of an important phase in the history of the continent and the beginning of a new one in which concerns about African unity and development would pre-dominate".

Globalization forced a change from O.A.U. to A.U. to meet the needs of external forces of neo-economic liberalization, build stable polity, minimize crisis, military rule, and implement other inherent policies emanating from Western institutional agents: I.M.F., W.T.O., World Bank - democratization and liberalization conditions for loans (Egwim, 2018):

By changing from O.A.U. to A.U., African leaders intend to build stable polity, minimize crisis and military rule, and provide a fertile ground for Western capital investment (*maintain peace and stability that will encourage foreign investments*) proffered by I.M.F. and World Bank as the only solution to Africa's underdevelopment. The new African leaders are trying to give the Union power to deal with political and economic questions that affect economic relations with the West, hoping to increase economic prosperity and political strength, which are essential in the prevailing world order, targeting to build a market sphere (Egwim, 2018:52).

Suggesting a unified economy (the plan for a common market) entails cooperative economic planning and a unified military and defence strategy, a suitable foreign policy, and diplomacy to give political direction to joint efforts for protection and economic development. Certain key principles enunciated by the O.A.U Charter, ECOWAS treaty and protocols and adopted as foreign policy principles become irrelevant regarding the prevailing reality - globalization, which thrives in a stable environment. Some modifications gave the bodies the legal authority to intervene in the member states (Adebayo, 2023; Ogaba, 1993). According to (Ogoba, 1993): "The O.A.U. Charter was the product of the perception and value systems of the founding fathers within the spatial and temporal qualities that characterized international relations in 1963". ECOWAS and African Union (A.U.) gave a new meaning and injected dynamism into the idea of 'non-interference' in a new sense of continental solidarity in the era of globalization. The principles of non-interference in the internal affairs of states, respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of each state, and affirmation of a policy of non-alignment with regard to all blocs became obsolete. They needed reformulations in a new form, seeking interventions to maintain peace, emphasizing conflict-settlement, political and economic crisis management, respecting democracy and human rights, and practising good governance to gain aid and foreign direct investment, offsetting the effects of globalization by establishing peace and security in Africa. These forced O.A.U. to change to A.U. by modifying the O.A.U. Charter.

The provision of Article 4(h) of the Constitutive Act (C.A.) explicitly states the: Right of the Union to intervene in a Member State pursuant to a decision of the Assembly in respect of grave circumstances, namely war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity (Adebayo 2023).

The African Union anticipates a common African defence and security policy/African Standby Force. Over the years, the ECOWAS treaty and various other protocols were also modified to equip it with the legal authority to intervene in the member states.

In 1978, a Protocol on Non-Aggression was signed, according to which ECOWAS member States vowed not to use force or aggression against other member States. The 1981 Protocol Relating to the Mutual Assistance on Defence provides for collective self-defence in cases of armed threat or aggression directed against any ECOWAS member State (arts. 2 and 3). The 1999 Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security establishes a collective security system. It lays down the guiding principles of the mechanism (arts. 2 and 3) and lists the circumstances which set it in motion, among which is the overthrow or attempted overthrow of a democratically elected government (art. 25) (Russell and Nicholas 2023).

Article 45 of the Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security (1999) provides that:

Where the authority of government is absent or has been seriously eroded, ECOWAS shall support processes towards the restoration of political authority. Such support may include the preparation, organization, monitoring and management of the electoral process, with the cooperation of relevant regional and international organizations. The restoration of political authority shall be undertaken at the same time as the development of respect for human rights, enhancement of the rule of law and the judiciary (Adebayo, 2023).

Article 45 of the Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, Supplementary to the Protocol relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security, 2001, provides that: In the event that democracy is abruptly brought to an end by any means... in a member state, ECOWAS may impose sanctions on the state concerned and reserve the right to trigger the provision of Article 45 of the Protocol of December 10, 1999 (Adebayo 2023). In the post-Cold War era, ECOWAS has militarily intervened in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau, Ivory Coast, Mali, Gambia and recently threatened military intervention to restore the democratically elected government in Niger.

The principle of non-alignment premised on the existence of alliances and contending ideological blocs in the international system became obsolete. First, the demise of the then dominant and opposing ideological blocs, the East and the West, which had the Soviet Union and the United States as their dominant actors, made non-alignment irrelevant. The disintegration of the Soviet Union and its alliance, the Warsaw Treaty Organization, resulted in an American-dominated world order (Olukosi, 2004; Mazrui, 2001; Iroanya, 1992). According to Olukosi (2004):

While it lasted, the Cold War had a major impact on the domestic politics of many African countries as the rival ideological blocs immersed themselves in the internal political dynamics of different countries in their quest to contain each other and retain/expand their spheres of influence.

Being a member of a non-aligned movement was influenced by the Cold War, but since its end, many believe that the organization has lost its purpose (Shashi, 1995). The Non-align Movement (N.A.M.) went into decline over how to respond to the changes in the global distribution of power following the collapse of the Soviet Union. After the fall of communism and the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact in 1991, N.A.M. suddenly seemed out of place in a world without a bipolar military or ideological confrontation (Caragea and Feffer, 2009).

Thus, contemporary international economic and political realities changed the face of global politics and compelled a review of some aspects of the O.A.U. Charter as obtained in the A.U., ECOWAS treaty and protocols and the Nigerian foreign policy focus. According to Egwim (2018), 'A.U. is a result of the change in global international economic relations - globalization - where direct investment replaced the sort for raw materials and mineral resources, heightening the role of governments in influencing competitiveness between nations through economic climate, institutions and policies.'

Africa, as the centre piece of Nigerian foreign policy,' a narrative ingrained since the 1960s, is now facing critical evaluation amid the evolving landscape of global affairs' (Ikpeama, 2023). According to Fawole(2024), 'it is a time of highly consequential, fast-paced, epoch-defining geopolitical and geostrategic changes, alignments and realignments across all regions of the globe.' The moves entail that while Africa remains the centre piece of Nigeria's economic and foreign policy, protecting a clear vision of national interests is paramount.

Anchoring Nigerian Foreign Policy on Economic Development at Home: Economic Diplomacy

Economic diplomacy is how countries use foreign policy to build economic strength and prosperity at home, improve nations' economies, ensure market access and facilitate business relations. Core economic diplomacy uses economic means to achieve political ends (Obidiaghaa, 2023). 'Economic diplomacy is using diplomatic methods to address national economic interests. It is the means to manage global interdependence relating to trade, investment and financial flows, and the articulation of international economic rules and participation in global value chains (Akande, 2018).' Economic diplomacy uses the nation's foreign policy initiatives to induce economic growth and national development at home.

The argument is that Nigerians must benefit directly from the nation's foreign policy. While upholding a leadership role in Africa, Nigeria would strive to redefine her foreign policy and diplomacy to support the government's domestic programmes, re-orienting Nigeria's foreign policy pursuit towards beneficial economic and political engagement (Ambassador Olugbenga Ashiru in Ojeme, 2011).

This would entail deploying foreign relations instruments to propel economic and industrial programmes... to sustain growth and economic development by supporting the economy's real sector for mutual benefit... aimed at employment generation, food security, and regional peace and security, all geared toward poverty alleviation. (Ashiru in Ojeme, 2011).

Economic diplomacy was spearheaded by Babangida's Regime (1985-1993), Obasanjo's civilian administration (1999-2007), Goodluck Jonathan's administration (2010 – 2015) and the Buhari administration (2015-2023). In April 2018, Vice-President Yemi Osinbajo (2015-2023) announced the launching of a new Nigerian Economic Diplomacy Initiative (NEDI). Under Babangida's regime (1985-1993), economic diplomacy was aimed at achieving economic recovery through implementing the Breton Wood Institutions endorsed Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP). Obasanjo's Civilian Administration (1999-2007) explicitly targeted obtaining debt relief, attracting foreign direct investment and soliciting for more loans through implementation of Breton Woods Institutions loan conditionality (Aniche, 2009 in Okeke, 2014:22). 'Economic diplomacy is a strategy of economic recovery or development bordering on how to manage relations with international finance institutions or donor agencies like World Bank Group, I.M.F., etc., to bring Nigeria to the path of economic development' (Aniche 2009:436 in Okeke, 2014:22).

One of the major pillars of this foreign policy focus is the inclusion of the organized private sector in diplomatic engagements within and outside the country to make Nigerian business entrepreneurs take advantage of Nigeria's regional and subregional peace-making and peace-building efforts, unlike in times past, where the organized private sector, was completely shut out of Nigeria's diplomatic moves. According to (Ashiru in Ojeme, 2011):

We will redress existing imbalances and forge a strong partnership with the organized private sector to assist economic growth. Consequently, members of the organized private sector would frequently constitute part of any bilateral discussions between our governments and other foreign delegations so that Nigeria can benefit from visits to and from different countries.

The argument is that Nigerian's intervention to restore peace and stability in Liberia and Sierra Leone, stability achievements in Guinea Bissau, Ivory Coast, The Gambia, riding the African continent of the remnants of the vestiges of colonialism and apartheid in Angola, Zimbabwe and South Africa, was without a meaningful economic presence in these countries to compensate for her sacrifices. Little

was done to turn the nation's sacrifices in these countries and others into economic gains (Ojeme, 2011; Ukaogo et al., 2020).

Unlike previous diplomatic engagements, where the majority of Nigerians could not justifiably see anything tangible and beneficial to the man on the street, the current focus is expected to be felt in several ways, including more FDIs, transfer of technologies, taking the nation's under-utilized industrial capacities to neighbouring countries, thereby creating a pool of expatriate Nigerian workers, as well as opening new frontier of business opportunities for big and small businesses within and outside the African continent (Chief Emeka Anyaoku in Ojeme, 2011).

However, according to Akande (2018), despite the new focus, Nigeria is still committed to Pan-African ideals. It stands out as a country determined to integrate Africa while also committed to ensuring adequate consultation with the private sector before making further commitments to some of the international treaties.

Nigerians as the Centrepiece of Nigeria's Foreign Policy: Citizen Diplomacy

There are compelling reasons for negating retaining Afrocentrism in Nigeria's foreign policy to promote Nigeria's interests and protect citizens abroad. Ukaogo et al. (2020), reviewing the recurring xenophobic attacks on Nigerians in some African countries, argued that 'Nigeria's utilization of her human and material resources for the greater good of African states was unrewarding and a commemoration of ingratitude and thus create the imperative for foreign policy review.' Nigeria's security challenges at home and economic decline also constitute a push factor for a redirection from an Afrocentric foreign policy to a more people-centred approach like *citizen diplomacy* spearheaded by the Yar'Adua's/Jonathan's Administration (2007-2015). Other administrations have taken a proactive stance towards foreign policy, emphasizing the paramount importance of Nigerian citizens in shaping foreign relations, focusing on fine-tuning and implementing a robust strategy.

Citizen diplomacy contends Nigerians are the centrepiece of Nigeria's foreign policy, addressing the problems confronting Nigerian citizens at home and abroad (Odoh, 2020). 'The alignment of a country's foreign policy with its domestic circumstances, geared towards curbing insecurity and alleviating the poverty affecting citizens, rather than intervening in neighbouring countries' (Premium Times Editorial, October 16, 2023; Premium Times June 24, 2023). Nigeria's foreign policy repositioned to support the domestic programmes and priorities of the government, improve the living standards of Nigerians, including the creation of jobs and reduction of poverty, addressing the nation's socio-political, economic and security challenges in the power/energy sector, food security, infrastructural development, peace and security of lives and properties' (Ashiru in Ojeme, 2011), harnessing the resources and potentials of diaspora, mainstreaming the doctrine of reciprocity, and creating an enabling environment for Nigerians to prosper at both the national and international levels, cooperation in the area of tackling insecurity to end Boko Haram terrorism etc.

Conclusion

In summary, these moves entail that while Africa remains the centrepiece of Nigeria's economic and foreign policy, protecting a clear vision of national interests is now paramount, unlike the former 'big brother' approach. In June 2023, President Bola Tinubu (the incumbent president) visited France and reassured Nigeria's Afro-centric foreign policy approach, emphasizing support for African stability and development (Elumoye, 2023b). Tinubu's foreign policy thrust 'Nigeria's 4D Renewed Foreign Policy Doctrine' predicated on four cardinal variables, Democracy, Development, Demography and Diaspora, gives the impression of an inward-looking orientation, i.e., making Nigeria the central focus of foreign

policy within economic and citizen diplomacy (Fawole, 2024). Underpinning this new doctrine is the conviction that Nigeria's foreign policy must align with its national interests, uphold democratic values, harness demographic potential, stimulate economic development, and prioritize the well-being of its diaspora community (Iroegbu, 2023).

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Biographical Note

Ambrose Ihekwoaba EGWIM *PhD* is a Lecturer in the Department of Political Science, Redeemer's University, Ede, Osun State, NIGERIA. Email: egwima@run.edu.ng & ambroseegwim@yahoo.com Phone: +234-8032750131