

## **Nigeria's Foreign Policy and National Development: A Study of Muhammadu Buhari's Administration, 2015 to 2023**

**Ojiugo Chijinwa AKAKURU<sup>1</sup>, Sandralyn Ifeoma OBIUKWU<sup>2</sup> and Secunda Chibozam ONWUHARAONYE<sup>3</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Department of Social Studies & Civic Education Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education, Owerri Imo State NIGERIA

<sup>2</sup>Department of Economics Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education, Owerri Imo State NIGERIA

<sup>3</sup>Department of History and International Studies Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education, Owerri Imo State NIGERIA

### **[0191] Abstract**

*Foreign Policy is a country's strategic relation with countries and agencies of international system. A policy of tact and strategy for the actualization of enormous expectations of the national interest of a sovereign state. From this assertion, this paper examined and assessed foreign policy of Muhammadu Buhari's administration in its essence to national development. The research design of this paper is qualitative in data collection and analysis. The study revealed positive indications and failures that trailed the conduct of Nigerian foreign policy under Buhari's administration towards national development between 2015 and 2023. From these findings, the paper recommends for the redefinition of Nigeria foreign policy (in thrust, strategy and drive), enhanced purposeful foreign collaboration among other measures to respond meaningfully to the expectations of national development.*

**Keywords: Buhari administration, foreign policy, development and national development.**

### **Introduction**

State-centric perspective of international relation underscores the criticality of sovereign states in transnational engagements. In this vein, international relations represent relation between sovereign states in pursuit of national interests. National interest motivate state's action and inaction with other state actors and non-state actors in the context of international system. To further underline the nature of international relations and its rationality, Okafor and Agbaenyi (2012) stressed that the concept of international relations is a gamut of interactions among people of different nationalities representing states, organizations, and corporations. Similarly, Egbo (2003) observed that each state, no matter its national attributes, resources, development and advancement in science and technology is in constant exchanges with other states. Hence, the need for relations and exchanges. Basically, what is critical in state's relations is the notion of national interest. Accordingly, Madubuegwu, *etal* (2022), remarked that the rationale of state's relations and exchanges with other states and non-state entities is embellished in the symbolism and substance of national interest. Thus, national interest is a reflection of expectations of sovereign state as articulated and expressed in foreign policy. Hence, foreign policy therefore constituted a diplomatic guide of lofty principles and modalities adopted by sovereign states in pursuit of national interests in relations and exchanges with entities of the international system. In a similar sense, Ikedinma (2012) opined that with the emergence of modern nation states, modern international relations emerged as these nation-states devise and followed certain principles, courses and standards that govern their interactions in the international community. Since, no nation is an island, so it becomes imperative for nation states to interact with each other. These actions therefore formed the foreign relations of such states. Traditionally, these actions are guided by national foreign policies that are clearly in pursuit of national aspirations or interests. Foreign policy is thus defined as "the actions of a state towards external environment and conditions usually domestic, under which these decisions are formulated" (Ikedinma, 2012).

Basically, the March 2015 presidential election in Nigeria remarkably ushered in presidency and government of an opposition political party, APC first ever in the history of civilian transition and political development of the country (Udensi, *etal*, 2019). Thus, President Muhammadu Buhari administration emerged on the campaign message of "change mantra" in response to challenges and expectations of national development. National development is what every state or country desired. It is the values, plights and expectations of a people of a country or nation-state (Bello, 2017). In Nigeria today, the expectations of national development are enormous. And, the enormity of these expectations

are obvious in governance, economy, security, social welfare and infrastructure, etc. The country is facing a lot of daunting problems of national prestige and global recognition which stem from failures of governance, economy, security, national unity, etc (Mohammed, 2016; Nnaedozie & Ebiri, 2018). To this extent, Mohammed (2016) conceptualized national development as multifaceted process of advancement in every strata of national life and aspiration.

Subsequently, Udeagu & Okere (2017), argued that foreign policy is key to national development. This is because, the external policy provide diplomatic direction for promotion of country's potentials for market and investment. As a matter of fact, targets of Nigeria's socio-economic growth and development cannot be achieved in isolation of a pragmatic foreign policy where issues of development are well articulated and defined for global projection and interaction (Aliyu, 2019). Indicatively, the nexus between foreign policy and national development is further illustrated as Anakara (2018) stressed that national interest is what foreign policy intends to achieve. And, the content of this national interest is where emphasis is placed on national survival, protection of lives and properties of citizens in host countries and efforts towards global cooperation and peace. In credence, Asogwa (2009), also stated that national interest is the main determinant of what a country should or ought to do through its leaders or decision makers. It is defined in terms of domestic and foreign policy goals. From Anakara's view, the fundamental question is, "has Nigeria foreign policy conduct responded to the challenges and expectations of national development as regards national security, protection and advancement of lives and investments of citizens in various parts of the world and other sundry issues of national concern?" This polemical question has over the years elicited varied perspectives while some scholars have argued that conduct of Nigeria foreign policy under Muhammadu Buhari has engendered national development other scholars and observers thought otherwise. On the other hand, Bello (2017) and Udensi, *etal* (2019) argued that Buhari's trade deals with Russia, Chinese and Western countries have in successive years yielded socio-economic dividends towards mitigating challenges of national development.

Also, the rejuvenation of the operational activities of Nigerians in Diaspora Commission, NIDCOM had in few years provided viable protective channels for safety of Nigerians in hostile host countries across the world. This indication as asserted by these scholars has indeed elicited curiosity in the significance of conduct of Nigeria's foreign policy towards national development in view of current national woes. From the foregoing scholarly assertions invariably established the thrust of this research. In this sense, Eke (2009) re-echoed the fact that no nation is an Island unto itself, a nation enters relation with others to secure its objectives. For example, Nigeria is no exception. As a nation, Nigeria foreign policy is therefore under continuous scrutiny to assess its viability, constraints and achievements. This paper therefore intends to establish the significance or non-significance of Nigeria foreign policy conduct towards national development with reference to Muhammadu Buhari's administration, 2015-2023. This is remarkably relevant in view of enormous challenges and expectations of national development in Nigeria today.

### **Conceptual Analysis**

The term, "foreign policy" basically elicit diverse definitional perspectives among scholars and practitioners of international relations and political science. In this vein, Unaji (2017) opined that as there are as many definitions of foreign policy as there are interested scholars and writers. Though there is no universally satisfactory definition of the term, they have certain common views. Foreign policy of any country deals firstly with preservation of its independence and security, and second, with the pursuit and protection of its economic interest. In apt sense, Unaji's view underlines the fundamental ideals of foreign policy of every sovereign which revolves around territorial sovereignty and security occasioned with advancement of economic interest. Beyond the imperatives of ideals, foreign policy can also be considered as a strategy. In this regards, foreign policy of a state can be described as a coordinated strategy by which institutionally designated decision-makers in a country seek to manipulate the international environment in order to achieve national objective (Macpherson, 1996). To this extent, there is affinity between foreign policy and national interest.

Hence, it is subsequently stressed that foreign policies are justified because they further the national interests of nation-states. Although national interest is an ambiguous concept and therefore limited in its ability to guide policy, it is not altogether lacking in meaning and action. It directs the attention of policymakers to a category of goals that a state's foreign policy should value most, national or societal goals. Goals that advance only the interests of certain individuals or groups are by definition, not eligible for placement at the center of a state's foreign policy. For a foreign policy goal or objective

to be in the national interest, it must benefit more than a particular group or sector; it must promote the welfare of the country as a whole. It is however stressed that the articulation of the goals does not necessarily guarantee the successful execution of foreign policy. The extent to which a foreign policy goal/objective is achieved depends largely on the quality, character and disposition of policy makers, the prevailing political and economic circumstances, the resource endowments of the state, the military capability, geographical location, population and a host of other factors (Ikedinma, 2012). Obviously, Ikedinma's assertion underlines the criticality of domestic and external environment in the performance of state's foreign policy. In this vein, Asogwa (2009), acknowledged this fact and indicated that foreign policy of a state in the contemporary society is determined or shaped by various factors. These factors can be grouped under internal and external factors which include national interest, perception and attitude of political leaders, nature of the constitution, history, economy, population, military capability, interest groups, international organization, international pressure groups, policies of other states and dominant ideals in the global society. In addition, (Northedge, 1993 cited in Aisien, 2012) indicated that foreign policy by its nature is a two-fold entity comprising external and internal considerations.

There is the world of systematic environment on one hand and the complex of demands which arise in a country and which show how the government must satisfy or make a show of satisfying. Foreign policy is also classified as actions taken at international arena. Similarly, Akinyemi (2002), opined that foreign policy refer to aggregate of actions, non-actions, pronouncements and non-pronouncement by which a country regulate its relationship with the rest of the world. Similarly, Adeniran, (1983) emphasized that the foreign policy of any state involves at least four levels of interaction –viz political, private (concerning the interaction of citizens of one state with another), economic and socio-cultural dimensions. The goals and objectives which a state sets out to achieve with regards to these various categories of interest and means at her disposal for achieving the set goals are the ingredients of any foreign policy. In a technical sense, foreign policy is the compass by which a given state navigates her world. It is both a chart and a guide not only to a country but also to the international community. It is a dynamic process ever reflecting the core values and national interests of a given state. It is the summation of thoughts, actions and principles on external affairs taken by decision-makers with the intention of achieving a large range of goals and short-term objectives (Zimako, 2009). To this end, Williams (2019) reasoned that foreign policy is articulated set of principles, decisions and actions designed to pursue national interest of sovereign state in its relations with state and non-state actors.

This assertion basically evinced the criticality of the conduct of foreign policy in the international arena. In this sense, Madubuegwu (2022) pointed out that the conduct of foreign policy is the responsibility of the state diplomats. It is a process characterized with significant engagements in symbolic events where diplomats applied tact and intelligence in relation with diplomats of other countries. For illustrative instance, Eke (2009), documents that the channels for the making and conduct of Nigerian foreign policy are many and varied in their specific functions. The channels are the institutional mechanisms involved in research, formulation and conduct of Nigeria's foreign policy. The implementation can be referred to as conduct of Nigerian foreign policy or diplomatic practice. The conduct of Nigerian foreign policy is the last stage of the whole activities before the efficacy can be evaluated and discerned. The appropriate and dedicated bodies and agencies for the diplomatic practice include the Foreign-Service Academy, Diplomatic Missions, High Commissions, Consulates and United Nations Mission.

As regarding the foundation of Nigeria's foreign policy, Asogwa (2009), recalled that on assumption of office as Prime Minister in 1960, Tafawa Balewa outlined the broad principles of Nigeria's foreign policy in an address he presented to Nigeria House of Representatives. The broad principles were further articulated and affirmed in the Prime Minister's address to the United Nations General Assembly in October 1960 on the occasion of Nigeria's admission as the 99<sup>th</sup> member of the United Nations. Thus, the foundation principles of Nigerian foreign policy are outlined as follows: **(a)** Promotion of Nigeria's national interest and world peace. **(b)** Pursuance of the policy of neutrality and non-alignment. **(c)** Respect for the sovereign equality of all nations. **(d)** Promotion of friendship and cooperation among the various countries of the world. **(e)** Promotion of the rapid decolonialization of Africa. **(f)** Maintaining a modest approach in the pursuit of Nigeria's foreign policy. **(g)** Support for a free and democratic world. **(h)** Promotion and support of cooperation and integration among Africa states.

At that significant event, the Nigerian political leadership and state acknowledged the fact that one of the fundamentals for national prestige and survival is premised on the visibility of its presence

in the comity of nation-states through a pragmatic foreign policy for robust diplomatic relations. Thus, policy of Non-alignment for self-preservation, policy of Afro-centrism for national prestige, policy of regional economic integration for partnership and development; and policy of commitment to world peace for global security featured prominently as the foundations of Nigeria's foreign policy. However, domestic realities, regional expectations and global dynamics had in successive years and decades stimulated the expediency of foreign policy reforms to strengthen Nigeria's external relations for meaningful engagements (Madubuegwu, *etal*, 2022). Hence, Madubuegwu, *etal* views underscores the importance of foreign policy in national development. Then, what does national development represents? First, development is a polemical concept in social science literature.

Accord to Madubuegwu, *etal* (2021) the term, "development" is a multi-disciplinary concept replete with diverse perspectives and interpretations that stem from ideological inclinations. This indication underscored ambiguity in definition and interpretation of the concept which crystallized in traditional and modern views of development. In this vein, Gauba (2003) stressed that the concept of development was evolved in the sphere of social sciences for guidance of new nations who won their independence after the second world war (1939-1945). Indeed, the idea of development itself was not new. Early indications of this idea are found in the social thought of nineteenth century and early twentieth century. It was largely expressed in the theory of social change. The change could be conceived as a transition from simple to complex forms, from less efficient to more efficient forms, or from ordinary to better forms. Succinctly, the polemics of traditional view of development (as earlier noted) has over the five decades thrown up ideological perspectives as embellished in Liberal and Marxian views of development. In this sense, Okeke (2012) remarked that while some people see development as industrialization and modernity or even westernization and its artifacts such as cars, trains, refrigerators, television, computers, phone-sets, radio, electricity, textiles, schools, tarred roads, et cetera, for others, development has come to mean the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In other words, to them, development is the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger, illiteracy, maternal and child mortality, malaria and HIV/AIDS, gender inequality, and so on. Development is often used in an exclusive economic sense – the justification being that the economy has a pervasive influence in all societies and also, the economy is itself an indicator of other socio-political features of a society. But, development is a multi-dimensional concept, thus it could be economic, political, social, cultural or even human. Based on this fact, it has attracted a variety of definitions from various scholars of different orientations. Beyond the divergences on what development represents, it may be identified as a process in which a system or institution is transformed into stronger, more organized, more efficient and more effective form and prove to be more satisfying in terms of human wants and aspirations. It may be distinguished from progress as development subject to measurement on empirical scale whereas progress is concerned with moral judgment for which it applies normative criterion (Gauba, 2003). This conception obviously underlines the essentials of modern view of development.

A cursory review of the foregoing scholarly submissions revealed that development is a dimensional social reality with multi-faceted targets and processes appropriately contextualized as national development. Hence, the concept of national development like every other concept in social sciences is depleted with myriad of definitions and interpretations. In this vein, national development is defined as an ideal for the holistic growth and advancement of a nation. The advancement that is practically witnessed in every sectors of national life (Anyu-Ude, 2016). In addition, national development is also seen as efforts towards economic growth, political development and social safety of a people in a country. It consist of policies and processes initiated towards improved social well-being of a people and economy (Koko, *etal*, 2020).

Basically, the actualization of targets of national development is beyond policies but illuminate in attitudinal disposition as revealed by Tolu and Oluwatoyin (2011) that national development refers to a phenomenon that embraces a whole nation as the overall development or a collective socio-economic, political as well as religious advancement of a country or nation. This is best achieved through development planning, which can be described as the country's collection of strategies mapped out by the government. However, there is need for attitudinal change towards the realization of the targets of development. Nigerians must as a matter of fact change their pessimistic attitude towards development. The idea or belief that "things cannot work in Nigeria or Nigerian factor" should be discouraged. Real development is achieved through internal activities rather than from external influences. Development is seen as a process generated within a society by forces propagated and invigorated by the actual members of that society. It is believed that true development can neither be

started nor sustained by outsiders. Although, no country can develop in isolation, but heavy emphasis should not be placed on foreign resources for the country's development. The models of development of Japan and China show how these countries utilize their internal resources both human and material for rapid economic development. It is reasonable that Nigerians should inculcate a high sense of patriotism as demonstrated by the Japanese and Chinese processes. It is therefore pertinent at this stage to assess the viability of Nigerian foreign policy to national development under Muhammadu Buhari administration.

### **Nigeria's Foreign Policy to National Development under Muhammadu Buhari's Administration (2015 to 2023)**

The administration of President Muhammadu Buhari like other successive governments conceptualized and implemented foreign policy targets in the realization of its policy reform agenda for national development. At the inception, the reform agenda of Buhari's administration is informed by daunting challenges bedeviling the country. Hence, the global objectives and targets of the administration were anchored on the harsh realities of national security and national economy which served as premise in this study to assess performance and drive of its foreign policy. Subsequently, Ofodile (2015) went further to point out the various foreign policy challenges to President Buhari's government among which is Boko Haram/ISIS/global terrorism, which were categorized as domestic, regional and global problems. Others include regional integration, foreign direct investment, treaties/investor-state dispute settlement, food security/food safety, global governance, the global drive for energy security, and the need for new products and new markets, etc. It is therefore pertinent to itemize and analyze contributions of Buhari's foreign policy towards national development on the benchmark of the following indicators:

**National Security:** At the inception of Buhari's government on May, 2015, the country's north-east region was intensely besieged by the Boko Haram onslaught where lives and properties worth billions of dollars were destroyed. It was a national calamity with devastating toll on the country's economy and image abroad. Thus, Buhari's government acknowledged the imperatives of productive engagement with neighboring African countries and the West to tackle the menace of Boko Haram terrorism which had elicited global attention in its alliance with Islamic State, Isil with the intent to Islamize Nigeria state. In this vein, Olakunle (2017), documents that Buhari visited Niger Republic, Cameroon, Benin Republic, Chad, G-7 meeting in Berlin and the United States. Buhari's main mission was to raise awareness for international co-operation against Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria and West African sub- region. Also, President Buhari ordered the relocation of Military Command Headquarters to Maiduguri. It was a courageous move to take the fight against terrorism right to the door steps of Boko Haram. President Buhari championed the creation of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), which comprised of 8,700 standing army officers pulled from member countries of the Lake Chad Basin Commission. The Multinational Joint Task Force over the years benefited through donations, military platforms and shared intelligence in fight against the insurgents. Also, Buhari ordered the release of \$21 million to facilitate the establishment of the MNJTF headquarters in N'Djamena. A further \$79 million was pledged and subsequently released by Buhari's administration (Williams, 2017). These efforts yielded positive results in the quest to secure the country from antics of terrorists. Furthermore, Buhari's government worked assiduously in collaboration with foreign powers to rescue 103 out of the 276 Chibok girls that were kidnapped by Boko Haram on April 14, 2014. The rescue and release of the kidnapped girls was done with the help of Swiss government, International Red Cross and the Nigerian government. The administration also explored more effective collaborative ways with foreign powers in area of training intelligence and weapon development to engage more professionally and effectively with the insurgents (Mohammed, 2017).

**Anti-Corruption Campaign and National Image:** Buhari's government worked fanatically to bolster the country's image through anti-corruption war against politicians and public servants. This is because the measure taken by the government has helped to recover stolen government funds and reinforced foreign investor's confidence in investment for the socio-economic development and growth of the country. In this vein, Opakunbi (2020) embellished that the anti-corruption crusade embarked upon by President Buhari has won him a lot of admirers both home and abroad. To buttress this assertion, few days to the 2016 Anti- Corruption Summit held in London, in a video footage, the

Archbishop of Canterbury (Head of Anglican Communion), Justin Welby cautioned the former UK Prime Minister, David Cameron about his remarks that some countries such as Nigeria and Afghanistan are 'fantastically corrupt'. Again, the 2016 Anti-Corruption Summit is considered by many observers as a step in the right direction towards combating corruption on a global scale. Buhari's zero tolerance towards corruption is seen by many observers as a powerful tool that will restore the dignity of Nigeria as well as facilitate the inflow of massive foreign direct investment. Since 2015, the Buhari administration has kick-started investigations and prosecution of high profile Nigerians such as former National Security Adviser, Col. Sambo Dasuki (retd), the Senate President, Dr. Bukola Saraki, former petroleum minister, Diezani Alison Madueke, former first lady, Dame Patience Jonathan, ex-governors Babangida Aliyu (Niger) and Sule Lamido (Jigawa) among several other corruption cases (Oluwitin, 2016). Similarly, Udenna, (2019) noted that according to the minister of Information and Culture, Alhaji Lai Mohammed, about 3.4 trillion naira (cash and assets) was recovered during the first year of the Buhari's Presidency. Also, President Buhari's administration has strengthened diplomatic ties with great powers such as China, America, Germany and France to facilitate recovering of stolen funds in foreign banks beyond the continent. The friendly gestures accorded to the Buhari's administration is being reflected in the fight against international terrorism, recovery of looted funds, accessibility to loans and deepening trade deals. These efforts expectedly won Nigeria global and continental recognition as one of the leading countries in the fight against corruption and transparency in governance and public service.

***Pragmatic Citizenship Diplomacy:*** The effective conduct of Nigeria citizen diplomacy represents one of the strides of Buhari's administration. In this sense, Madubuegwu, *etal* (2022) recalled that Alhaji Umaru Musa Yar' Adua administration introduced Citizen Diplomacy as a foreign policy reform to bolster Nigeria's image and prestige in international community with exclusive interest in security and welfare of its nationals. In effort to promote the imperatives of this ideal, President Muhammadu Buhari in 2019 established the Nigerians in Diaspora Commission, NIDCOM to resonate federal government commitment towards the welfare and security of Nigerians resident in various parts of the world. Thus, (Oghenekevwe 2021 cited in Madubuegwu, *e tal* 2022) noted that NIDCOM has the mandate to encourage Diaspora Nigerians to be good ambassadors of the country and mediate relations between the Nigerian government and Nigerians in the Diaspora for mutual development benefits. Again, Madubuegwu, (2019) observed that the federal government of Nigeria under the presidency of Muhammad Buhari has implemented plausible policies and legislations in promoting citizen-centric foreign policy thrust. For instance, the economic diplomacy of Buhari's government had in the few years leveraged on bilateral and multilateral resolutions that attracted foreign direct investment in agric resources and export promotions to mitigate the challenges of a recessive economy. Subsequently, between February and April 2018, the Federal Ministry of External Affairs in collaboration with International Organization for Migration airlifted over five hundred Nigerians trapped in Libya and visit of President Muhammadu Buhari to the South African president, Cyril Ramaphosa on the wake of resurgence of xenophobic restiveness against foreigners which culminate with the inauguration of Nigeria/South Africa Bi-National Commission for the safety of lives and investments of Nigerians in the Rainbow country were few out of sundry indicators in credence to Citizen Diplomacy.

Similarly, the Nigerians in Diaspora Commission, NIDCOM has showed commitment towards the welfare and well-being of the estimated 17 million Diaspora Nigerians by organizing a Town-Hall meetings and interventions during xenophobic attacks on Nigerians in Ghana and South Africa occasioned with evacuation of thousands of stranded citizens back home and response to petition from Nigerians abroad. Again, the Commission in collaboration with Nigeria National Assembly sought for the amendment of the Electoral Act for Diaspora voting. The Commission has also partnered with National Identity Management Commission, NIMC for Diaspora mapping and, commenced data capturing of Nigerians in West Africa, Europe, Asia and America for effective planning purposes, especially in view of much anticipated Diaspora voting (Oghenekevwe 2021 cited in Madubuegwu, *etal*, 2022). Furthermore, the recent air-lifting of Nigerians from Ukraine due to the ongoing armed conflict with Russian federation also underscored the commitment of the administration of President Muhammadu Buhari towards the ideals of Nigerian Citizen Diplomacy (Madubuegwu, *etal* 2022). Subsequently, Ene-ochi (2019), added that the conduct of citizen diplomacy under Buhari's administration in successive years promoted the rich potentials of Nigeria citizenry within and outside the country. The reformed citizen diplomacy under Buhari's government has achieved

goals of strengthening Nigeria's relationship with other countries of the world for the promotion of interests, welfare and growth of its citizens through efficient consular services.

**National Economic Diplomacy:** One of the most outstanding features and remarkable stride of Buhari's foreign policy is the Nigeria Economic Diplomacy Initiative, NEDI. It was conceived to respond efficiently to daunting challenges of economic growth and development. Thus, Ighoshemu (2021) stressed that economic diplomacy of President Muhammadu Buhari unlike his predecessors improved relations between Nigeria and the United States which help in the fight against Boko Haram and corruption resulting in the repatriation of stolen money back to the country and multilateral cooperation to fight insurgency of Boko Haram. The Buhari administration hinged his campaign promises on three cardinal points of combating terrorism, fighting corruption and improving the economy. He improved relations with her neighbours in order to jointly fight Boko Haram which has assumed multinational or transnational dimension, partner with America and other world powers to support the government in order to fight terrorism by providing needed manpower and intelligence and more importantly the improvement of the economy and fighting corruption. He also improved relations with china in order to foster economic development through the provision of needed infrastructure. President Buhari barely one year after assuming office, visited China to solidify both countries trade, diplomatic and economic relations. This visit led to the signing of a framework to enhance infrastructural development. Reform Commission of China and the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Investment of Nigeria, facilitated robust technological and scientific cooperation between both countries. During the visit to China, a number of loans were granted especially to finance the deficit of 2016 budget, infrastructure loan for trains, among others (Bello, *etal*, 2017). The railway project by the Buhari administration was aimed at solving the infrastructural deficit in the country, also provides needed jobs for the populace and to stimulate the economy.

The trade relations between Nigeria and China in just first half of 2016 has stood at \$6.4 billion (Bello, *etal*, 2017). It has provided the Nigeria State with the needed funds to cushion the effect of infrastructural deficit and the nation's needed foreign direct investments (Ighoshemu, 2021). Furthermore, the strides of these efforts was facilitated by National Economic Diplomacy Initiative, NEDI as earlier noted. Apparently, the Nigeria Economic Diplomacy Initiative, NEDI of President Muhammadu Buhari emerged in response to domestic socio- economic challenges and the need to realize the lofty targets of regional economic integration as embellished in the ideals of African Continental Free Trade Area agreement. The NEDI is also designed to leverage on Nigeria's bilateral and multilateral trade engagements with other countries to accelerate domestic growth and development. However, the unprecedented coronavirus pandemic swept economies (advanced and industrializing) into recession. Indeed, the scourge of the pandemic reversed governance expectations and projections of Economic Recovery and Growth Plan and undermined the prospects of NEDI (Madubuegwu, 2022, *etal*). However, the effects of the pandemic was effectively managed by the NEDI initiatives.

Subsequently, (Temitope and Engunele 2021 cited in Madubuegwu, 2022) also revealed that that the country's economic diplomacy has also been deployed to achieve foreign financial aids. Report showed that Nigeria has received \$4.1 billion foreign support in the last six years according to data obtained from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA). The highest amount of \$943 million was received in 2017 while \$159 million-which is the lowest was received in 2015. The second highest amount during this period was \$927 million in 2018 just as the country prepared for general elections in the following year and the country's security situation became fragile. This is also a meaningful stride to the conduct of Nigerian foreign policy in realization of lofty ideals of national development.

A cursory view of data presented and, its underlying analysis undoubtedly showed that the conduct of Nigeria's foreign policy under Buhari has to a significant extent contributed to national development. However, it is pertinent to note that scholars have argued that the conduct of Nigeria's foreign policy under Buhari's administration has failed to ameliorate daunting challenges bedeviling national development (Akinbola, 2018, Yusuf, 2017 and Adams, 2020). In a similar sense, Olakunle (2017), opined that Nigeria's foreign policy under the Buhari administration seems to be gathering momentum, albeit, at a slow pace. This is not unconnected with some problems that have bedeviled the socio-economic growth of Nigeria. Under the Buhari led government, Nigeria has not carved specific foreign policy goals and objectives. Nigeria's foreign policy is vague and incoherent. Nigeria is merely wavering in her foreign policy approach. With this attitude, foreign nations may find it difficult to deepen their ties with Nigeria. Secondly, coupled with a vague and incoherent foreign



policy, the sudden ill-health of President Buhari and management of the episode have generated so much anxiety and uncertainty among Nigerians and the International community. It is therefore pertinent to illuminate these gaps in the conduct of Nigeria foreign policy towards national development from the four perspectives already established.

***Crisis of National Security:*** Today, crisis of national security is one of the enormous challenges constraining efforts of Nigeria to advance rapidly to path of socio-economic growth and development. National security crisis was daunting and overwhelming inspite of the efforts of the Buhari's administration through domestic measures and foreign collaboration. Despite the efforts, years down the line, 112 Chibok girls are still missing. According to Charles Onunaiju, an International Affairs expert, in an interview with Mohammed, the relations with Francophone countries of West Africa was a diplomatic achievement for the country. This is because these Francophone countries normally give ear more to Paris other than their neighbouring countries such as Nigeria for a serious diplomatic push. As such, attempting to engage them using the sub-regional mechanism is regarded as a major success of President Buhari's foreign policy output. The relevance of this initiative is evident in the setting up of a Joint Commission of the three countries in tackling Boko Haram's insurgency. Cooperating with these countries paid off in considerably reducing the insurgent's attacks at that time, although, it is not unlikely that such multilateral corporation may result in some security complications which are obviously not captured in this study. However, from the end of 2018, the attacks by the terrorist group increased and the conflict is yet to be brought to resolution. Insecurity is a major threat to sanctity of life in the nation, as such, it is a dent on the image of the country with over 30,000 Nigerians killed in the last 10 years by the Boko Haram. Many have had to flee their homes to become refugees in neighbouring countries like Niger (Mohammed, 2020, Dutse, & Othman, 2020).

Furthermore, terrorism and insurgency are major sources of the image crisis that Nigeria experiences, and until they have been successfully tackled, Nigeria's aspiration to be a regional influential nation will not be realizable. Moreover, if the country cannot be as influential as it would love to be regionally, such an aspiration will be more difficult in the global setting. In addition to the Boko Haram terrorism, killer herdsmen have become another growing security challenge for the President Buhari's administration. In 2017, the killer herdsmen were estimated to have killed at least 598 Nigerians and by first quarter of 2018, over 1000 persons had lost their lives in the hands of the herdsmen. More recently, from January to March 2019, they were recorded to have killed about 179 people. Bicknell noted that the "Fulani militias" have been committing crimes against humanity and genocidal massacres against Christians in Nigeria. With these insistent attacks by killer herdsmen in villages, the country continues to be painted in a bad image in the face of the world. This is adversely affecting foreign investments as investments may not thrive in an unstable country with insecurity as a bane (Mohammed, 2020, Dutse, and Othman, 2020, Brechenmacher, 2019, Niarchos, 2020 and Bicknell, 2020). These ugly and unabated scenarios have in the recent years undermined Nigeria's image and prestige in the comity of nation-states. The West frowns on the failure of Buhari's administration to tackle perennial problem between farmers and Fulani herders raising suspicion of Islamic genocide against communities in the country. Thus, Nigeria has been categorized in foreign media as a country where Christians were daily slaughtered in isolation of the efforts of the government to abate the ugly development. In addition, the intensity of armed banditry and abduction also illuminate gaps in the efforts of the Buhari's government in domestic national security policy and strategic foreign collaboration to mitigate these challenges (Lawal, 2021).

***Corruption and National Image:*** Basically, the economy of Nigeria cannot be mentioned without the effects of corruption and tackling of corruption is the third cardinal objective of president Buhari's government partly because it is an impediment and a major image deplete for the nation in foreign relations. It is argued that corruption in Nigeria is pervasive and has an image tarnishing effect on the country. For this reason, foreign nationals have for long started exercising extreme caution in entering into business transactions with Nigerians. This condition has obviously weakened the economic sector of the country. Hence, it is further indicated that Nigeria has struggled against its image crisis for about three decades, under the inhibiting influence of corruption, a condition that cannot be overcome until the government shows seriousness in fighting against corruption. In order to improve the image of Nigeria and for Nigerians to enjoy better identity abroad, the fight against corruption in every sector of the Nigerian government becomes important. However, the government has been criticized for being selective in its handling of corruption allegations and cases, using the battle against corruption to victimize members of the opposition party. As such, the fight against corruption has not had much impact on the nation's



foreign policy. Also, the president does not have moral justification to fight corruption, especially for being the Minister of Petroleum and the Chairman of Petroleum TET Fund. This shows that the government may not be as serious in its ambition as it would want the world to believe, since the war against corruption must be holistic and not lopsided, for it to be meaningful. Also, Transparency International has ranked Nigeria 144 out of 180 countries in its Corruption Perception Index of 2019 which does not show so much progress in the fight against corruption for almost half a decade (Akinwale, 2020, Chukwuemeka and Ugwu, 2019, Mbah, 2019, Ireju and Osatohanmwun, 2020).

Subsequently, there are still incidences of scandals among public officials of the administration which makes mockery the efforts of the government against corruption and undermines image of the country. Thus, the corruption scandal of the former Secretary to the Government of the Federation, SGF was one of the references. Though, the former SGF was sacked but his prosecution was not duly followed raising serious doubt on the administration's commitment to mitigate corruption. Also, the arrest and prosecution of the former chairman of Anti-Graft Agency, Economic and Financial Crime Commission, Magu on fraudulent diversion of recovered stolen public fund and assets is one of the incidences that plummet international goodwill and support for the administration's efforts against corruption (Justice, 2021 and Duru, 2022). To this end, corruption is the bane of national development challenges which inextricably illuminate the failures of Nigeria foreign policy conduct.

**Challenges of Citizenship Diplomacy:** As earlier indicated, Buhari's administration has made impressive efforts on citizen diplomacy. However, citizen diplomacy from its conduct under successive administrations to the present government is immersed in obvious problems. In this vein, Abati (2009), documents that placing the citizen at the centre of the national programme reinforces the original purpose of the Government and when those in power provide necessary leadership, they will without much effort secure the trust of the general populace and create centers of national solidarity and more agents for national progress. In Nigeria, we don't seem to get this. Our Governments do not value our lives. One Nigerian was killed in Spain, another one was brutalized in Asia, routinely, our people are beheaded in Saudi Arabia. At home and in Diaspora, Nigerians are left to their own survival tactics; many have learnt not to expect anything from their government (cited in Dickson, 2010). In a more broad sense, Madubuegwu (2019), noted that a cursory analysis of events at domestic, regional and global arena as regarding the safety and welfare of Nigerians revealed enormous challenges towards the realization of the lofty ideals of Citizen Diplomacy. On domestic level, the security of Nigerians is threatened daily by unabated kidnapping and insurgency amid the efforts of the police and the army. At regional level, the wide spreading human trafficking in Libya, terrorism in West Africa neighboring countries and xenophobia violence in post-apartheid rainbow country, South Africa stridently elicits serious concern on the safety of Nigerians and their investments. Beyond Africa, most responsible Nigerians have suffered discourteous treatment and resentment with foreign immigration officers.

Similarly, it is also argued that humiliating situations that most responsible Nigerians in Diaspora found themselves occasioned with extra-judicial killings by authority of host countries in isolation of concerted efforts from Nigerian government emanate obviously from the failure of appropriate authorities to guarantee safety and improve living conditions of people in the country (Madubuegwu *etal*, 2022). In addition, Dickson (2010), also argued that back home, the average Nigerian is treated badly by the authorities. For instance, the Nigerian Police Force vested with the responsibility of maintaining internal peace and security have in all ramifications become agents of terrorism engaging in extra-judicial killing, arrest, and detention of innocent citizens, extortion of multifarious dimensions, and brutality. Consequently, these torrents of national security threats have undoubtedly worsen negative reflections of Nigeria's image in the international community and heightened discourteous treatment of its nationals in various parts of the world. Again, it has also severed relations with the West as related to intermittent sanctions against Nigeria immigrants. As earlier noted, United States in acknowledgement of unabated terrorism incidences and federal government failure had in 2020 placed stringent visa ban on Nigerian immigrants (Madubuegwu, *etal*, 2022). Again, Madubuegwu (2020), document that the US Department of Homeland Security stated that the action became necessary because Nigeria failed to meet the US security and information-sharing standards. Similar travel restriction of this kind was in the past extended to Iran, Somalia, North Korea, Venezuela and Yemen on the expedience of precautionary security measure to stem the tide of terrorism. The US visa restriction created so much apprehension and anxiety among Nigerian passport holders who intend to visit United States on medical, leisure, work, schooling, etc.

Report from DHS revealed that in 2018, a total of 7,922 US immigrant visas were issued to Nigerians. And as of 2017, bureau survey indicated that there were 348,000 Nigeria immigrants living in United States engaging in productive ventures. However, this unpleasant development obviously illuminates the inadequacies and challenges bedeviling our appropriate institutions and agencies with reference to inadequate security intel, failed institutional synergy, fraud, absence of viable data base and unabated spread of terrorism in various parts of the country. The systemic failures of our security architecture have today constituted a serious threat to the safety of citizens of Nigerian foreign allies and possible diplomatic row. The Federal Government of Nigeria in response to the unpleasant situation created a special committee led by Honorable Minister of Interior to interface with relevant persons and agencies on ways to resolve this diplomatic impasse. President Muhammadu Buhari had on the occasion of 33<sup>rd</sup> Africa Union Summit in Addis Ababa Ethiopia re-echoed Nigerian and regional commitments towards ending terrorism. It is therefore expected that these lofty ideals should be translated in the operational procedure of the appropriate institutions to ensure public safety of Nigerians and strengthen our foreign relations.

Although, the issue of United States immigrant visa ban has been amicably resolved but the national security threat has remained more stridently than ever raising apprehension of diplomatic row between Nigeria and Western allies particularly in view of resurgence and vehemence of international terrorism with the re-emergence of Taliban in national governance of Afghanistan in 2021. Hence, the unpleasant security situation in the country currently looks frightening as security personnel and institutions works fanatically to reverse the trend (Madubuegwu, *etal*, 2022). As reported in December 2021, the government effort led to a consecutive month-to-month reduction of security incidents and fatalities but not kidnappings, where 574 cases were recorded representing a 58 percent month-to-month increase. It is also recorded that diverse range of security incidents occurred where 431 fatalities were confirmed in 29 states across 96 local government areas. Further breakdown of these incidents showed 26 percent occurred in the North-West geopolitical region, 19 percent in the North-Central, 17 percent in South-West, 13 percent in South-South and South-East and 12 percent in the North-East. The thematic indications of the incidents that resulted in these fatalities include mostly armed attacks and a continuation of the trend of several non-state actors successfully challenging the state's monopoly of the use of force (Report of Beacon Intel, 2021). To this end, the challenges in the conduct of Nigeria citizen-centric foreign policy has undermined the efforts of Buhari's administration towards safety of lives and properties of Nigerians resident within and outside the country.

**Challenges of National Economic Diplomacy:** As earlier noted, Tope (2020), remarked that President Buhari's administration is argued to have inherited a battered economy, due to mismanagement and corruption of past administrations. As such he is faced with the task of reviving the economy and bringing Nigeria back to its respectable status in Africa. This dire economic situation, among other economic challenges like inflation, unemployment and poverty, are responsible for the growing brain-drain syndrome ravaging almost every sector of the Nigerian economy. Consequently, many Nigerians continue to put their lives at risk by taking illegal route through the Mediterranean Sea to get to Europe, only to end up losing their lives on the journey; others who choose to cross over to Europe through Libya become victims of enslavement. Excessive reliance on crude oil as the dominant source of foreign exchange is another factor militating against Nigeria's economic prosperity.

Basically, it was against the backdrop of this development that Buhari's government initiated National Economic Diplomacy. In this regard, Umaru (2018) reports that the launch of the National Economic Diplomacy initiative by President Mohammadu Buhari's government on the 5<sup>th</sup> of April, 2018 was a welcome development. It is a fact overdue in Nigeria Economic Recovery Plan over the years but for the poor vision of past leaders. Vice President Yemi Osinbajo in his speech at the occasion said that the event was a monumental importance to both Nigeria's diplomacy and economy. In his words, 'this is convergence of global reach and influence with the tremendous opportunities for commerce and industry in Nigeria, a game-changing-synergy that has been waiting to happen for years. Economic diplomacy is a foreign policy orientation that emphasizes and pursues the economic development aspirations of a sovereign state in the conduct of diplomacy with other nations, international organizations and other actors in international arena. Nigeria does not need to be exception in the management of international affairs in the comity of nations. Nigeria has played 'Father Christmas' with its national resources for so long! It has always been about playing the 'Africa big brother' whatever that means in terms of prosperity of the Nigerian economy and that of Nigeria people is yet to be appreciated in concrete terms. It is also anticipated that economic diplomatic plan should be

implemented in line with the Lagos Plan of Action and Africa Economic Community. This is because Nigeria participated in Africa Integration Process since the adoption of the Lagos Plan of Action and the Treaty establishing the Africa Economic Community. The reason for National Economic Diplomacy Initiative is a very good economic and foreign policy for the country.

However, the effect of COVID-19 might not have had so much toll on the country had the Nigeria's economy been diversified and not relied so much on crude oil. With a diversified economy, there will be multiple sources of foreign exchange earnings for the country, thereby improving foreign reserves which have been depleting since 2008. Thus, the present government needs, as a matter of urgency, to improve the economy of the country through diversification of the economy, especially as about 69% of the population are said to be living below the poverty line (Jiddere, and Manu, 2018; Akinterinwa, 2018; Olurunbi, 2020; Otunuga, 2018 and Akinwale, 2019). In effect, Madubuegwu (2020), writes that the Nigerian government is overwhelmed by the pandemic. However, President Buhari responded swiftly by inaugurating an inter-ministerial committee known as Economic Sustainability Committee, ESC on March 30, 2020 to develop a strategic blue-print to mitigate socio-economic challenges created by COVID-19 Pandemic. Also, certain measures were quickly initiated to respond to the myriad of disruptions in the economy and improve the living condition of Nigerians in period of so much fear and difficulties caused by the public health problem.

In same vein, Nigeria recorded N1.94 trillion foreign trade deficit in 2021, according to a report by the National Bureau of Statistics. It therefore portend a negative trade balance as the Nigerian economy is still import-driven and depends largely on export of petroleum and some agricultural products to meet foreign exchange earnings. Export in the fourth quarter of 2021 was still oil-dependent. Crude oil exports recorded N4.27 trillion, and it remained the major product in total exports (74.04 percent) while non-crude oil was valued at N1.49 trillion or 25.96 percent of total exports of which non-oil products contributed N810.88 billion representing 14.06 percent of total exports during the quarter under reviewed. The top three countries that accounted for highest share in Nigeria's total exports in the fourth quarter of 2021 were India (15.17 percent), Spain (13.69 percent) and France (8.42 percent) while China (27.8 percent), Belgium (10.3 percent) and India (7.24 percent) were the countries Nigeria imported the most goods from during the period (Ejechi, 2022).

Consequently, the international perception of the country's image is a threat to the optimal performance of Nigeria's economic diplomacy. Most foreigners see the country as a breeding ground for fraud, corruption and insecurity. Hence, Nigerians often experienced discourteous treatment from immigration officers of their host countries because they were seen as fraudsters and criminals. Despite the strategic effort at rebranding the image of the country through citizen-centric diplomacy of national prestige and resourceful citizenry, however, the suspicion and resentment against Nigerians remain unabated. Trust deficit and perception dilemma are critical issues in the diplomatic circles as Nigeria's envoys makes fanatic efforts to push narratives of enabling and safe environment to reluctant and suspicious foreign investors. Invariably, the rapidity in crises of insecurity currently seen in the overwhelming armed banditry in the North-West and unknown gunmen insurgency in the South-East indeed scare away potential foreign investors and diminished the lofty target of foreign direct investment of National Economic Diplomacy Initiative. And, the unpleasant development have worsen in the recent months where people and security personnel are daily killed and villages sacked by invading militias as people resort to self-defense. Beside the challenges of insecurity, the deplorable status of Nigeria foreign service is also a clog in the wheels of progress in the realization of lofty ideals of National Economic Diplomatic Initiative. Hence, Nigeria foreign service particularly the operational conduct of Embassies, High Commissions and Consulates are immersed in daunting challenges of inadequate funding, dearth of appropriate technology and facilities, and knowledge gap among personnel in the core ideals and expectations of NEDI (Madubuegwu, *etal*, 2022). To this end, Buhari's economic diplomacy was fraught with enormous institutional limitations which constrained efforts of the government towards national development. The foregoing analysis undoubtedly showed that the conduct of Nigeria's foreign policy under Buhari was immersed with enormous challenges which had to a significant extent militated national development. To this end, the Nigerian foreign policy's contribution to national development under Muhammadu Buhari's administration (2015-2023) was a mixed grain on positive and negative effects.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Conclusively, Nigerian foreign policy has to a reasonable extent recorded tremendous achievement towards national development under Buhari's administration. The release of 103 Chibok girls in

collaboration with foreign powers and neighboring African countries, air-lifting of Nigerians from war-torn Libya and Ukraine including the launch of Nigeria Economic Diplomacy Initiative, NEDI were among the fundamentals towards national development under Buhari's administration. However, there were issues trailing the conduct of Nigeria foreign policy towards national development under Buhari's administration. These issues include crises of insecurity, selective corruption-fight, crisis of domestic economic woes of poverty, unemployment etc. These issues have to a significant extent grossly eroded Nigerian's image under Buhari's administration. From the findings and conclusion, this study makes the following recommendations as a policy for current administration of President Bola Tinubu presidency: **(a)** Re-definition of thrust, targets and strategies of Nigerian foreign policy orientation. It has become necessary for the Nigeria government through its statutory offices and research institutes to define the foreign policy thrust and strategies of conduct in credence to domestic plights and expectations for meaningful international engagements. **(b)** Nigeria government should not relent in strengthening its collaboration with neighbouring countries and foreign powers to mitigate the menace of terrorism, banditry and insurgency in various parts of the federation. These collaborations should place more priority on joint-patrol, intelligence gathering, weapon development and training. **(c)** Finally, Nigeria government should strive to build a good and positive image for the country for robust engagement in international system. The priority areas for this positive image should focus on corruption, insecurity and democratic process for the country's prestige and international recognition.

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### Biographical Note

**Ojiugo Chijinwa AKAKURU** PhD is a Lecturer in the Department of Social Studies & Civic Education Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education, Owerri Imo State NIGERIA  
Email: [ojiugoakakuru@gmail.com](mailto:ojiugoakakuru@gmail.com)

**Sandralyn Ifeoma OBIUKWU** PhD is a Lecturer in the Department of Economics Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education, Owerri Imo State NIGERIA  
Email: [sandralyn.obiuoku@alvanikoku.edu.ng](mailto:sandralyn.obiuoku@alvanikoku.edu.ng)

**Secunda Chibozam ONWUHARAONYE** PhD is a Lecturer in the Department of History and International Studies, Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education, Owerri Imo State NIGERIA  
Email: [secunda.onwuharaonye@alvanikoku.edu.ng](mailto:secunda.onwuharaonye@alvanikoku.edu.ng)