

Concentricism in Nigeria's Foreign Policy

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Abstract: *Concentricism in Nigeria's foreign policy advocates that national interest should take precedent over other interests such that the welfare of the citizens should take priority over Nigeria's interests in the West African Sub-Region, Africa and the wider world. But in carrying out its foreign policy, the interest of Nigerians is not given due consideration, as while the country spends enormous resources in the of discharging its leadership role in Africa, the majority of Nigerian citizens suffer from absolute poverty at home.*

I. Introduction

There has been an increase in adopting the concentric circle in analyzing Nigerian foreign policy since the time of Professor Ibrahim Gambari as External Affairs Ministry of Nigeria between 1984 and 1985. Gambari has often argued that more will be gained if scholars and policymakers develop the layered approach to the study of Nigerian foreign policy. By this, it means that Nigeria's interests in global affairs should be located in the physical Nigeria and her immediate neighbours in West Africa, Larger Africa, then the rest of the world and international organizations. This, Ibrahim Gambari and others who believe in the thesis of concentric circle argue, is the best way for Nigeria to go in protecting her interests (Saliu 2007: 269).

According to Ali (2011:37) the need for a paradigm shift in Nigerian foreign policy was the product of diminishing profile of Nigeria in the international affairs, which stemmed from her domestic problem:

Considering the critical self-assigned role of the nation as "giant of Africa" and leader of the black race and the responsibilities that come along in the ... policy of the continent and the sub-region and even because of national need, to protect the physical integrity of the Nigerian State, there ought to be an alignment between objectives and policies.

As argued by Soremekun (1997:12) a country's capabilities inform its role in international politics. Its ability to achieve its foreign policy objectives flows from how it assembles its variable capabilities. In a situation where its foreign vision and assumed roles impact negatively on its domestic affairs, its foreign policy objectives must be re-examined and refocused.

II. Framework Of Analysis: The Theory Of Realism

For any nation to survive in the highly competitive globalized world, it must cast off idealistic posture in favour of realism. Nigeria almost did herself absolute harm when it unilaterally foisted on herself the burden of solving Africa's problems which is to the detriment of domestic responsibilities.

Realism makes several key assumptions. It assumes that nation – states are unitary, geographically – based actors in an anarchic international system with no authority above, capable of regulating interactions between states as no true authoritative world government exist. Secondly, it assumes that sovereign states, rather than IGOs, NGOs or MNCs are the primary actors in international affairs. As a result, a state acts as a rational autonomous actor in pursuit of its own self – interest with a primary goal to maintain and ensure its own security and also its sovereignty and survival. Realism holds that in pursuit of their interest, states will attempt to amass resources and that relations between states are deterrence by their relative levels of power. The level of power is in turn determined by state's military and economic capabilities (Wikipedia).

It therefore means that, foreign policy is the means to advance national interest. National interest, thus, needs to be defined much more specifically than through the over-arching goals of self – imposed continental responsibilities that have become the hallmark of Nigerian foreign policy.

Consequently, in context of realism, foreign policy is seen as an instrument at the disposal of a country employed to promote and protect its national interest, which must be constant, and which entails defence of sovereignty and territorial integrity, enhanced economic and social well-being of the people, promotion of opportunities for profitable trading relations with other countries and exploitation of the "soft power" through propagation of the cultural assets. However, while national interest is foreseeable, its content varies with time and circumstances. It follows that the policy has to be flexible, and must be in tune with changing environment that accounts for the concentric circle theory in Nigeria's foreign policy.

III. Concentricism In Nigeria's Foreign Policy: A Brief Overview

According to Osuntokun (2007:1) between 1960 and 1966 Nigeria's foreign policy was based on constructive Pan Africanism. Later, there was a paradigm shift from constructive Pan Africanism to concentricism. What it means is that foreign policy should be made to serve the ordinary citizens of our country. Ojo Maduekwe calls it "citizen foreign policy".

Concentric foreign policy idea in Nigeria is the brain child of Dr. Ibrahim Gambari. He succinctly analyzed the dialectical content of the dynamics and tensions that have become the hallmark of Nigeria's foreign policy making in an era that has become increasingly characterized by diminished external revenues from oil production. He argues that declining oil revenues have imposed new economic constraints that have severely undermined Nigeria's ambitious, dynamic and assertive foreign policy objectives especially in relation with the United States and West Europe. The author calls for a new thinking, a new realism in the definition of Nigeria's role in Africa and World Affairs (Orogun, 1989:260). Agreeing with Orogun and Northage, Obayuwana (<http://www.google.com.ng>) submitted that the farther a circle, the less willing a state will be in securing the interest in the periphery to the detachment of other national interests in the middle range of the core circle.

According to Gambari, the foreign policy of Nigeria could be called a concentric circle. This concentric circle clearly puts Nigeria's interest first, the West African Sub-region second and then the rest of Africa. The foreign policy objectives shall be the promotion and protection of national interest, promotion of Africa integration, and support for African unity; promotion of international peace and mutual respect in all manifestations, respect for international law and treaty (<http://www.shevoong.com/humanities/philosophy/1257-center-nigeriaforeignpolicy>).

Buhari, in acknowledging the need for concentricism in Nigeria's foreign policy states that:

While African remains the centrepiece of our foreign policy, we cannot but operate within a series of concentric circles which now effectively guide our behavior on the African and world scene. The innermost of the circle of National Interests involves Nigeria's security, territorial integrity and political independence and of the neighbours of Nigeria. The second circle involves our relations with the ECOWAS sub-region where we intend to take more active interest in development of social, economic and political nature. Nigeria is not a global power, therefore, our commitments, pre-occupation and expenditure of our resources must be made to reflect our capabilities and interests. It is for this reason that our primary focus is on the West African Sub – region since any event occurring in this has an impact directly on Nigeria's interest. The third circle of national interest involved supporting self-determination and dealing with larger African issues (Dauda 2006:54).

Gone with the winds was the general concept of Africa "is the centre piece of our foreign policy". Henceforth, Nigeria's relations with fellow African countries were to be defined largely in terms of Nigeria's national interest first and, financial resources to deliver second (Dauda 2006:54). Nigeria's relations with her neighbours were to be conducted purely in terms of gains and losses (Akinrinade 1992:52). This was first demonstrated by the Buhari regime, when it closed land borders which in the view of Gambari, was done to put economic interest of our people first and for security reasons (Newswatch, 4 March, 2005:14). The overriding national interest was in fact, the impetus that made General Sani Abacha to turn the diplomatic beam light to the East. Professor Bolaji Akinyemi's theory of reciprocity contains elements of concentricism – emphasis mine (Obiozor, 1993:24).

IV. A Critical Appraisal Of Concentricism In Nigeria's Foreign Policy

Putting in place a viable policy framework is imperative. In other words, without a well-fashioned and articulated foreign policy framework, a nation would only be heading to a cul-de-sac in international diplomacy. According to Adeniji (2005:23), unless there is a periodic review and restatement of foreign policy goals and objectives, the response by any nation to the challenges posed by changing international situations would be conducted in a haphazard manner.

It has been emphasized in this write-up over and over again that Nigerian foreign policy hinges on the fact of elevating the welfare of her citizens over and above other considerations. The prioritization of citizen welfare is to strengthen the value of national interests. However, in the conduct of Nigeria's foreign policy the demarcation among the layers has remained blurred.

Adeniji has stated that:

In implementation reality however, the line between the centre of the concentric circles and the outer ones have remain blurred; and the anti-colonial and anti-apartheid focus dominated all other considerations, including Nigeria's interests. Enormous resources were committed to the cause of Africa (Adeniji 2005: 39 – 40).

The vagueness in the implementation of the principle of concentricism in Nigeria's foreign policy has been viewed in many quarters as having a detrimental effect on the inner circle of the concentric circles. In other words, there are many steps that the country took in international diplomacy which were clearly not in the national interest. This partly stemmed from continuities and discontinuities in the Nigerian foreign policy brought about by rapid turnover of regimes in the country.

General Babangida, whose regime was confronted with the Liberian conflict, had argued that:

The ECOWAS Region Constitutes what has been termed the three concentric circles governing Nigerian foreign policy and defence policies – there is therefore no gain saying the fact that when certain events occur in this region depending upon their intensity and magnitudes where bound to affect Nigeria's policies – Military and socio-economic environment, we should not stand – by as a hapless and helpless spectators. We believe that if the events are such that have the potentials to threaten the stability, peace and security of the sub-region, Nigeria is duty bound to react to either avert and disaster or to take adequate measures to ensure peace, tranquility and harmony (Bassey, 2011:7)

With ECOMOG's efforts under Nigeria leadership, the Liberian Conflict was eventually resolved and on August, 2, 1997. Charles Taylor was sworn in as President (Ali, 2012:50).

In many respect, the Sierra Leone Conflict was an overflow of the Liberian Civil War (George, 2012:400). President Ahmed Tejjan Kabbah, invited ECOWAS to help restore him to power after the military overthrew his government. The ECOWAS mandate in Liberia was expanded and notwithstanding the difficulties and cost; Nigeria, Ghana and Guinea contributed troops. Thus, Nigeria's immense contribution in men, money and material made it possible for ECOWAS to achieve its objectives in the two countries (Ali, 2012: 51).

Nigeria has borne the greatest burden in terms of peacekeeping in West Africa. By 1999, it was estimated that Nigeria had committed 13 billion US dollars to peacekeeping operations in West Africa (Bamali, 2009: 1000).

In other troubled sports in West Africa such as Guinea Bissau, Cote d' Ivoire, Togo etc, either through Military intervention or mediation, Nigeria has spent unquantifiable resources both human and materials to ensure peace reigned in the Sub-region. The same situation manifest in other milieu especially economic aspect (Sanda, 2003; Akindele, 2003; Agwai, 2010: 132).

Across Africa, Nigeria's contribution is unparalleled. Since independence, Nigeria has spent unquantifiable amount of money to bring about a Liberated and united Africa. It contributed troops to UN Peacekeeping missions in troubled areas of the world. At a point in Nigeria's diplomatic history it stood over Africa like a Colossus. It indeed was respected or even feared the world over.

However, the pertinent question that remains unresolved is, what benefit has Nigeria derived from her foreign policy? If the theory of concentricism entails that Nigeria's foreign policy ought to be in the national interest, then it is a total failure. This is because Nigeria's diplomatic relations had benefited the outside world than Nigerians.

According to Adeniji (2006: 41) a critical analysis of the Nigerian situation demonstrates that the Nigerian people have not been directly considered as the focus or relevant factor in foreign policy postulations. Modern international relations and foreign policy formulation and implementation is economically driven. That is, if Nigeria, as it were, had spent so much to bring about peace and development across Africa, there would have been derivable benefits from such efforts. For instance, in Liberia, after Nigeria almost single handedly brought peace to that country, Nigeria would have been part of the reconstruction process. This would have, even if the billions spent would have not had something extra added on it, what was spent would have been recovered to be plunged back into national development. The Nigerian situation faces the opposite direction. Overtime, funds meant for national development are spent abroad while absolute poverty rages on in the land. Nigeria had paid the salaries of workers in a couple of African countries while in many states of the country teachers are yet to enjoy the minimum wage; granted loans to a couple of African countries while Nigerian citizens are languishing in absolute poverty.

Our false generosity abroad and penury at home are proofs that we are pretending to be what we are not, because in reality we have been overstretching ourselves. Nigeria, more than any other country in Africa, had contributed to the emancipation of the continent from colonial rule. However, Nigeria suffers rejection wherever they go in Africa. The prime victims of the xenophobic attacks in South Africa were targeted at Nigerians, but here is a country that workers in Nigeria were forced to contribute part of their meager salaries during that country's fight for independence. The late Libyan maximum ruler, Colonel Muamamar Gadafi had sarcastically told the world that Nigeria would divide into two countries on the basis of Christianity and Islam.

According to Daily Trust:

Nigeria recalled its ambassador from Tripoli earlier this month, when Gadafi proposed that Nigeria break for Christians. The Federal Government had said Gadafi's comments were insensitive and irresponsible and 'diminished his status and credibility' (Daily Trust, Tuesday March 20, 2010: 125).

To show that the divisive statement was made deliberately, when Nigeria recalled her ambassador from Libya to show resentment, against the contemptuous statement, the Libyan leader reemphasized that Nigeria would broke into several countries on the basis of ethnic cleavages, equating the Nigerian situation with that of the former Yugoslavia.

Nigerian roads are unfixed, educational system is in shambles, same goes with healthcare system, portable water is unknown to majority of the citizens, agriculture the industry that provides source of livelihood for over 80 percent of the population is yearning for improvement, poverty is staggering etc. yet Nigerian leaders are more concerned with African and world welfare, and had since independence being spending the country's resources for this.

There is no gain – saying that the world has become a global village and it is naïve to expect Nigeria to behave like it is an island. Yet, cognizance must be taken of the fact that in this global community, the game is that of the survival of the fittest. The survival rat race makes it imperative for sustained rationality. For instance, South Africa is said to be the continent's most robust economy, but has inhibited the urge for profligacy in the name of propping up the African project. Perhaps, it has realized that in the contemporary world, it is a country's economic and military muscle that commands respect from other nations. It has worked committedly along this line and it has attracted reverence for itself. The United States of America would not have been sacrificing to keep world peace just for the sake of it.

While Nigeria should not sit on the fence in world diplomacy, rationality should be the watch word. As Adeniji (2005:42) has pointed out, in practical terms, the country should through her foreign policy, strive to kill two birds with one stone. That is playing her leadership role and at the same time, strengthening the natural base requirement. Adeniji had advocated the concept of "Beneficial Concentricism", that is that Nigeria' bilateral and multilateral relations with other countries must be beneficial to the country and her people. This theory seeks to remove the 'Father Charismas' diplomacy Nigeria now practice which has become among the factors that are sapping the economy with the attendant increased poverty.

Nigeria had granted a four billion and two billion naira loans to Ghana and Sao Tome and Principe respectively. According to Adeniji (2000:43), the deal was done in the right direction, since Nigeria is expected to benefit from it. For the Ghanaian deal it is for execution of the West African pipeline project. When completed, it would help in gas distribution from Nigeria to other countries in the sub-region, thus, boosting Nigeria's gas export. Turning to the two billion naira loan granted to Sao Tome and Principe, it is for a joint venture agreement whereby Nigeria could provide the expertise and operational workforce for the Sao Tome and Principe oil and gas venture.

In the same vein, Nigeria's intervention in the Dafur Region in the Sudan should bring economic benefits for the country. Mistakes of the past where Nigeria would spend huge resources to bring peace and stability to a country while other countries would come in to reap benefits like it did happen in Liberia should be avoided.

The paradox of the Nigerian situation is that those countries that Nigeria sacrificed enormously to uplift have become globally accepted and respected much to the consternation of the country. South Africa presents a good example. That Ghana has also become the toast of the West is another good point.

In two days, President Barak Obama will travel to Egypt to deliver a speech on the US – Muslim world relationship before visiting Ghana on 10 – 11 July on his maiden official trip to Sub – Saharan Africa. White House press Secretary Robert Gibbs avowal that "the President and Mrs. Obama look forward to strengthening the US relationship with one of our most trusted partners in Sub-Saharan African and to highlighting the crucial role that sound governance and civil society play in promoting lasting development was not a direct rebuke of Nigeria. However, Gibb's words resonated for what he did not say; Nigeria no longer enjoys a most trusted partner status. Add to that is the fact that President Jakaya Kikwete of Tanzania become the first African head of state invited to the Obama White House. Until recently such honours were in African context, reserved for Nigeria. In fact, President George W. Bush's first visit to Africa in July, 2003 was to Senegal, South Africa, Botswana, Uganda and Nigeria, but not Ghana (Obaze, Seionnoseaoi.com).

It therefore means that for the ordinary Nigerian, concentric foreign policy many not make any meaning; it can only be adjudged as beneficial to the extent to which the Nigerian quality of life is impacted in the final analysis. To this extent, concentricism in the Nigerian diplomacy and foreign policy still remains rhetorical.

V. Suggestions

The economic development and well-being of Nigeria should henceforth be the mainstay of our foreign policy. In the name of African unity and good neighbourhood, Nigeria has sacrificed a lot and continues to sacrifice for our continent. That is praiseworthy but most African countries seemed to have forgotten the sacrifices made by Nigeria to bring them out of their woes. Liberians and Sierra Leoneans have forgotten the loss of lives by Nigerian soldiers in the efforts to defend unity and peace in those countries. Though Africa should not be forgotten, Nigeria's interests should come first in all our foreign policy analysis and decisions.

In the field of defence, which is very important in foreign policy, what is our defence policy? Does it simply mean protecting the integrity of the country against whom? In short, who are our friends? What type of relations should we have with all our French – speaking neighbouring countries considering that all of them have over thirty years old defence and military pacts with France, (Ostensibly against Nigeria) one of the world's leading military and industrial powers? These questions need to be answered.

The nitty-gritty of economic diplomacy is the management of Nigeria's bilateral and multilateral economic relations to expand areas of mutual benefit. Economic diplomacy has guided Nigerian's External relations with African countries and this is manifest in the areas of trade, economic co-operation and technical assistance. Nigeria played an invaluable role in the eradication of colonialism and apartheid in South Africa. But what economic or social dividends has the nation reaped for liberating Africa. Today, the dynamics of world diplomacy have made it imperative for Nigeria to adopt multilateralism, with the welfare of her citizens and the health of the economy as her overriding national interest.

The citizenship diplomacy should not remain at the level of the rhetoric. Infrastructure in terms of creating the conducive environment for citizens living abroad to contribute to the overall development of the country should form part of Nigeria's foreign policy. Where necessary, they could take advantage of their exposure to utilize opportunities created by the Nigeria's diplomacy.

Modern diplomacy has no room for naivety. Foreign policy making is a serious business if it must match the sophistication of what exist in the international arena. Consequently, although it is primarily a foreign ministry affair, looking at the performance of Nigeria international diplomacy, the imperative of synergy has become indispensable. Thus, internal actors such as the president, the foreign minister, ambassadors and embassies abroad, 'the press and the business community should be involved in the foreign policy formulation process'. The armed forces, the public though civil society organizations all, to some extent, be allowed input. Foreign policy making should not be hastily done, except in cases that require emergencies.

If the Gadafis can, through words and deeds confront Nigeria in the glare of the world unprovoked and South Africa and Egypt are telling the world without mincing words that they were the ones qualified to hold the security portfolio in the UN for Africa and Charles Taylor can tell Nigeria to get out of Liberia after the former helped restore peace in Liberia, and in the early 1980s Libya could draft its army to Chad unilaterally and independently when Nigeria's troops were already stationed there, it shows that Nigeria's contribution to the prosperity of Africa has not been valued by the continent. Let Nigeria withdraw into her shell. During the diplomatic re-incubation, Nigeria should concentrate on building a strong economy and a robust army. The period should be one of red alert devoted to repelling any spoil-over of instability from any of the country's neighbours. Cameroon, Niger, Chad, Benin and even far away Guinea could be burning to ashes. Our concern should only be that of looking up our borders. Buhari did it effectively. It is still doable. External relations during this period should only be devoted to promoting economic growth. Let this period span through ten years, with re-evaluation carried out at the end of the day. Notes would be compiled with a view to re-stratigizing. It is not being advocated that Nigeria should abdicate or chicken out of her leadership role in Africa. What is being emphasized is that the theory of reciprocity should be seen as handy in the new paradigm. And finally, adequate funding of Nigeria's diplomatic missions abroad should be prioritized.

VI. Conclusion

The implementation of the concentric circles in Nigeria's foreign policy since independence is skewed to the detriment of the country's national interests. Nigeria has spent enormous resources for the independence of some African countries and to end apartheid in South Africa. Nigeria has contributed to peace in the West African sub- region, African as a whole and the entire world through various regional, continental and global bodies, yet the country has not enjoyed and benefit from her commitments. It is obvious that the country is enjoying global contempt rather than the deserved respect. Nigeria needs to return a new leaf by way of redefining her foreign policy such that the difference between the three or four concentric circles would be made clear. When this is done, it would place the country in a good stead to pursue her foreign policy in tandem with modern diplomacy which places high premium on national interest. Nigeria should recognize the fact that even the United States, reputed to be the largest economy in the world does not play "Father Christmas" in international diplomacy. The United State foreign policy since that country's independence has never operated at variance with national interests.

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