

NIGERIA'S AFRO-CENTRIC FOREIGN POLICY; AN ABERRATION IN THE PRINCIPLE AND PRACTICE OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS?

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Abstract

Nigeria got independence and qualified to conduct foreign policy as a sovereign state in 1960. At independence, Nigeria chose Africa as the centrepiece of her foreign policy. For about 50 years of Nigeria's existence, Africa was meticulously observed as the centrepiece of her foreign policy. Against international relations principles, this choice of Nigeria's foreign policy is an aberration in international relations. The focus of every state's foreign policy is the interest and welfare of the state which is the centrepiece of each state's foreign policy before the consideration of general or long-term interests – where supposedly, Africa falls within the realm of Nigeria's national interest. From the standpoint of the realist school of thought, this research investigates if, Africa as the centrepiece of Nigeria's foreign policy is in line with the known principles and practices of international relations. The study adopts secondary source of data collection while content analysis was deployed to distil the data collected. The findings of the research were that, given the existing circumstances in the international system as at 1960 when Nigeria gained independence vis-à-vis the bipolar nature of the system, Africa as the centrepiece of Nigeria's foreign policy was adopted based on the leaders' limited knowledge of the principles guiding international relations. Also, the research found out that the concept still looms large in Nigeria's foreign policy vocabularies although the practice is no longer as it were during the Cold War and during Apartheid Policies in Southern Africa. It concludes that Africa is not supposed to be the centrepiece of Nigeria's foreign policy because states' central focus in international relations is their safety and the interest of her citizens as a priority before considering sub-regional, regional, or global concerns. Consequently, it is a misnomer for Africa to be the centrepiece, epic, or priority of Nigeria's foreign policy.

Introduction.

Africa is a continent made up of over fifty countries. In Africa's international relations, Nigeria has been outstanding. At independence in 1960, Nigeria emphasized the place of Africa in the priority list of her foreign policy principles, objectives, and practice. The implication was that Nigeria attached much importance to Africa as a continent, supported states undergoing marginalization from colonial masters within Africa, and showed commitment to the welfare of African individuals suffering racism in Africa and the globe. Unfortunately, however, Nigeria seemed to pay little attention to the unjust treatment of African governments against their own people (African ethnic minorities) by their governments or even treatment of Nigerians, at home and abroad. Indeed, for the sake of African states, Nigeria was willing, ready, and indeed sacrificed resources, human and materials, without expecting anything in return except the ego of

being the “giant of Africa” or “big brother of Africa” at the detriment of Nigeria and Nigerians. While Nigeria chose to and adopted such policy, in an international system dominated and guided by national interest amidst “self-help” strategies adopted by other states to realize their interests, as espoused by the rationalists, is what elicited the interest in conducting this study.

At this juncture, it is important to emphasize that from the time Nigeria got independence to date, she had no foreign policy vision, mission, or strategies to dominate Africa to her (Nigeria’s) advantage. That notwithstanding, she (Nigeria) chose to make the continent the centrepiece of her foreign policy. By this policy, Nigeria accepted Africa and whatever affects it as the cornerstone of her foreign policy. Meanwhile, an analysis of the foreign policies of the United States and or the Soviet Union that desired and designed programmes to dominate the globe, during the Cold War, indicate that they (individually) made the security of their states and welfare of their citizens the centre of their foreign policies. This practice is different from Nigeria’s stance on Africa even when she had no desire to dominate Africa. This work interrogates the circumstances behind the Nigerian leaders’ adoption and sustenance of Africa as the centrepiece of her foreign policy at independence and thereafter as against the practice in international relations. This is important, especially, given that all states are eager and indeed, guarded jealously, their national interest of protecting themselves and their citizens first before attending to general or long-term interests. Equally, the work interrogates into, why after several decades of existence, Nigeria and her leaders still believe and argue that Africa is the centrepiece of her (Nigeria’s) foreign policy. Hence, the objectives of this studies are to:

1. examine the circumstances behind the adoption of Africa as the centrepiece of Nigeria’s foreign policy.
2. determine if Africa as the centrepiece of Nigeria’s foreign policy in 1960 and beyond is a misplacement of priority of Nigeria’s basic interest; and
3. investigate if Africa is still the centrepiece of Nigeria’s foreign policy today especially when Nigeria’s interests are involved *vis-a-vis* Africa’s interest.

To achieve the objectives of these research, the following questions are raised:

1. What were the circumstances surrounding the adoption of Africa as the centrepiece of Nigeria’s foreign policy?
2. Is “Africa as the centrepiece of Nigeria’s foreign policy” as adopted in 1960 and beyond a misplacement of Nigeria’s basic national interest?
3. When African State[s]’s interest contradicts Nigeria’s interest in today’s international relations, which takes precedence?

For a better guide to the study, lets examine realism and national interest in Nigeria’s foreign policy.

Realism, National Interest and Nigeria’s foreign policy

In international relations, the foreign policy of a state is a product of her national interest. For the realists, “whatever enhances or preserves a state’s security, its influence, military, and economic power’ (Rourke 2008, 22) is her national interest. Thus, national interest is all about national

security that is secured through power. The realists equate national interest to anything that enhances state power and security. That was why Morgenthau (1993, 5) argues that “statesmen think and act in terms of interest defined as power”. Thus, power is the key, subject, and object of national interest. Consequently, [b]ecause power is necessary to obtain any other goal, Morgenthau reasoned, every state’s national interest boils down simply to getting more power (D’Anieri 2010, 65). That makes powerful “leaders to focus on interests rather than ideology, and to realise that great powers can coexist even if they have antithetical values and beliefs” (Dunne 1999, 110). It was on this background that we set out to find out if Nigeria leaders, at independence, observed this in the formulation of Nigeria’s national interest and foreign policy. Incidentally, national interest suffers from a single accepted definition. Its makeup or ingredients are more controversial than the definition. That notwithstanding, national interest embodies the very essence of the state. In its simplistic form, it is “that which is most advantageous to the country as a whole” (Frost 1997, 232). It is all actions, policies, programmes aimed at sustaining the existence of the state and to better the living condition of the citizens at home and abroad. It may also include “the defence of the territorial integrity of other states” (Okolie and Nnoli 2007, 76) and the international system. It performs three functions: “the aspirational, the operational, and the polemic” (Frankel 1973, 78). Hence, Nigeria’s national interest are those interests of the state which enhances her survival and sustenance politically, economically, strategically, socially, and religiously as well as promotes the wellbeing of the citizens, at home and abroad. It includes but not limited to the following: national sovereignty, national ideology, national self-preservation, national defence and security, national economic well-being, national cultural preservation, regional and international peace as well as national prestige and status. Others may include religious belief systems. The list is in-exhaustive according to the geo-politics and interests prevalent at a given time and space.

On the other hands, Nigeria’s foreign policy originates from and serves her national interest objectives and interests. In other words, Nigeria’s foreign policy is derived from Nigeria’s national interest. Like other states, Nigeria’s national interest objectives is categorized into three: primary/basic interest; secondary/intermediate interest; and general/long-range interest. While primary interest deals with the security and survival of Nigeria as a corporate entity, her secondary interest deals with her disposition towards her citizens at home and abroad, while the general interest deals with her disposition towards the international system i.e., relations at the sub-regional, regional, and global levels.

In 1960 when Nigeria got independence, the Prime Minister, Alhaji Tafawa Balewa enunciated the basic principles upon which Nigeria’s foreign policy would depend. Some of the principles included:

- defence of Nigeria’s sovereignty, territorial integrity, and national independence.
- creation of the necessary economic, political, social, and cultural conditions to secure the independence of Nigeria and other African countries.
- promotion of the rights of all blacks and others under colonial administration.
- promotion of African integration and support for African unity.

- promotion of international cooperation for the consolidation of universal peace built on freedom, mutual respect among all nations, equality for all peoples of the world and elimination of discrimination in all its manifestations.
- respect for the territorial integrity of all nations.
- respect of international law and treaty obligations as well as the seeking of settlement of international disputes by negotiation, mediation, conciliation, arbitration, and adjudication; and
- promotion of a just world economic order (Balewa 1960; Egbo 2003, 36-37; Eke 2009, 13).

It was based on the above principles that the Balewa administration chose Africa as the centrepiece of her foreign policy. The implication was that whatever happens to or affects Africa directly and indirectly affects Nigeria and elicits her immediate and unconditional response as appropriate.

Nigeria's Afro-centric foreign policy

Nigeria's foreign policy since 1960 was Afro-centred. The first Prime Minister, Tafawa Balewa, in his speeches at the floor of the House of Representatives, his independent-day speech, and his acceptance speech at the UN in New York as the 99th member of the organisation, emphasised that issues affecting Africa directly affect Nigeria too. At the UN General Assembly in 1960, Sir Tafawa Balewa informed the world that Nigeria hopes to join others to find solutions to international problems but would dwell on Africa, its immediate neighbourhood (Balewa 1960). By this, the Prime Minister demonstrated the importance Nigeria would attach to Africa's affairs in her foreign policy making and execution. His successor in the Foreign Affairs Ministry, Hon Jaja Wachuku, went further to argue that Africa's affairs are both responsibilities and thrust bestowed on Nigeria by Almighty God and Nigeria would not renege on the responsibility. He explained the rationale behind Nigeria's Afrocentric foreign policy posture arguing that "charity begins at home and therefore any Nigerian foreign policy that does not take into consideration the peculiar position of Africa is unrealistic" (Arhewe 2014; Pine 2011).

It was on the strength of the above convictions that Nigeria packaged Africa and its affairs as the centre of her foreign policy and tackled the African challenges including colonialism, apartheid, racism, poverty, insecurity, *et cetera*. For the sake of Africa, Nigeria befriended her enemies and became enemies to her allies, risking political, economic, and diplomatic support and benefits. For instance, because of Egypt's interest in the Suez Canal as noted by Akinyemi (1980, 108), Nigeria "broke diplomatic ties with Israel and hence sacrificed a beneficial economic and technological relationship. Similarly, Nigeria made huge sacrifices fighting apartheid regimes and other forms of discrimination against blacks anywhere in Africa and the world. For this, many Nigerians agreed with their government on the African centeredness of her foreign policy. Nigeria fought with vigour the oppression of the blacks in Southern Africa to the point that:

Nigeria, as a member of Commonwealth of Nations, mobilised its diplomatic influence in Africa to end the 1975 Angolan Civil war. Nigeria equally extended diplomatic support to Marxist movement in Namibia to stall the apartheid South African installed puppet government. In 1977, the General Olusegun Obasanjo's military regime made a donation of \$20 million dollars to the Zimbabwean

liberation movement. Nigeria also sent military equipment to Mozambique to help the new independent country suppress the South African backed RENAMO guerrillas (Moguluwa and Achor 2013, 143).

Indeed, the dexterity with which Nigeria fought against forces that threatened Africa's freedom made her to be bold enough to challenge her ex-colonial master, whom Nigeria knew, 'first as masters, and then as leaders, and finally as partners, but always as friends' (eternal ally) – as once described by PM Balewa, Britain. Without apologies, Nigeria nationalised two British economic interests in Nigeria, British Petroleum (BP) and Barclays Bank, to protest Britain's support for the apartheid regime and white minority rule in Southern Africa. This decision sent a strong signal to Britain to reconsider their position in supporting apartheid regime in South Africa. Britain felt the pain of losing the two investments in Nigeria. The pain was made worse, when the then British Prime Minister, Margret Thatcher, confronted the then Nigerian Foreign Affairs Minister, General Adefowope, (for an explanation on the reasons for the nationalisation policy by Nigeria at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Lusaka in 1978), the answer was as harsh as the action. He replied to her in strong words thus, "Madam Prime Minister, that is Act 1, Scene 1, many more will follow if you don't play ball on Zimbabwe" (Arhewe 2014). Nigeria did this notwithstanding the fact that cooperation with Britain would have benefitted her more than confrontation. Indeed, Nigeria needed more of British investments in Nigeria for the benefits of its economy and the teeming population looking for jobs. The nationalisation of the two British assets would jeopardize her chances of getting more of such investments. Nigeria was aware of that but took the risk of nationalising the assets as long as her Southern African brothers have dignity in their homelands.

As noted by Moguluwa and Achor (2013), Nigeria was at the frontline for the decolonisation of Africa for the common good – the peace and security of Africa and the respective people concerned. This earned her the status of 'big brother', 'giant of Africa'. Between 1970 and 1980, Nigeria spent over \$61 billion in financial and material aid to the frontline nations of Mozambique, Angola, Zimbabwe, Namibia, and the fight against apartheid (Ibrahim 2010, 58). The support included financial, moral, military, scholarships and so on to fight white minority rule. Similarly, Nigeria did not abandon her African people when South Africa's apartheid regime, using her destabilisation policies in Southern Africa, attacked some areas in the region. For instance, in May 1986, after the bombing of Zambia, Zimbabwe and Botswana by South Africa, Nigeria's Foreign Affairs Minister visited the countries and pledged US\$10 million to them. Nigeria's President in June 1986, promised another \$50 million, to be spread over a five year period to the frontline states and liberation movements in Southern Africa. Between 1986 and 1988, this promise was fulfilled (though \$20 million out of the \$50 million promised was given as at that time) (Asobie 2002, 86).

To make Africa more peaceful and prosperous, Nigeria embraced conflict prevention and peacebuilding measures in Africa. She moved away from merely giving financial aids to needy African countries to offering them technical expertise through the Technical Aid Corps (TAC)

scheme. TAC was introduced in 1987 with the “deployment of one hundred and two volunteers (102) in 1987-1988” (Directorate of Technical Aid Corps 2015) to other African and Third World states where they would work for two years in the first instance. The agreement was that, while the Corp members’ stipends (\$500 monthly to each participant) were paid by the Nigerian government, the recipient states provide them accommodation (Asobie 2002, 89). Nigeria was a good leader and partner ever willing to give out aids and assistances to needy countries with no strings attached. Her strong desire for Africa’s development informed her disposition to institute the Technical Aid Corps (TAC) Scheme. Through the TAC, Nigeria has shared technical know-how and expertise which has only “earned Nigeria good reputation and good name, respect and honour from the ACP countries that are recipients of her foreign policy projects (Moguluwa and Achor 2013, 155).

In a similar vein, Nigeria did not abandon her West African neighbours as they benefitted from her economic, diplomatic, and military largesse been lavished on Africa. Nigeria showed commitment to the welfare of her neighbours notwithstanding the fact that she is surrounded by francophone neighbours; Benin, Cameroon, Chad, Equatorial Guinea, and Niger. This is in spite of the fact that these Francophone countries shared strong ties with France, their ex-colonial master, that dislikes Nigeria’s unity as a state. Nigeria is aware that her immediate neighbours were comparatively weaker and less endowed. From independence, Nigeria assured them that she harbours no territorial expansionist intentions and that their interest would be Nigeria’s interest. For the sake of the security and economic wellbeing of the subregion, Nigeria considers and treats the security of its neighbouring states as having direct bearing on its own security (Akinboye 2002, 248; Osaghae 2010, 39). Hence, Nigeria championed and influenced the formation of Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in 1975. When the need arose, Nigeria demonstrated strong leadership and sacrifice by the creation of ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) in 1990 through which ECOWAS intervened militarily in Liberia and Sierra Leone. By April 1993, Nigeria had 15,000 out of total ECOMOG deployment of 17,000 (Bukarambe 2000, 115). In all ECOMOG operations, Nigeria provided “over 70% of ECOMOG Military and civilian personnel as well as logistical support” (Adeniyi 2015). In Liberia, between 1990 to 1991, Nigeria’s government budgeted for daily allowances alone to the 3500 Nigerian soldiers who served in ECOMOG for five months a total of US\$5.25 million (i.e., \$10 per soldier, per day) (Asobie 2002, 87). The military interventions were estimated to have cost Nigeria “over \$14billion, while she lost up to 1000 soldiers in the operations” (Emeh 2015). In support of peace building and peace-making in the sub-region, Nigeria granted asylum to President Charles Taylor when it became obvious that the states (Liberia, Sierra Leone, and, by extension, the West African sub-region) would not know peace if he was in Liberia.

In analysing Africa as the centrepiece of Nigeria’s foreign policy, scholarly opinions have been divergent. Although this is not the focus of this research, it is still important to digress to ascertain how scholars perceive the policy in Africa. While some authors appreciate Nigeria for their position in Africa, others discredit it as a mere jamboree. Some of the latter’s position is

examined here. Okogwu and Akpuru-Aja described it as being unrealistic and a farce. They argued that “the acceptable doctrine should be that Africa is one, and only one, among other interests, which affect Nigeria’s national interest” (Okogwu and Akpuru-Aja 2004, 63-64). For Okpokpo, the successive military dictators in Nigeria used the concept to draw patronage from other African dictators. In that way, the Nigerian military administrations “used the Africa cornerstone slogan to lure compliant like-minded African regimes to support their unpopular regimes” (Okpokpo 2000, 31). He went on to question why Africa should be the cornerstone of Nigeria’s foreign policy, especially given the lack of respect from the recipients of Nigeria’s generosity. For him, “Does Africa still represent the cornerstone of our foreign policy when we have more respect from other countries than we get from African nations despite our whole-hearted commitment to them?”

For others, Afrocentric foreign policy does not promote Nigeria’s interest (see Garuba, (2005); Al-Hassan (2008); Pine (2011); Nwanolue& Iwuoha (2012); Iganga (2013); etc.). In promoting the philosophy of Africa-centred approach to Nigeria’s foreign policy, “considerations of the economic benefits, continental political leadership, national interests, and military partnerships and strategic engagements are sacrificed on the altar of good neighbourliness and psychological gratification no matter how conceptually lush it may be, it remains substantially empty” (Pine 2011; Wogu, Sholarin and Chidozie 2015, 140). In fact, Nigeria’s African centeredness “has not served the national interest in a commensurate measure” (Nwanolue and Iwuoha 2012, 82) compared to the resources deployed. Indeed, Al-Hassan (2008) noted that the scale of such expenditure greatly hurts our domestic aspirations. After colonisation was defeated in Africa, Nigeria’s commitment to Africa did not wane down. Rather than any significant change,

paradoxically, the nation became more involved in the African agenda. It could therefore be noted that Nigeria’s role and initiative in drawing up the Constitutive Act of African Union (AU), The New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) and the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) have greatly engrossed the country even more deeply into African Affairs. Also under NEPAD, Nigeria initiated Joint Africa / G8 plan to enhance Africa’s capability to undertake peace support operations. In addition to the above endeavours, Nigeria’s high-profile engagement in the continent continued with several summits and conferences such as the Roll-Back Malaria Summit held in Abuja on 24th August, 2000; which was closely followed by the HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Infectious Diseases Summit also held in Abuja in 2001. While these engagements are worthy undertakings, they however, tend to suck Nigeria intimately into the un-ending African problems (Wogu, Sholarin and Chidozie 2015, 143).

Incidentally, as noted by Wogu, Sholarin and Chidozie that Nigeria’s engagement “sucks Nigeria” as cited above, Nigerian leaders and foreign policy makers remained adamant in their pursuit of Afro-centric foreign policy even when there were no commensurate benefits accruable to the state or the citizens from such benevolent gestures. On some occasions when Nigerian

leaders tried to shift the focus of the foreign policy and were met with some agitations, incidentally, from other African states and concerned citizens, rather than the government arguing that it is the standard of international engagements to promote her immediate national interest, the government and her officials were apologetic. For instance, when economic diplomacy was introduced and emphasised in Nigeria's foreign policy – occasioned by the economic challenges of the country, rather than place the rationale for the introduction by the Gen. Babangida administration as a deliberate policy of the government to resuscitate the ailing economy due to, in part, Nigeria's disagreement with the West – Britain and United States – over their position in South African apartheid regime and policy, the foreign Affairs Minister – Gen. Ike Nwachukwu (Rtd.) “denounced the idea of Nigeria abandoning the Afro-centred foreign policy-, arguing that since the apartheid policy was already coming to an end, Nigeria had to switch from the political thrust we placed on our foreign relations as the motive for economic development” (Ogo and Nwokike 2021; Ogwu and Olukoshi 2002). The implication is that rather than making a conscious policy that would see Nigeria and Nigerians as the centre of Nigeria's foreign policy, Africa was still but occasionally displaced when Nigeria's challenges are enormous that the leaders could no longer avoid the obvious.

Is Africa worth being the centrepiece of Nigeria's Foreign Policy?

This section takes care of the first and second objectives of the research which is to find out the circumstances behind the adoption of Africa as the centrepiece of Nigeria's foreign policy” as adopted in 1960 and if it was a misplacement of Nigeria's basic national interest. The primary interest of every state, the centrepiece of every state's foreign policy, is the security of its territory, the citizens, and their property. It is important to note that when Nigeria gained independence in 1960, that is - during the Cold War, the international system was bipolar, polarised between the United States-led West and the Soviet Union-led East while the neutral but weak third force, the Non-aligned Movement, was at its infancy. The contrasting division of the international system based on two major ideological rivals and a third force that could not become a balancing force created the tensions that enveloped the international system. It is important to note here that although both the United States and the Soviet Union had a vision and mission to dominate the international system, none made the international system the centrepiece of her foreign policy. Both countries deployed enormous resources targeting the international system, but none lost consciousness of its primary interest or sacrificed its basic interest at the fight for the soul of the international system, even when the achievement would have enhanced their status in the international system. It is for the same reason that, in the late 1980s, when the Soviet Union discovered that her interest in the international system was hurting her domestic wellbeing, she looked inwards and introduced two twin programmes, *Perestroika* and *Glasnost* to strengthen and reposition herself based on the priorities of her national interest – to protect her sovereignty as well as provide for her citizens. In other words, although both countries were conscious of their national interests in the international system, Soviet Union had to reduce her international engagements to respond to and achieve the centrepiece of her foreign policy i.e., preserving her sovereignty and repackaging her domestic political and economic policies in the interest of her citizens against the odds of the international system.

Nigeria's commitment to Africa as the thrust of her foreign policy in 1960 was based on altruism. Nigeria had no ulterior motif of strategic or economic gain in her relationship with other African states, which was a standard deviation from the normal reasons for states' engagement in foreign policy. She saw her role in Africa as a "big brother" being the giant of Africa. To emphasise more on this, the then foreign Affairs Minister, Jaja Wachuku argued that Africa was a divine responsibility of Nigeria, and she cannot do anything else than satisfy it. Asobie (2010, 2) described the period when this policy was adopted as 'an age of innocence' in the history of Nigeria's diplomacy. However, it would be important to ascertain if indeed, they undertook the policy based on innocence or based on other circumstances beyond their control. This study believes that the decision to adopt Africa as the centrepiece of Nigeria's foreign policy was based on the limited knowledge of the policy makers, as at the time of independence, about the principles guiding international relations. This is evident in the fact that after independence, Nigeria retained a British expatriate as a foreign policy advisor. Secondly, the opinion of Nigerian experts in the field of International Politics and Relations were not sought before the decision was taken.

Similarly, it is evident that the Prime Minister rebuffed all entreaties from the opposition in the House of Representatives for a deliberation of the House Members on what should be the principles of Nigeria's foreign policy arguing that the decision is for the government of the day. This gives credence to Asobie's position that since the dawn of independence and subsequent years thereafter, 'Nigeria's national interest has been defined or determined mostly by the executive arm of the State' (Asobie, 2010, 7). The implication is that the decision to adopt Africa as the centrepiece of Nigeria's foreign policy was determined and adopted by the Prime Minister, Alhaji Tafawa Balewa, who doubled as the first Nigeria's Minister of External Affairs and Commonwealth relations. His successor, Hon. Jaja Wachuku, merely continued with the policies, expanding the practice notwithstanding the obvious lacuna inherent in it with regards to standard international practices.

Taken as given above that the two foreign policy makers, especially the Prime Minister who, Pine (2020) described as 'The Philosopher-King of Nigerian Foreign Policy' were instrumental to Nigeria's adoption of Africa as the centrepiece of her foreign policy. At this juncture, it is important to peruse into the qualifications that enabled the key policy makers to make such decision on-behalf of Nigeria. This is important to determine whether that decision was made as the best choice for Nigeria based on principles governing international relations or based on the prejudices of the decision makers.

Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa was a teacher who 'attended Katsina Teacher Training College (1928- 1933) and graduated with a third-class certificate' (Umar 2011, 5). In 1944, he was enrolled at the University of London and studied education (Pine 2020, 67). He rose through the ranks and was appointed Headmaster and later Inspector of Schools. On the other hand, Jaja Wachuku who took over the foreign affairs ministry from him was a lawyer. He was educated at Government College, Umuahia, Higher College Yaba, New Africa University College, Angola, Trinity College, Dublin University. Although he had the knowledge of international law and

became ‘a research fellow at the Department of International Law, Trinity College’, Wunmi (2018) notes that Wachuku was only interested in “The Juristic Status of Protectorates in International Law.” The obvious is that the Prime Minister who midwived the principles of Nigeria’s foreign policy, described as ‘The Philosopher-King of Nigerian Foreign Policy’ (Pine 2020), was not educated in or an expert in International Relations or Affairs. Hence, he adopted, using idealist principle, what the realist principle provided a clearer and better guide, Africa as the centrepiece of Nigeria’s foreign policy in Nigeria’s engagement with the international system.

Similarly, Hon. Wachuku who succeeded him in Foreign Affairs Ministry did not consider it imperative to emphasise the position of basic national interest in the conduct of Nigeria’s foreign policy with Africa ostensibly because he was either not interested or was not ready to challenge the position already adopted by his boss, the Prime Minister. To worsen matters, there was no professional institutional framework to contribute and give direction to the formation principles of Nigeria’s foreign policy. The Nigeria Institute of International Affairs established in 1961 as the policy think-tank for the Nigeria’s foreign policy makers was formed after the principles of Nigeria’s foreign policy had already been articulated and enunciated by the Prime Minister, Alhaji Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa. The implication is that the Nigeria’s foreign policy think-tank institution did not advice for or against nor contribute to the adoption of Africa as the centrepiece of Nigeria’s foreign policy. Whether they advised against it thereafter or not is not the focus of this study but what is pertinent is that notwithstanding its formation, Nigeria continued with Africa as the centrepiece of her foreign policy in principle and in practice.

This work believes that the Nigerian foreign policy makers in 1960 erred in international relations by adopting “Africa as the centrepiece of her foreign policy” perhaps due to their limited knowledge of the principles and practice of international relations in the international system. This is obvious when we look at the practices of United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War and even after as analysed earlier in this work. While this work has, in no way, argued that African issues and affairs be abandoned by Nigeria as the ‘giant of Africa’, it believes strongly that making Africa the cornerstone of her foreign policy is against international relations principles and practice. Indeed, such is an aberration in the principle and practice of international relations. This is important because even when hegemon advance their hegemonic ambitions in their geographical hemisphere and beyond, they do so conscious and mindful of their primary interest – the protection of the interest of their state and the citizens. Nonetheless, in this case, Nigeria was not on a mission or vision of becoming a hegemon within the African hemisphere.

Is Africa still the centrepiece of Nigeria’s Foreign policy?

After the decolonisation and end of apartheid in Africa, Nigeria seemed to have redressed her steps in adopting Africa as the centrepiece of her foreign policy. She decided to repackage the centrepiece of her foreign policy on the country itself. Nigeria chose to make herself the centre of her foreign policy while still not abandoning the interest of Africa. The then Nigeria’s foreign Affairs minister assured that “[m]aking Nigeria our primary focus in terms of issues bordering on our national security, economic prosperity, youth unemployment and infrastructural development, does not translate to a reduction of our commitment to Africa (Ashiru 2013). He acknowledged

that the decision was “in response to ... the global realities and changing times”. For the first time, the Nigerian government acknowledged this aberration of making Africa the centrepiece of Nigeria’s foreign policy in clear terms. The decision to ‘fall in-line’ with global principles and practices of international relations is important because, as noted by Enuka (2023, 290), national interests of states is defined and appreciated within the context of the foreign policy objectives of the state. To that effect, the national interest of Nigeria, preserving her security and securing the wellbeing of her citizens, became a strong factor that conditioned her choice of the centrepiece of the state’s foreign policy and relations.

The above leads us to the task of determining if ‘when Africa’s or African State[s]’s interest contradicts the safety of Nigeria or interest of Nigerians, which takes precedence?’ The answer is simple, based on our earlier analysis, – Nigeria and Nigerians’ interest take precedence. This means that Africa is no longer the centrepiece of Nigeria’s foreign policy but Nigeria and Nigerians. Hence, Nigeria introduced Citizens Diplomacy in her foreign policy principle and approach to international relations. Citizen’s diplomacy in Nigeria’s foreign policy was a fall-out of the criticisms by Nigerians against their government’s over-centeredness on African issues at the expense of her citizens (Ogo, 2018:223). Citizen diplomacy was to compliment economic diplomacy that was introduced by the Gen. Babangida’s administration as soon as apartheid South Africa was dismantled. Citizens’ diplomacy in Nigeria’s foreign policy today is a principle and a strategy. A principle entrenched in her foreign policy package aimed at ensuring that Nigerians are the centre piece of Nigeria’s foreign policy (Maduekwe 2007, 13; Eke 2009, 73; Pine 2011; Ashiru 2013, Ogo, 2018). According to the then Foreign Affairs Minister, it simply means that Nigeria’s foreign policy shall be of positive impact on the lives of Nigerians “with the prospects to put food on their tables” (Maduekwe 2009, 13).

As a strategy, Nigeria created the Nigeria Diaspora Commission to ensure the implementation of the policy to the later. The then chairman of the House of Representatives Committee on Diaspora, Abike Dabiri-Erewa, told *National Mirror*, that “the people must come first, so Nigerians at home and those in Diaspora should be the centre of our policy thrust” (Arhewe 2014). The House Committee Chairman later became the Chairman of the Diaspora Commission and pursued, with vigour, the interest of Nigeria and Nigerians all over the world, in Asia, Europe, Americas and even Africa. To that effect, Africa as the centrepiece of Nigeria’s foreign policy has been replaced by Citizens’ diplomacy in Nigeria’s foreign policy engagements. Hence, while Africa is still a priority in Nigeria’s national interest, it is obvious that it is no longer her basic interest. The introduction of citizens diplomacy and the vigour with which Nigeria’s foreign policy makers pursue issues related to it indicates that, from the Yar’Adua’s administration to the present, the Nigerian leaders have understood, repositioned, and undertaken to pursue Nigeria’s vital interest in the international system. This vital interest of Nigeria is Nigeria and Nigerians, not Africa. Subsequently, the centrepiece of Nigeria’s foreign policy, given the principle and practice of International Relations, is and should continue to be, Nigeria and Nigerans. Anything else to the contrary is an aberration to the principles governing the practice of International Relations.

Summary/Conclusion

This work set out to investigate the circumstances surrounding the adoption of Africa as the centrepiece of Nigeria's foreign policy in 1960, to determine if it was the standard practice of international relations and to ascertain if it is still the practice in Nigeria's foreign policy making and implementation. The work discovered that Nigeria's adoption of the policy in 1960 was due to the limited knowledge of the then Political leaders in-charge of Nigeria's foreign policy. The work observed that the practice contradicts the standard norm and practice of states in their pursuit of foreign policy objectives and interests, especially as propounded by the realists. Having recognised this, though after long years of lavishing Nigeria's wealth pursuing 'big brother status' in Africa, Nigeria adopted economic and citizen diplomacy as the new focus of Nigeria's foreign policy. In conclusion, this work argues that 'Africa as the centrepiece of Nigeria's foreign policy' is an aberration in the principle and practice of international relations. It suggests that Nigeria's political leaders should always consult institutions and experts who are knowledgeable in the standard practices in International Relations before adopting foreign policy principles that would hurt the country in its practice.

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