

**AN ANALYSIS OF NIGERIAN FOREIGN POLICY:
The Evolution of Political Paranoia**

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OCCASIONAL PAPER

GELEENTHEIDSPUBLIKASIE



**DIE SUID-AFRIKAANSE INSTITUUT VAN INTERNASIONALE AANGELEENTHEDE
THE SOUTH AFRICAN INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS**

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ISBN : 0 908371 11X

The South African Institute of International Affairs
Jan Smuts House
P O Box 31596
BRAAMFONTEIN
2017

April 1983

THE FUNDAMENTALS OF NIGERIAN FOREIGN POLICY

At independence in 1960, the Nigerian state represented a contrived federal balance between three ethnically and politically divided federal states. The political rivalry and tension between the three factions precluded the evolution of any specific 'Nigerian ideology or doctrine' and the emergence of any single charismatic national leader (as was the case in most other emergent African states) who could be identified as the 'voice of Nigeria'.

Thus, the characteristic conservatism of Nigerian foreign policy at independence, often interpreted as weakness or lack of sovereignty (Prime Minister Balewa was patronisingly referred to as the "golden voice of Africa"), is more realistically ascribed to the uncertainty of the Nigerian political leadership's domestic political footing. In formulating foreign policy the leadership elite was faced with the dilemma of internal disunity and a patently contrived and unstable federal political balance. In order to bridge the cleavage between internal divisiveness and the wider notion of 'Nigerianism', the political leadership (in view of the lack of any characteristic or cohesive Nigerian nationalism) sought to project Nigeria's external objectives into a wider pan-Africanist framework.

An 'African consciousness' (far stronger than any 'Nigerian consciousness') had been a motivating force of the pre-independence nationalist movement and was thus a major influence in the political leadership's ideological perception and socio-political experience. The inability of the leadership to draw upon any national value hierarchy or national objective in the formulation of an international 'role' which would enjoy the united support of the Nigerian nation (and, thereby, consolidate the domestic political stability), made a close commitment to the more abstract, and less domestically sensitive, continental whole inevitable.

Nigeria's declared policy motivation, as a result, was scarcely distinguishable from that of Africa as a whole :

"... Nigeria is an African nation, it is part and parcel of that continent of Africa and therefore it is so completely involved in anything that pertains to that continent that it cannot be neutral and must never be considered as a neutralist country ... We are independent in everything but neutral in nothing that affects the destiny of Africa".⁽¹⁾

At independence the Nigerian political leadership elite was made up of an alliance of conservative political parties.⁽²⁾ While there is no doubt as to the perception of the international role which the Nigerian leadership considered the country predestined and ably endowed to play, such perceptions were only asserted with any measure of conviction in the domestic constituency.

Africa has replaced the Middle East as the mediator between East and West in world affairs. I think ... there will be a vacuum unless it is filled with some idea, and the idea we suggest is militant pan-Africanism, a union of African peoples. People say that leadership is the birthright of this country ...⁽³⁾

... Nigeria ... is the largest single unit in Africa ... (and so) must lead Africa ... and we are not going to abdicate the (leadership) position in which God Almighty has placed us.⁽⁴⁾

Nigeria is destined to lead Africa ... black Africa as a whole to the total emancipation of all our peoples.⁽⁵⁾

... if we appear well meaning to the countries of Africa, there is no reason why they should not give us our recognised position by virtue of our size and population ..."⁽⁶⁾

Statements of foreign policy were vague and unspecific as to Nigeria's aspired role in the external environment and centred on the notion of "pursuit of the national interest" which, although repeatedly referred to as the sole parameter of Nigerian external interaction, remained undefined and intangible.

In formulating its policy for the conduct of foreign affairs, the Federal Government recognises that its primary duty is to safeguard and promote the interests of the Federation and of its citizens. We have already declared our intention of applying to join both the Commonwealth and the United Nations ... we shall nevertheless have a free hand to select those policies which we consider to be most advantageous for Nigeria, subject always to our belief in the principles of the United Nations.

We shall, of course, endeavour to remain on friendly terms with every nation which respects and recognises our sovereignty, we shall not blindly follow the lead of anyone ... We consider it wrong for the Federal Government to associate itself as a matter of routine with any of the power blocs. Our policies ... will be founded on Nigeria's interests, and will be consistent with the moral and democratic principles on which our constitution is based.⁽⁷⁾

The vague and abstract nature of the stated policy objectives may be seen as an attempt to transpose the inherently conservative Nigerian nationalist objectives ("sovereignty", "self-reliance", "equality") to the wider African and global plane and thereby formalize the image which the Nigerian leadership elite perceived as being rightfully Nigerian, but lacked the ideological wherewithal to reinforce.

This inability to create an ideological or doctrinal linkage between the Nigerian leadership's perception of the country's predestined leadership role in Africa and its perception of the external environment may be ascribed principally to the constraints of internal instability. However, on a secondary level, we argue first, that the leadership elite perceived their foreign policy options to be limited by a degree of historical determinism, which dictated a strong practical (economic) and psychological commitment to Britain (and by extension, the West). In the post-independence 'Cold-War' milieu, this fact compromised any doctrinaire devotion to non-alignment. Secondly, that newly independent Nigeria found itself curiously isolated in West African regional terms, in as much as its natural ally, Ghana, under Nkrumah, was politically opposed to the Nigerian Government and in collusion with opposition political factions.

Moreover, the Nigerian leadership (being a conservative alliance) was ideologically opposed to, and resented the vociferous recalcitrance of Nkrumah. Kwame Nkrumah, and to a lesser degree Mobida Keita of Mali and Sekou Toure of Guinea, by means of the rhetoric of intransigence, had effectively usurped the political leadership in Africa, and thus constrained Nigeria in its foreign policy options.

Furthermore, Nigeria perceived itself to be surrounded by francophone states, which presented a threat to the leadership's perception of Nigeria's "predestined leadership role in Africa"; first, in that these states formed a cohesive bloc in their close identification with France, and secondly, because France, under de Gaulle, was seeking to carve out a world role for itself free of British or American influence, and this conflict of interests between the metropolitan powers evoked a degree of polarization and antagonism between their African spheres of influence.

Thus, it is clear that the policy imperatives for the post-independence Nigerian leadership were twofold : (a) the need to exert Nigerian independence and thus maintain a modicum of credibility with (if not leadership of) the emergent African states; and (b) the need to focus the national objective on an issue which would unite the support of all Nigerians and provide a distraction from the domestic rivalry in a singular national purpose and commitment. The issues of southern Africa in general and apartheid in particular (dramatised by the March 1960 Sharpeville shootings and the disintegration of the Central African Federation) provided a propitious distraction. The apartheid issue presented Nigeria (and indeed, the rest of Africa) with the opportunity to consolidate the concept of the national interest and the self-image.

The issues of southern Africa/apartheid served to create a 'tangible' focus for the diplomatic energies of those African states struggling to come to terms with the realities of their domestic and international post-colonial predicaments; it served to structure the African continental value hierarchy and continental objective, and to internationalise the "African condition".

The apartheid issue has permeated every facet of international intercourse and, through the cumulative nature of diplomacy, has become the antithesis of accepted international morality. The African continent (as the collective victim of the stigma of apartheid) is able to pose as the 'world conscience', as the central focus of the international abhorrence at this moral deviance. The fact that racial policies in South Africa have been of such sustained international salience (as opposed to the relative disregard for other instances of repression around the world) is due to the symbolism of the racially oppressive, anti-libertarian, anti-African image of South Africa in evoking everything which is contrary to African (as a cohesive continental unit) values and objectives. In short, the focus of apartheid has provided a continental unity of values, objectives and purposes over and above communal and nationalist interests. This degree of superficial cohesiveness has given the African-bloc states a degree of influence in international affairs largely inconsonant with their de facto capabilities.

Evidence would suggest that, while the southern African dilemma and the system of apartheid was initially perceived by the emergent African states as a threat to "... the African objective and vision of a new Africa, free and defiant",⁽⁸⁾ this perceived threat has come to offer some considerable opportunity for manifesting African unity and projecting the African condition into the forefront of international politics. Through this influence, Africa in general has gained a considerable degree of international leverage in the international system. Paradoxically apartheid has in fact become the instrument of "African freedom and deviance".

The above argument is of direct relevance to an analysis of Nigerian foreign policy since Nigeria is the epitome of the African experience.

Over time, the linkage between threat and opportunity perceived in the southern Africa/apartheid issue has been established as the fundamental tenet of Nigeria's international role. The southern Africa/apartheid issue is perceived as posing a sufficiently credible threat to the national objective as to provide the opportunity for direct linkage between the indignities of apartheid and the imperative of national unity (and on the wider plane, African unity), the instability of which is historically a real threat to national capability.

Through the process of cumulative diplomacy the precepts of Nigerian external policy have evolved from the abstract and vague to the assertive and specific. Over the 23 years since Nigerian independence there have been only peripheral changes (most notably in terms of economic and military capability), the basic imperatives remain unchanged. That is to say; (a) the need to manifest and maintain domestic political stability and national unity (most forcibly underscored by the experience of the civil war); and (b) the need to exert its "predestined" leadership role in Africa, in accord with pan-Africanist sentiment and objectives.

Since independence Nigeria has been engaged in the struggle to come to terms with the legacy of its historical development, colonial circumstance and contemporary socio-political precepts. We have argued that, in seeking to come to terms with the realities of this predicament, Nigeria has consciously sought to manifest a perceptual image of national unity that concurrently shields the domestic stability from external demands and maximizes the country's importance in African affairs (and by implication, world affairs).

Historically, Nigeria has been intimately involved in the main trends of the African continent. As Stremlau has suggested :

Nigeria's self-avowed political interests related almost exclusively to the changing conditions in Africa. In the broadest sense, Nigerian leaders viewed their country's international prestige as a function of the extent to which Nigeria was considered a leader of black Africa.⁽⁹⁾

After a considerable part of Africa had gained its independence of colonialism, drives for continental unity among the newly independent African states, primarily in an effort to manifest and preserve their sovereignty in an international political environment characterized by radical super-power polarity, once again gathered momentum. Nigerian foreign policy-makers have consistently worked to ensure that irredentist and secessionist forces in Africa were contained within the existing territorial boundaries of post-independence Africa. To this end, Nigeria's political leaders played an active role in negotiating the pan-African alliance that became the Organisation of African Unity (OAU). In contrast to the more radical leaders of the time, Nigeria sought an alliance that would protect the territorial integrity of these fragile states and provide at least a diplomatic weapon against any attempts from within or outside the region to alter the status quo by means of wars of aggression or subversion.

The right of self-determination does not apply, in Nigeria's view, to the ethnic groups within member-states of the OAU, but only to insurgents against colonial or White minority rule. Prior to the outbreak of the 1967-70 civil war over Biafran secession, Nigerian leaders were careful not to interfere in the domestic affairs of other African states; despite the

carefully nurtured image of Nigeria as 'Giant of West Africa', there was no effort to establish regional hegemony.

It is not surprising that Nigeria's role in external affairs prior to the civil war has been projected as one of diplomatic correctness. Besides the fact that the Nigerian political leadership was politically conservative several other factors delimited the options : historically determined links with Britain (and by extension, the West), internal political instability, a perception of regional isolation and Ghanaian hostility, and significantly, the fact that while Nigeria had considerable apparent economic potential (in 1963 the population of Nigeria was 22% of that of all Africa), it remained economically and militarily underdeveloped and dependent on the export of agricultural products, primarily to the British market. Furthermore, Nigeria possessed no characteristic, dynamic leadership, and at a time when 'leadership in Africa' was measured in terms of personalized extrovert recalcitrance, the apparent conservatism in Nigeria's pre-civil war foreign policy is understandable.

This assertion is borne out by the following outline of Nigeria's African policy as stated by the Nigerian foreign minister :

- (a) 'Policies must be clear and practicable, not fatuous or sentimental or designed to soothe people's nerves or for propaganda purposes'.
- (b) Help would be offered to any African state to solve its problems, but the help must be solicited and unpublicized.
- (c) Promotion of cultural and economic links with Africa.
- (d) Territorial boundaries must be respected to avoid chaos and bloodshed.
- (e) No interference in the internal affairs of others so as to prevent 'unrest and harm to the overall plan for the future unity of the African continent' ...⁽¹⁰⁾

The Nigerian civil war marked the end of the euphoric post-independence phase in African politics. During this time international prestige was measured in degrees of diplomatic intransigence and strong expression of sentiments of doctrinaire pan-African unity. The bitter rivalry evoked by the Nigerian civil war dispelled illusions of pan-African unity and the amicable settlement of disputes, thus ushering in a more pragmatic phase in African politics.

During this phase the primacy of national interests, personal diplomacy and the manifest continental leadership vacuum were to be the salient parameters of policy. The authority and credibility of the OAU had been severely tarnished. Similarly, Nigerian military rulers were faced with a crisis of political confidence and authority both internally (in their ability to maintain political stability and order) and in the external environment. Nigerian leaders had been alarmed by the recognition accorded the Biafran secessionists by Tanzania, Gabon, Ivory Coast and Zambia, and perceived the internationalization of the issue as a manifestation of neo-colonialist designs aimed at disrupting African unity.⁽¹¹⁾

In order to consolidate the tenuous national unity and to regenerate the credibility and cohesiveness of the OAU, the Nigerian leadership embarked on an assertive foreign policy, with Gowon visiting 20 African states between 1970 and 1973 - including the four deviants. In a reconciliatory gesture to Zambia, which had led the bid in the OAU to recognize the Biafran secession, Nigeria sent \$750 000 to compensate that state for the closing of its border with Rhodesia.⁽¹²⁾ Gowon warned : "... the enemies

of African freedom fighters, particularly Portugal, and the racist minority regimes of South Africa, and Rhodesia ..." that Nigeria planned to take the offensive.⁽¹³⁾

Besides the domestic rationale for seeking to externalize Nigerian political objectives, the Nigerian leadership recognized that the perceived threat of African disunity would damage Africa's credibility in international affairs and Nigeria's role as leader of the continent. Thus Nigerian rulers indulged in forceful rhetoric, the perennial substance of which was southern Africa/apartheid.

Gowon committed his country to :

... support all people engaged in the struggle to rid their land of colonialism and racism especially in such parts of Africa as Angola, Mozambique and Namibia ...⁽¹⁴⁾

Whether Africa will find an effective and independent role to play in the new international relationship, and whether Nigeria can prove its worth so that the black man is treated with dignity throughout the world : these are the problems that should be engaging our attention ...⁽¹⁵⁾

Those who perceive the disaster in South Africa in terms of ideological conflict are either missing the point or deliberately confusing the issues ... our peoples and their leaders are driven by three main motives : the inalienable right to self-determination; the necessity for a decent life; and the unquestionable demand for human dignity. In the attainment of these objectives, whoever supports Africa would be her friend, but those who for whatever reasons twist and turn our purpose for immediate and selfish gains would not qualify for our respect, least so, our company.⁽¹⁶⁾

In reviewing Nigeria's continental role it is evident that the linkage between the domestic constituency (the need to maintain national unity and stability) and the desire to exert a leadership role within Africa, pre-determines policy action. However, Nigeria is more likely to take idiosyncratic initiatives when the issue proffers a greater opportunity to maximize the dictates of the former. When the opportunity to consolidate the domestic constituency is less great, Nigeria has consistently preferred to universalize the perceived threat (African solidarity, neo-colonialism, imperialism, etc) in an endeavour to orchestrate and consolidate the continental reaction, and to act in concert with a wider, more abstract constituency.

Thus, for example, the first opportunity after the civil war for Nigeria to galvanize the tenuous African unity and to dramatize the threat of neo-colonialism, was the alleged (and at any rate very short-lived) invasion during December 1970 of Guinea by Portuguese armed forces. At the initiative of Nigeria an extra-ordinary session of the OAU Council of Ministers was convened at Lagos. Simultaneously, the Defence Commission convened in Addis Ababa and Nigeria renewed the call for the establishment of an African High Command to defend African states in the front-line of the 'liberation offensives'.

Similarly, in 1971 Nigeria determined to secure, from the OAU Council of Ministers, a declaration condemning South Africa's 'dialogue policy' and forbidding member-states from taking up the South African dialogue initiative so as to maintain a united OAU opposition. So too, Nigeria led initiatives to reconcile the OAU member-states who were in favour of those against the seating of the representative of the Amin regime at OAU conferences during the first half of 1971.

Ironically, Nigeria which itself had been so reluctant to accept OAU mediation endeavours has, since the civil war, actively encouraged continental belligerents to submit to OAU mediation : the Guinea-Senegal border dispute, the 1971 Arab-Israeli conflict, the civil war in Sudan, tribal massacres in Burundi, recurring border clashes between Tanzania and Uganda, conflict between Equatorial Guinea and Gabon, and the conflict between Morocco and Mauritania over the Spanish Sahara.

As Nigerian economic prosperity, based on the fortunes of crude oil, began to increase, Nigeria sought to assert itself economically and to consolidate African economic co-operation. (By mid-1972 Nigeria had bilateral trade agreements with 25 African states.) Nigeria was severely critical of the terms of the Yaounde Convention governing terms of trade between Africa and the EEC. Nigeria perceived in the reverse preference granted EEC countries and tariff and non-tariff barriers, restrictions on African economic co-operation and development.

Thus, prompted by the projected accession of Britain, Denmark and Eire to the EEC in January 1973, Nigeria brought together trade ministers from all African, Caribbean and Pacific Island states (ACP), during 1973, to forge a unified position on their relationship with the EEC (meetings were held in Abidjan, Accra, Addis Ababa and Lagos before unanimity was agreed). Negotiations between the ACP and EEC were protracted over a two-year period and culminated in the signing of the so-called Lomé Convention in February 1975. The main objective of the Convention is to promote trade between the contracting parties, taking account of their respective levels of development, and the need to secure additional benefits for the trade of ACP states, so as to accelerate the rate of growth of their trade and improve the conditions of access of their products to the markets of the EEC. The EEC guarantees access to its markets of a wide range of ACP products (96% of ACP products) in return for "most favoured nation treatment" in EEC trade with the ACP states.⁽¹⁷⁾

That General Gowon should be deposed while attending the summit of the OAU Heads of State at Kampala in July 1975, is more than coincidental and reflects the leadership's ever greater concern with external affairs as the internal political situation became more unsettled and unmanageable. The foreign minister of the new regime assessed the symptoms as follows :

... our external image was based on two things - the former Head of State himself, because he toured extensively, and oil. Those were the two things for which Nigeria was well known in the past few years ... I think that as we bring discipline into our national life, as we pursue good economic and political policies, and as the country attains the greatness which is due to it, our external image will improve.⁽¹⁸⁾

Nigeria was once again in a state of political crisis. Fortuitously, however, a dramatic turn of events presented the Nigerian leadership with

an opportunity to consolidate domestic political unity and to reassert Nigeria's position in African politics.

The Nigerian government had, historically, refused to recognise any one of the three (UNITA/MPLA/FNLA) liberation movements engaged in the civil war in Angola in the wake of the withdrawal of the Portuguese colonial authority. During the latter part of 1975, Southern Angola was invaded by South African armed forces (as surrogates of the United States) in support of the UNITA/FNLA forces against the MPLA forces, which were receiving large-scale assistance from Cuba and the USSR. The Nigerian government, almost immediately, recognised the MPLA as the governing authority in Angola, and embarked on a concerted diplomatic effort among OAU member-states to evince African support for an MPLA government and the Nigerian stand.

We in Nigeria are committed to the total liberation of the whole of Africa and we will not fold our hands to see our brothers and sisters in Angola subjugated, exploited and recolonised by the racialists and imperialists in South Africa and their supporters.⁽¹⁹⁾

The domestic linkage in the Nigerian stand on the Angolan issue is clearly discernible from the following statement by the Nigerian Head of State :

In an issue like Angola, our national interest has been made quite clear and that is the liberation of Angola and Africa. The Federal Military Government has made a determined effort to pursue what it considers the correct line of action and it is gratifying to see the extent of national consensus and agreement on this subject.⁽²⁰⁾

The Angolan crisis marked the end of the general dearth of diplomatic initiative characteristic of African politics during the early seventies. In mustering majority support for the Nigerian initiative, the OAU had been seen to act decisively and abide by its decision in the face of considerable (particularly US) international pressure; it marked a significant shift from the display of continental disunity and organisational incapacity in the Nigerian civil war crisis, and Nigeria took full advantage of the high level of national and continental unity which the Angolan issue evoked. The Nigerian leadership unequivocally declared Nigeria's commitment to the emancipation of Africa :

... especially Southern Africa where the entire world is convinced that problems created by racial injustice are fast threatening the peace and shared goodwill of the human race ... The style of Nigerian foreign policy today is, therefore, determined largely by these two unambiguously articulated factors : African solidarity and an unflinching adherence to the principles of non-alignment. Nigeria's new posturing has emerged as a realistic approach to the prevailing structure and condition of the international community. Nigeria has, therefore, come to the conclusion that essential steps must be taken toward creating an African solidarity, an inter-African consensus without which Africa would not overcome its numerous post-colonial and neo-colonial problems, without which social stability and economic viability will continue to elude a greater part of the continent.⁽²¹⁾

Nigeria subsequently has consciously sought to project an image of reliability and high political/diplomatic morality (verging on the notion of 'continental matchmaker' or 'honest-broker'), exemplified by the intrusion of Nigerian 'good offices' in sundry continental mediation endeavours; most notably between Angola and Zaire during the invasion of the Shaba Province of Zaire by Katangese rebels during 1977; the Lancaster House negotiations on independence for Zimbabwe; the conflict in the Western Sahara and the civil war in Chad.

Through the cumulative process of diplomatic and political precedent, this notion of Nigeria the 'honest-broker' in African politics has become virtually inseparable from Nigeria the 'continental leader'. Thus President Shehu Shagari summed-up his administration's foreign policy objectives for the 1980s as follows :

Africa remains the cornerstone of Nigeria's Foreign Policy. My Administration is committed to the cause of the total liberation of Africa and the abolition of racism in all its manifestations. We shall neither relax nor relent until all Africans and all black men are free. It should be understood that political freedom is not complete without economic and cultural freedom. My Administration's Domestic Policy for peace, unity and stability in Nigeria translates, at the first instance, into being good neighbours ... Nigeria stands for African unity.

Let me state in categorical terms that freedom and unity in Africa will contribute to Third World solidarity as well as to international peace and co-operation. To this extent, Nigeria will play more active roles in mediatory efforts within the international community, always fulfilling its due obligations and responsibilities, within the international system.⁽²²⁾

Of fundamental significance in the pursuit of Nigerian foreign policy objectives, after the civil war, was the consolidation of a regional support base. The significance of this fact was underscored by the Nigerian suspicion of "neo-colonialist complicity" in seeking to undermine the allegiance of Nigeria's neighbours and, thereby, Nigerian national sovereignty. More ostensibly though, Nigerian attitudes to regional interaction were influenced by :

- (a) the perceived need for Nigeria to re-establish its credibility within the continental system; and
- (b) the projected entry of Britain (Nigeria's principal trading partner) into the EEC, an event perceived as constituting some disadvantage for Nigerian economic development, in the loss of trading preference and benefits previously extended Nigeria by Britain.

Regional relations were thus characterized by both economic and political imperatives and were conducted on two levels. First on the level of unilateral personal diplomacy; between 1970 and 1973 Gowon made official visits to all Nigeria's immediate neighbours, signing bilateral trade and friendship treaties and seeking to re-establish Nigerian bona-fides in the wake of what was perceived by most of Nigeria's neighbours as a brutal war. The second level was characterized by attempts on the part of Nigeria

to "woo" West African states into a regional economic agreement for the harmonization of economic policies, trade liberalization and the joint co-ordination of economic development. In this manoeuvring Nigeria nurtured the notion of "leader among equals" rather than offensively preponderant.

The successful ACP/EEC initiative set a precedent for negotiation and co-operation between francophone and anglophone states which influenced a measure of confidence in the proposal for a West African regional grouping. The concept was eventually formalized in the so-called "Lagos Treaty", thus bringing into being the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in May 1975.

The Community's principal objective was stated in the promotion of co-operation and development in all fields of economic activity and the gradual economic integration of the region. The member-states agreed to evolve gradually common policies in the areas of transport, communications, energy and the exploitation of mineral resources; and to co-operate in the fields of research, training, agricultural processing and marketing, forestry, animal husbandry and fisheries.

There shall be progressively established in the course of a transitional period of fifteen years from the definitive entry into force of this Treaty ... a Customs Union among the Member States. Within this Union customs duties or other charges with equivalent effect on imports shall be eliminated. Quota, quantitative or like restrictions or prohibitions and administrative obstacles to trade among the Member States shall also be removed. Furthermore, a common customs tariff in respect of all goods imported into the Member States from third countries shall be established.⁽²³⁾

The principal governing institution of the Community is vested in an "Authority of Heads of State and Government". As the ultimate executive organ, the Authority directs and controls the performance of the executive functions of the Community for the progressive development of the Community and the achievement of its objectives. A Council of Ministers, consisting of two representatives of each member-state is directly responsible to the Authority. Although the Council of Ministers is empowered to give direction to all subordinate institutions of the Community, its proposals to the Authority, regarding matters of Community policy are advisory and the Authority is apparently under no obligation to accept them. Other institutions include the Executive Secretariat, the Tribunal of the Community, a Fund for Co-operation, Compensation and Development (FCCD), and four Technical and Specialized Commissions grouped as follows : (i) Trade, Customs, Immigration, Monetary and Payments Commission; (ii) Industry, Agriculture and Natural Resources Commission; (iii) Transport, Telecommunications and Energy Commission; (iv) Social and Cultural Affairs Commission.⁽²⁴⁾

The primary objective and raison d'etre of ECOWAS is clearly regional economic advancement. From an economic point of view, the development of the smaller and poorer states as well as the larger states within the West African region can best be facilitated within such a co-operative economic union. The immediate advantages are : (a) the larger market for the products of member-states; (b) the extended infra-structural facilities; (c) complimentary raw material access; (d) the stimulation of regional economic activity; (e) the increase in investment potential; (f) an increase in industrial processing and capacity; (g) the raising of levels

of national income. Nigeria as the predominant economic power in the region stands to benefit more from the increased markets and stimulated economic activity than the other member-states. (This despite the fact that Nigeria contributes 30% of the ECOWAS budget, the contributions being estimated on the basis of GDP and per capita income.) However, in terms of Nigerian role perception, we argue that ECOWAS is primarily of political significance and that the Nigerian leadership perceives ECOWAS, in the long-term, as a potential continental and international political actor.

Nigerian leadership has, since independence, been afflicted with a perception of regional insecurity and insularity. This was initially manifest in perceptions of French inspired francophone hostility and the blatant Ghanaian endeavours to undermine Nigerian national sovereignty during the early years of independence. Such insecurity was realised during the Nigerian civil war, when the possibility of neighbouring states aiding the secessionist forces became a reality. This element of sustained regional insecurity in the perceptual image of the Nigerian leadership was perceived to constitute a direct threat to the maximization of the primary objectives of national unity and predestined continental leadership. Nigeria perceived in its regional environment a threat to its national sovereignty, inspired by a desire ('propagated by neo-colonialists') among its regional neighbours to undermine Nigerian actual and potential influence, both regionally and continentally. The linkage between Nigeria's primary objectives and its perceived regional insecurity has characterized Nigerian regional interaction since independence, and both this linkage, and the need to consolidate the Nigerian regional support/interest base, became increasingly more profound, until they reached crisis proportions in the uncertainties of the civil war period.

Nigeria emerged from the civil war militarily and economically preponderant, but still vulnerable to regional antagonism and the potential of neighbouring states to undermine Nigerian national unity (the Nigerian Achilles heel) together with the linkage between national unity and aspired continental leadership. The Nigerian leadership was mindful of the role of the concerted Zambian, Tanzanian, Kenyan and Ugandan diplomatic initiative in internationalizing the Nigerian civil war, as well as the inability of the OAU to manage the crisis in an effective way. The consolidation of the Nigerian regional constituency became imperative, both for the security of Nigerian territorial integrity (in April 1978, ECOWAS adopted a Protocol on Non-Aggression, recognising inter alia, the inviolability of national borders and guaranteeing the non-aggressive intentions of member-states) and the maintenance of national unity, and as a base from which to project Nigerian continental leadership ambitions. In aspiring to the role of continental leader, the Nigerian leadership has perceived the need for the country to be seen to represent a wider constituency and support base within the continent vis-à-vis other continental factions and regional groupings (de facto or psychological). The perception of Nigeria as the leader of the largest African regional organisation is of self-evident significance to Nigerian continental leadership credentials. Herein lies the primary significance of ECOWAS, namely, that the Nigerian leadership perceives in ECOWAS a base for the projection of continental role objectives. It is possible to envisage ECOWAS forming a cohesive political bloc within the OAU in time, and the pragmatism of the gradualist approach lies herein, since it is evident that the socialisation of member-states for a common 'political' purpose is a long-term and subtle process. Similarly, it is conceivable that the Nigerian leadership has perceived the possibility of the emergence of a powerful economic and political regional bloc in the southern African sub-continent once the remaining Namibia/

apartheid issues are "resolved". The emergence of such a bloc, centred on the mineral wealth of South Africa, would radically alter the balance of power in Africa and seriously challenge any notions of Nigerian continental leadership.

Nigerian foreign policy is largely predetermined by the linkage between the domestic constituency (the need to maintain national unity and stability) and the "predestined" right to exert a leadership role in Africa. Paradoxically, the more imperilled is domestic stability the greater the need for assertive external action (whether rhetorical or practical) and consequently, the more forceful the projection of Nigerian leadership. These elements are fundamental to Nigerian policy in Africa and in relations with the rest of the international community. Within this context, the issues of southern Africa/apartheid have provided a constant, and increasingly single-issue focus.

The essence of Nigerian foreign policy has been succinctly put as follows :

You won't find Nigeria being a flag waver for the Third World or the nonaligned movement, although we are involved with both. Really, our preoccupation is in Africa, in helping African countries solve conflicts among themselves ... We have a two-pronged policy. One is the commitment to effective liberation of Southern Africa. The second is to bring about a transfer of technology to Nigeria.⁽²⁵⁾

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN CONTEXT

The deduction which may be drawn from the above is that as long as domestic tranquillity prevails, the Nigerian government will seek to play an active and constructive role in African politics, while seeking to advance Nigerian plans for economic development. At the same time the functional structure of Nigerian foreign policy attitudes is built upon an increasing paranoia, ostensibly about the intransigence of the South African government, but more realistically about the enduring inability of African states to achieve desired political and economic objectives.

The notorious inability of African states to attain foreign policy objectives has become a point of derision for detractors of the African cause. Rational discussion on recent events, and their implications, in Nigeria has been submerged by media emotionalism and the attempt from various quarters to score political points, either about the nature of the regimes in both Ghana and Nigeria, or about black Africa generally. Ironically though, the reaction of those states most closely affected by Nigerian policy action has been characteristically restrained. The reason for this is not just an understanding of Nigeria's difficulties, or a desire to remain on good terms with the most influential state in the region, but the fact that Nigeria has always epitomized the African dilemma, and these states to a greater or lesser degree are experiencing similar pressures.

The inherent pressures on domestic political stability in Nigeria are compounded by the evolution of two principal sets of circumstances, which have had a mutually exacerbating effect : (a) a decline in economic prosperity; and (b) increasing political restiveness in the run-up to the

presidential elections, constitutionally prescribed for the latter part of this year.

Diagnosis of Nigerian economic ailments is not difficult - at the root is a structural imbalance in an economy that depends on the export of one product. Oil exports account for nearly 80% of government revenue (and about 95% of foreign exchange), the spending of which is critical for the level of other activities in the economy. The fact that Nigeria's manufacturing capacity is almost entirely dependent on imported raw materials implies that if foreign exchange earnings from oil decline, the rest of the economy goes into recession. This is precisely what has come to pass.

The oversupply of oil on the international market, the insistence by OPEC on the maintenance of existing price structures, and the undercutting of OPEC prices by non-OPEC oil producers has had damaging effects on most OPEC economies. In the case of Nigeria, oil production has fallen from 2 million barrels per day in 1981 to 0.5 million barrels per day in February 1983. The nett result is that Nigeria has to endure a worsening balance of payments position, resulting in a drastic cut in foreign imports, a fall in foreign exchange reserves (which in January 1983 were said to be insufficient to cover one month's imports), an inability to service the \$5 billion foreign debt which is already over three months in arrears and a \$4.8 billion deficit on the 1982 budget. By the end of 1982 an estimated 45 000 workers had been retrenched, the inflation rate was running at 20% and growth was down from an average 8% during the 1970s to zero growth.

Desperate efforts have been made in recent months to stem the tide of worsening economic recession, including a 50% restriction on imports over 1982 levels, a cut of 20% in government spending for 1983, and eventually on February 19, 1983 a precipitous \$5.5 break with the official OPEC price of \$35 per barrel. All this adds up to what has been described as the collapse of a dream. The country's ambitious five-year development plan (1981-85) has been subject to constant downward revision from the day it was launched. The plan's aim of diversifying the manufacturing base of the economy and setting agriculture on the path of a "green revolution" is no longer viable.

The significance of such deep economic difficulty is greatly compounded by the tense political circumstances which prevail in the extended run-up to the presidential elections. Nigeria's return to civilian rule four years ago, after thirteen years of military government, created the world's fourth largest democracy. Nigeria has a US-style constitution and federal system. It has nineteen states and there is pressure to create more. Most of the nineteen states are in severe financial difficulties, but because the spoils are so great for political leaders, all political parties agree that more states are a fine idea. The only difficulty is that none of the existing federal states is over-keen to be subdivided.

Politics in Nigeria has been described as the only growth industry. The election campaign was initiated 18 months in advance of the scheduled election date and has been characterized by political manouevring and increasing violence.

The initiative in the field of political manouevre lies, as is customary, with Presidet Shehu Shagari and the ruling National Party of Nigeria (NPN). Shagari's biggest political challenge comes from two southern-based parties of the Ibo and Yoruba tribes. The Ibo, Nigerian People's Party

(NPP) is headed by Nnamdi Azikiwe, and the Yoruba are led by the United Party of Nigeria (UPN), headed by Obafemi Awolowa.

Political enmity between the tribes goes back for generations and the effort to bridge the gap of political suspicion with an alliance of opposition parties is considered a necessity if neither of these parties is to have a chance of winning the presidency. However, the question of which of the two leaders would be the alliance's candidate for president has proved a stumbling block.

Aware of opposition wrangling, as well as the serious challenge which an alliance of opposition parties would present (in 1979 Shagari polled 5 million fewer votes than the combined opposition), Shagari played a political trump in December 1982, by extending a pardon to the former Ibo rebel leader Emeka Ojukwu. The thinking behind the manoeuvre was that Ojukwu would be pardoned in return for an undertaking, on the former rebel's part, of "delivering" the 12 million Ibo vote for Shagari.

Traditionally the Ibo are not NPN supporters - in the absence of Ojukwu they have supported Azikiwe and the NPP. However, in his eagerness to lure Ibo voters, Shagari is in danger of losing support within his party. With Ojukwu being tipped as Shagari's running-mate and future Vice President, NPN leaders fear the former rebel is being given too much power within the party.

On the other hand, it appears as though Shagari might have outmanoeuvred himself, since there are reports that large sections of the Ibo community have branded Ojukwu a traitor for supporting the NPN which has its base among the Hausa tribe - traditional enemies of the Ibo. Shagari's return to office is thus very much in the balance and the prospect of a collapse of constitutionalism should no alternative candidate win convincingly is real.

The reality of this latter contingency is underscored by two factors : (a) the increase in sporadic violence, and (b) bureaucratic inefficiency in organising the mechanics of the election. During the latter part of 1982 severe rioting, claiming the lives of some 1 000 people, broke out in the Northern states. Although this violence has been officially attributed to religious fanatics, it is symptomatic of the volatile atmosphere which prevails. Observers have suggested that the violence in the Northern states is more realistically attributed to the high levels of unemployment in that part of the country and the strain of economic austerity. Furthermore, Nigeria is traditionally prone to labour unrest, but the wave of strikes and industrial action in all sectors of the economy in recent months are said by President Shagari to be crippling the economy. While the labour movement has not constituted itself into a political group, labour leaders appear determined to capitalize on their control of the key industrial sectors, many of which are federal government monopolies. The atmosphere of crisis has been heightened by a spate of major cases of arson, directed against federal government installations. The most significant instance being the complete destruction by fire of the multi-storeyed telecommunications department skyscraper in Lagos, severing Nigerian communication with the rest of the world in the process.

There is doubt whether the Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) will be able to organise proper electoral lists or arrange for adequate polling stations, vote collection and vote counting. The police force has formed 33 new mobile units, each of company strength (about 200 men). Evenly

distributed, that means two units per state. The idea at present is that these units should keep the peace rather than assist the mechanics of the election.

When the decision was taken to form these units the bureaucratic problems were unforeseen, as was the degree of tension created by party politics and the economic crisis. At the time the suggestion of possible army involvement in the election was widely considered as dangerously provocative. Today it has been discussed publicly by a number of senior officers and has been discussed in detail with government officials. It is argued that if widespread public disorder is to be deterred effectively, the army will have to be deployed beforehand, rather than be called out of barracks after a failure by the police to keep order.

This rather calamitous set of political and economic circumstances had foreign policy repercussions in the expulsion, in January 1983, of an estimated two million illegal aliens employed in Nigeria. Facts submerged in the welter of media hysteria are that these people were illegally resident and employed in Nigeria, a situation which no state could tolerate in normal circumstances, let alone at times of economic recession and political instability. (It is the case that Nigerians were expelled en masse from Ghana in 1969 and on other occasions from Zaire, Gabon and Equatorial Guinea.) The nub of the question, of course, is how two million people are able to illegally infiltrate Nigerian society. The answer is two-fold : on the one hand bureaucratic inefficiency and corruption, and on the other, a willingness to turn a blind eye, in the good times, to a source of cheap menial labour.

Significantly, the attention which this issue has focussed upon Nigeria underscores the intimate linkage between domestic stability and foreign policy action which is the thrust of this analysis. In essence thus, the issue is one of severe economic decline at a time when the federal government needs to maximize its popularity and its political skills. In the light of Nigeria's political history, the federal government is particularly sensitive to two accusations; that of economic mismanagement, and inability to maintain law and order.

The body of two million illegal aliens presented itself inevitably as the personification of Nigerian ills; the implication being that, at once, the Nigerian system has been cleansed by the expulsion of all aliens. This move has been widely applauded by Nigerians, partly because of the notions of inherent superiority nurtured by all Nigerians, but also because of a belief in federal government reasoning that these outlaws are at the root of current political unrest and are logically a severe drain on the economy. It is difficult to substantiate either suggestion, there is little evidence to suggest foreign subversion or connivance in the sundry instances of political unrest and further, since these aliens were employed either in menial or semi-skilled positions, which Nigerians are loath to fill, their expulsion from the Nigerian economy is likely to leave a very large vacuum at this level, resulting in even greater disorganisation and disintegration of the economic system.

The conclusion that the federal government has found a political scapegoat expedient is unavoidable. As a result one may be confident that the content of Nigerian foreign policy is unlikely to change, also that, whereas Nigeria will of necessity give limited attention to external relations in the months ahead, the medium-term diplomatic standing and influence of the "Nigerian giant" in African politics will be unaffected.

The reaction from neighbouring countries has for the most part been restrained and concentrated on some of the logistical problems in shipping such a large number of individuals back home. Ghana, the state particularly affected, has seen some press criticism in strong terms, but official reaction has been contained. With regard to ECOWAS, Nigeria has pointed out that it has been acting entirely within the rules. The Protocol on the free movement of peoples is one of the key ECOWAS texts, but it only permits a 90 day free-entry visa.

The move, though technically in order, does seem to strike a blow at the spirit of ECOWAS, much as Ghana's own border closure last September, or Sierra Leone's expulsion of members of the Foulah community last December. All these measures, like Nigeria's, have been conditioned by a serious economic downturn, suggesting that this is not the time to advance regional co-operation. Paradoxically though, a special committee was set up, in May 1982, to investigate new orientations for the organisation, and Nigeria is in the forefront of those states pressing for ECOWAS to start making real advances.

Nigeria has been the victim on various occasions in the past of similar expulsions and is clearly not unmindful of appeals to ECOWAS sentiment. There are, after all, large Nigerian communities presently in many ECOWAS states. What would be unfortunate would be for some of the French-speaking states, who have been dragging their feet in making progress in ECOWAS, to now point to the expulsion issue as a failure of faith in the ECOWAS objectives, and to continue to concentrate on forming smaller francophone regional units. In this direction Nigeria, as guiding light and principal financier of ECOWAS, has some fence-mending to do.

There is no comfort to be drawn from the current political and economic disarray in Nigeria, or Africa at large. Economic collapse and concomitant political instability provide the opportunities for the foreign meddling and exploitation which impinges upon the hard-won national sovereignty closely guarded by African states. The consequence will be an intensification of Nigerian paranoia and the butt of increasing political frustration will be apartheid South Africa.

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