

"Reciprocity in Nigerian Foreign Policy" (The Akinyemi Doctrine)

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At the All-Nigeria Conference on Foreign Policy held at NIPSS, Kuru in April, 1986, the President and Commander-in-Chief, Major-General Ibrahim Babangida, challenged the nation's assembled foreign policy intelligentsia to identify and define Nigeria's national interest. In his keynote address, the President declared that, in his view, our national interest is coterminous with the national security interest. The centrality of the national security interest which he identified in his keynote address should not be seen exclusively in the narrow sense of military security. It should also be seen in the more comprehensive sense of economic, political and social security. These various components of a country's national security interests have a systemic relationship. Therefore, a nation which does not have economic security can, at best, only provide temporary relief from internal subversion and external aggression. Similarly, a nation without political stability cannot provide the framework for sustained economic growth and development.

Perhaps, one of the major achievements of the Kuru Conference was the serious attempt it made in identifying and defining Nigeria's national interest in political, economic, social and security terms. Indeed, it went further to formulate strategies and instruments for their realization.

Nigeria's national interest can, therefore, be identified as predicated on the nation's military, economic, political and social security. Anything that will enhance the capacity of Nigerians to defend their national security must be seen as being in the national interest. Anything that will promote Nigeria's economic growth and development is in the national interest. Anything that will make Nigeria politically stable is also in the national interest. Conversely anything that will make Nigeria militarily insecure, that will militate against the country's economic growth and development, and which will make it political unstable is against the national interest.

These then are the yardsticks for assessing the nation's foreign policy. With every policy position, we need to ask ourselves whether it will strengthen our defensive capabilities, enhance domestic economic growth and development, and promote our political stability. Thus, if Nigeria's security interests determine that we need to maintain eloquent silence and discretion when certain international developments occur, then we should do just that. Some analysts tend to convey the impression that Nigeria should be combative on every issue where the Western Powers are concerned. In my view, that kind of position will take credibility out of any foreign policy. Nigeria should be forceful on any issue as dictated by its national interest, irrespective of whether the provocation is from the West or the East.

Given these constituents of our national security interests, the challenges facing Nigeria at the dusk of the twentieth century become self evident. They are the rehabilitation and restructuring of our domestic economy; the creation of a stable domestic political order and the development of an effective and indigenous military and industrial capability. The successful fulfillment of these requirements will provide the framework within which to face up to our regional and international obligations.

Nigeria's national interest, as defined here, finds justification in certain principles which have informed Nigeria's foreign policy since independence, and which successive administrations, whether military or civilian, have maintained and pursued, albeit with varying degrees of commitment. It would be necessary to ascertain substantively whether these principles are still relevant to Nigeria's foreign policy today, and

whether they will be adequate to take us into the 21st century.

These principles include, in broad terms, the preservation of our territorial integrity; the promotion of peace and stability in our sub-region and in Africa; respect for the Charter of the OAU, especially those aspects of the Charter pertaining to the inviolability of inherited frontiers; and the strengthening of African solidarity through sub-regional and continental organisations such as the ECOWAS and the OAU. Other objectives of Nigeria's foreign policy are the decolonisation of Africa and the eradication of apartheid and racial discrimination. We have sought to achieve these objectives through direct support for African liberation movements, and also through the instrumentalities of the United Nations and other international organisations such as the Non-Aligned Movement to which we belong.

Mr. Chairman, I am convinced that these principles are still as valid today as when they were postulated twenty-six years ago. The objectives which they were required to serve, which are West African integration and the abolition of racial discrimination, are still in the process' of being achieved. The logical conclusion, then, is that these principles should still continue to guide and inform our foreign policy.

However, Mr. Chairman, as we approach the twenty-first century, there are two additional principles which we should contemplate.

The first principle seeks to confront Nigeria's response to crisis in international affairs. The second principle seeks to address the need to define and articulate Nigeria's foreign policy in a post-apartheid era.

With regard to the first principle, I postulated at Kuru that if Nigeria, as the foremost black African power, has certain responsibilities to Africa, then there should be no disputing the fact that Africa also has responsibilities to Nigeria. Nigeria, too, has definite interests to promote and protect, for which we shall require the support and assistance of other African States. If when we say that Africa is the centerpiece of our foreign policy, we mean that Nigeria should identify with and defend the legitimate interests of Africa, collectively, then it also means that Africa and African States should identify with and defend Nigeria's interests. However, the last four years of economic crisis in Nigeria have yet to elicit a supportive response from the few African States which are in a position to do so, such as in the areas of smuggling and currency trafficking.

A lot of debate has taken place recently over whether, in the formulation and implementation of Nigeria's foreign policy, certain countries, either because of geographic location, or common membership with Nigeria of a regional organisation, can automatically expect our support in conflict situations with extra-continental powers. The answer is an emphatic No. We will only defend those principles which continue to inform our foreign policy. In effect, therefore, Nigeria's support for sister-African states has been predicated, and will continue to be predicated, on the congruence between our ideals and interests and theirs.

Moreover, if Nigeria is going to be regarded as a leader in Africa, and if that leadership is going to entail some cost to the Nigerian government and people, then respect for Nigeria should dictate that the views of Nigeria should be sought, provided the situation allows for consultation. Even those belonging to the same alliance systems, defined by common principles and objectives, engage in extensive consultations. Among the NATO powers, for example, meetings and consultations are held as a matter of routine.

In the past one year, many foreign ministers and top foreign government functionaries have come to Nigeria for consultations on matters of mutual concern, or on matters on which they have sought our support or assistance. These include officials from Chad, Congo, France, Great Britain, Indonesia, Iran

and South Korea, to mention but a few. I have also gone abroad on consultations on behalf of the President to several countries, including Angola, Botswana, France, Great Britain, Libya, United States, Yugoslavia, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Apart from bilateral visits, consultations also take place through diplomatic channels at home and abroad, as well as during international conferences such as the OAU Summit or the United Nations General Assembly Sessions. At the Non-Aligned Summit in Harare, for example, up to 20 Heads of State or Government asked to see President Babangida.

In short, a lot of situations allow for consultation, and the consultation with actual or potential allies is procedural in international relations. Not to consult Nigeria, but to expect its support, is to take Nigeria for granted. Not even on the altar of solidarity does a nation sacrifice its self-respect. Nigeria is not an appendage of any state, and we will not be taken for granted.

Consultation, in itself, is actually not a guarantee, but merely a prerequisite, of our support. We shall also apply the principle of reciprocity, on the grounds that those who require our support must also be prepared to support us. This principle of reciprocity is a necessary attribute of sovereignty.

Nigeria's obligations to the Frontline States and the Liberation Movements in Southern Africa are perhaps the singular exceptions to our new emphasis on reciprocity in our international relations. Our commitment to the liberation struggle is total and unconditional. It is a moral and constitutional duty, and not an act of charity. Indeed, it is a basic tenet of our fundamental law. Section 19 of the Constitution states that:

"The State shall promote African Unity, as well as total political, economic, social and cultural liberation of Africa, and all other forms of international co-operation conducive to the consolidation of the universal peace and mutual respect and friendship among all peoples and States, and shall combat racial discrimination in all its manifestations".

It is, therefore, clear that it is a constitutional obligation on the Nigerian State, and Nigeria is known not to shy away from its obligations. Our position remains that no black man anywhere in the world can consider himself to be free until the bells of freedom ring in South Africa and the hateful system of apartheid is dismantled.

This means that the extent of gratitude or friendship displayed by the Frontline States and the Liberation Movements should not be used as a yardstick for evaluating our support for the liberation struggle. Our paramount objective in Southern Africa is not the courtship of the Frontline States, but the freedom of the black man.

The truth of the matter is that relatively rich and powerful states are usually envied and not loved. Nigerians need to come to terms with the fact that Nigeria is not necessarily going to be loved, even by those states which are beneficiaries of our assistance. What we shall demand is not love but respect. Respect for what we are, and respect for what we stand for. And this will be achieved by the vigorous pursuit of policies which will, in effect, blunt the challenges to Nigeria's national interests.