



Nigeria's Continental Diplomatic Thrusts: The Limits of Africa's Nominally Biggest Economy

Kunle Amwo¹

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Nigerian ruling elite should seize the February 2015 general elections to recompose its social contract with Nigerians.
- The ruling elite should address the vexed issues of corruption and insecurity in a deliberate and deliberative manner.
- The implementation of the Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy, Chapter 2 of Nigeria's 1999 Constitution, should be prioritised. This will boost distributive and social justice, and enhance the implementation of the foreign policy objectives enunciated in section 19 of the constitution.
- Negative domestic developments that impinge on Nigeria's diplomacies should be dealt with decisively in order to change foreign perceptions of the country.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A dominant portion of contemporary literature on Nigeria's regional and continental diplomacies suggests that the foreign policies of Africa's nominally biggest economy are hardly progressive and dynamic, due principally to the perverse hiatus between its domestic ecology and foreign policy. Many African countries do not know exactly what Abuja wants; worse, she herself does not appear to know. Nigeria needs to move quickly to put her domestic house in order, beginning with addressing corruption and stemming the Islamist Boko Haram terrorist movement. To do so, she needs strong leaders to build a strong economy and strong institutions; drive clean government at home; and recover national interest-propelled and activist foreign policies.

INTERNAL-EXTERNAL NEXUS

The story of Nigeria's regional diplomacies since her juridical independence on 1 October 1960 is one of a richly endowed nation-state but which has been unable to fulfil her manifest and historic leadership role in West Africa, let alone in Africa. Compared to the 1970s and the 1980s when Nigeria earned international respect for playing a crucial role in the decolonisation of the continent in spearheading, with Togo, the formation of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and in supplying a professional officer corps to global peacekeeping operations, Nigeria now appears to be experiencing a self-inflicted decline in her diplomacies. Whereas in the 1990s Abuja played a well-documented significant role in ending the brutal civil wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone, since the turn of the new millennium, the context of 'democratically elected' governments notwithstanding, Nigeria has seemingly been punching below her weight and has lost much of her moral capital globally.

Several factors explain this impasse: a chaotic post-1999 domestic political economy, worsened since 2009 by the Boko Haram Islamist terrorist movement's activities in the country's north-east region; a docile ruling elite, coupled with an incompetent ruling party, the People's Democratic Party, bereft of the legitimacy and moral courage to critically interrogate Nigeria's vexed national question; seemingly weak and incompetent presidents since 1999, who have shown little commitment to the realisation of the goals of ECOWAS and the African Union (AU) beyond grandiose public grandstanding; and an increasingly inept sitting presidency, in free fall in public morality, appearing incapable of ameliorating the deepening national and regional insecurity debacle.

The aggregate of the foregoing is that Nigeria, the continent's demographic giant – as well as, since May 2014, its nominally biggest economy – has all but lost her pre-eminence in Africa. She may be West Africa's conductor and ECOWAS' pacesetter, but even in this highly circumscribed sphere of influence, Nigeria has been a highly contested and ridiculed premier player, capitalising inconsequentially from her numerous diplomatic engagements. Dr. Dapo Fafowora, a retired Nigerian senior diplomat argued that the country no longer had a foreign policy!² He may have exaggerated Nigeria's precipitous decline, but compared to the other giant – post-apartheid South Africa – it is legitimate to interrogate the goals and expectations of her contemporary foreign policy thrusts in relation to both ECOWAS and the AU. There appears to be a widening hiatus between Nigeria's hitherto existing illusion of grandeur and the stark reality on the ground; between the *precepts* and the *praxis* of her regional diplomacies. Abuja's riposte, at both regional and continental levels, amounts to little more than throwing money at problems; akin to a notorious practice it has perfected into an art in domestic politics and policy.

NIGERIA'S COMPLEX NATURE AS A REGIONAL ACTOR

Nigeria's chaotic domestic politics and policy define foreign policy and diplomatic thrusts that are at once inchoate and ambiguous. Since

1960, depending on regime values and leadership character, there has been an abiding tension between normative policies and *realpolitik*. Two major factors explain this phenomenon:

First, is the absence of an idea of Nigeria as a meaningful entity with an ethical core, spurring an incoherent sense of collective social citizenship with a common destiny. This reality is due to a social contract held in abeyance, as most Nigerian governments are unable to provide basic public goods and values. The result is pockets of discontentment and violence across the federation.³ There exists also contestation over a shared national sense of direction. What is Nigeria's national interest in foreign policy? It is often difficult to engender a policy elite consensus around this crucially important issue. Additionally, for all of Nigeria's renowned intellectual capital, the country's politics is insufficiently ideologised and intellectualised. There is lack of robust foreign policy debates outside the hallowed precinct of a restrained foreign policy elite and think-tank.

Second, strong political leadership and an equally strong economy are decisive intervening variables in successful foreign policy drives. When they are absent, foreign policy tends to fail. Thus, Adebajo has argued that 'an effective foreign policy must be built on a sound domestic base that promotes both effective economic development and democratic stability'.⁴

REGIONAL DIPLOMACY

Since the 1990s, West Africa has been the focal point of Nigeria's Africa policy. Securing the region in the light of growing intra-state conflicts – including in the hitherto peaceful Côte d'Ivoire in September 2002 and in northern Mali in 2012/13 – and mitigating their creeping contagious effects (eg, refugee influx, and sub-regional insecurity and instability) are Nigeria's main foreign policy preoccupation.⁵ Akindele has underscored Abuja's 'generous investment of time, attention and resources on the maintenance of peace and security' in the region and on the continent.⁶

Nigeria has always pursued a policy of good neighbourliness and solidarity in West Africa. This is hinged on Abuja's enlightened self-interest,

typified by a huge regional market for her industrial goods and investment. In view of her 'manifest destiny' doctrine and seeming capacity to implement it, Nigeria has, since 1975, deployed both bilateral and multilateral diplomacies to invest in peace and security. The result has been a rich harvest of protocols and mechanisms: the 1991 Abuja Declaration of Political Principles; 1999 ECOWAS Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peace-Keeping and Security; and the 2001 Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance.⁷

Nigeria principally funds the Lomé-based ECOWAS Bank for Investment and Development (EBID), by accounting for 60% of its equity. Yet, she does not control the bank's activities, prompting Ogunsanwo to argue that the EBID 'is the only such financial institution in the world where the country providing such proportion of equity does not also provide the executive head of the Bank'.⁸

More recently, the country is intensifying bilateral and multilateral partnerships with its immediate neighbours – Benin, Cameroon, Chad and Niger – to address instability caused by Boko Haram and related groups. However, the fact that these partnerships were boosted only after France had hosted a summit on the Islamist sect in Paris in May 2014 rather than Nigeria organising one in West Africa perhaps best demonstrates the complexity of Abuja as a regional pivotal state: she is the main driver of, and biggest spender for, the regional body, but does not command its respect and loyalty. Some analysts see leadership failure in Nigeria's decision to attend the summit. For Adekeye, 'if Nigeria were truly a regional superpower, why would it need the president of France to bring it together with Benin, Niger, Chad and Cameroon?'⁹

A combination of negative developments in the domestic political economy – notably the squandering of public funds¹⁰ by a venal ruling elite, visionless public authorities, and short-term and unstable policies – has conspired to halt Nigeria's diplomatic progress and drastically attenuate her standing globally. In consequence, the capacity of the Nigerian state to dominate at the regional and continental levels has been downgraded.

NIGERIA'S CONTINENTAL DIPLOMACIES

The significance of Nigeria's Africa-centred diplomacies comes into bold relief in figures: she boasts of 46 resident diplomatic missions on the continent compared with 52 in the rest of the world.¹¹ This resonates in the financial implications of her leadership role. She shares, on an equal basis, 75% of the AU's annual recurrent budget with Algeria, Egypt, Libya and South Africa.¹² As in West Africa, a Nigeria Trust Fund, with a seed amount of \$80 million (ZAR 878 million¹³), was set up in July 1975 within the ambit of the African Development Bank. All other African states could borrow at relatively low interest rates as determined by the bank.¹⁴

In 2001, alongside Algeria, Egypt, Senegal and South Africa, Nigeria was a major driver of the New Partnership for Africa's Development and the African Peer Review Mechanism. Subsequently, these frontline states experienced strain between them on the now-rested issue of an African permanent seat on the United Nations (UN) Security Council. Nigeria's major tension has been in relation to South Africa to whose liberation from apartheid she had contributed. Without a coherent post-apartheid South Africa policy, Abuja has been ensconced in a game of catch-up with Pretoria economically and otherwise. South Africa is streets ahead of Nigeria in areas such as governance and infrastructure.¹⁵

In September 2014 back-to-back cash for arms scandals, totalling \$15 million (ZAR 164.6 million) allegedly involving high-profile Nigerian state officials and prominent politically exposed persons,¹⁶ were forfeited to the South African treasury. It remains to be seen how the duo's bi-national commission will mitigate this unprecedented situation.

CONCLUSION

In summary, Saliu's contention that 'Nigeria has benefited from her African policy' and that 'her diplomatic space has expanded as a continental leader' appears exaggerated.¹⁷ Rather, she enjoys waning influence and dwindling power. Since the

mid-1990s, she has lost high-profile elections. More spectacularly, her candidate for the AU Commission chair – incumbent Jean Ping of Gabon – was outlasted by South Africa's Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma in 2012. Three years earlier, rather than vote for Nigeria in an election to the UN Security Council, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Togo voted for themselves without presenting candidates.¹⁸

A minimalist agenda for Nigeria to reverse the foregoing situation is the election in February 2015 of strong and legitimate leaders who will build a strong economy and strong institutions to drive clean government at home and a national interest-propelled foreign policy abroad.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Department of Political Science & International Relations, Covenant University, Ota, Nigeria,
- 2 See Fafowora D, 'When will Nigeria earn international respect again?', *The Nation*, 25 September 2014, p. 72.
- 3 John Campbell argued that former President Olusegun Obasanjo's (1999–2007) diplomatic activism was dulled by Nigeria's internal dissolution. Under President Goodluck Jonathan, more attention appears devoted to national security than to a coherent or activist foreign policy. See Campbell, John, *Nigeria: Dancing on the Brink*, Ibadan: Bookcraft, 2010, p. 134.
- 4 Adebajo A, 'Hegemony on a shoestring: Nigeria's post-Cold War foreign policy', Adebajo A & AR Mustapha (eds), *Gulliver's Troubles: Nigeria's Foreign Policy After the Cold War*. Scottsville: UKZN Press, 2008, p. 32.
- 5 Fawole WA, 'Military, militias and mullahs: National security issues in Nigeria's foreign policy', in Adebajo A & AR Mustapha (eds), *Gulliver's Troubles: Nigeria's Foreign Policy After the Cold War*. Scottsville: UKZN Press, 2008, pp. 106–108.
- 6 Akindele RA, 'Nigeria's multilateral diplomacy, 1960–2012: Structure, process and preoccupation', *Nigerian Journal of International Studies (NJIS)*, 38, 1 and 2, December 2013, p. 16.
- 7 *Ibid.*, pp. 25–28.
- 8 Ogunsanwo A, 'Bilateralism and Nigeria's foreign policy', *NJIS*, 38, 1 and 2, December 2013, p. 62.
- 9 Adekeye A, 'Who's afraid of Boko Haram?', *Business Day Live*, 2 June 2014, <http://www.bdlive.co.za/opinion/columnists/2014/06/02/boko-haram-has-exposed-jonathans-ineptitude>. In 2013 the Nigerian military crackdown on Boko Haram led to the sect's increased presence and radicalization in Niger, Chad and Cameroon, prompting collaboration between these countries. See International Crisis Group, *Curbing Violence in Nigeria (II): The Boko Haram Insurgency*, Africa Report No. 216, 3 April 2014.
- 10 For instance, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Bashir Wali, remarked that 'none of Germany, South Africa and Egypt had up to a third of Nigeria's [2013 UN General Assembly] delegation' of 567, only 20% of whom added value. See Editorial, 'Big for nothing: Nigeria should not repeat last year's UN General Assembly jamboree', *The Nation*, 18 September 2014, p. 17.
- 11 Ogunsanwo A, *op. cit.*, p. 49.
- 12 Akindele RA, *op. cit.*, p. 17.
- 13 ZAR is the currency code for South African rand.
- 14 Ogunsanwo A, *op. cit.*, p. 59.
- 15 Awoniyi O, 'Nigeria becomes Africa's biggest economy', *AFP*, 7 April 2014.
- 16 Compare Editorial, 'F[ederal] G[overnment] as money launderer? No explanation can remove the illegality and odium of the \$9.3 million cash haulage scam', *The Nation* (Lagos), 23 September 2014, p. 19. The All Progressive Congress, the main opposition party, told the Jonathan government that 'nowhere else does a government engage in illegal black market movement of money or arms – both signatures of terrorism world-wide'. See Jibueze J, 'Outrage over \$5.7 million arms deal', *The Nation*, 8 October 2014, p. 57.
- 17 Saliu HA, 'New options for Nigerian foreign policy', *NJIS*, 38, 1 and 2, December 2013, p. 187.
- 18 Alli WO, 'Nigeria: State weakness and foreign policy', *NJIS*, 38, 1 and 2, December 2013, pp. 132, 137–138.

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