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President Buhari's Foreign Policy: A Realist Perception

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Abstract

President Buhari came to power in the midst of challenges ranging from security, economy and international relations. To overcome these challenges, Buhari's government decided to look inward for reforms in the overall security apparatus in order to relate effectively with the outside world for sustainable development in Nigeria. It is against this backdrop that this paper analyzed Buhari's foreign policy within the first Twelve (12) months of his administration and came to conclusion that, he was a realist in perception using political power for the realization of national objectives.

Keywords: Political Power, National Security, Foreign Relations, Sustainable Development

Introduction

Foreign policy is an important determinant of international relations. It deals with the relationship between actors in the international system. Therefore, the defining elements of foreign policy are friend or foe. The Nation States defined their friends and enemies in the international system with the intention of achieving the following objectives:

- *Maintenance of sovereignty and territorial integrity.
- *Provision of national security.
- *Promotion of economic interest and welfare of citizens.
- *Protection of national prestige and development of national power. *Maintenance of world order.

However, given the dynamism of Nigeria's domestic conditions resulting from dominant negative values, these objectives have not been maximally achieved when compared with her contemporaries in the third world countries of Latin America and Asia. This is not far from the lip service to Nigerian national pledge. The lyrics of the national pledge appear on the

lips of Nigerians every day like a devotional sermon, but with insignificant action to justify the pledge. Lest I forget, the lyrics read thus:

I pledge to Nigeria my country
To be faithful, loyal and honest
To serve Nigeria with all my strength
To defend her unity and uphold
Her honour and glory
So help me God.

It is pertinent to note that, school pupils at their formative stage, sportsmen, organized private sector, the traditional institution, the academia, the civil service and the political class read the national pledge only for ceremonial purposes. Against this backdrop, public consumption goods within the context of the neoclassical political economy such as functional schools, efficient health facilities, road infrastructure, pipe borne water, national security, etc. were relegated to the background leaving a lot to be desired in all sectors of the Nigerian economy. The devastating consequences of this disconnect between the pledge and positive action are a hostile environment for both domestic and international relations in Nigeria.

To buttress the above, President Buhari is of the view that:

In recent times Nigerian leaders appear to have misread our mission. Our founding fathers, Mr. Herbert Macaulay, Dr. Nnamdi Azikwe, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, Alhaji Ahmadu Bello, the Sardauna of Sokoto, Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, Mallam Aminu Kano, Chief J.S. Tarka, Mr. Eyo Ita, Chief Denis Osadeby, Chief Ladoke Akintola and their colleagues worked to establish a certain standard of governance. They might have differed in their methods or tactics or details, but they were united in establishing a viable and progressive country. Some of their successors behaved like spoilt children breaking everything and bring disorder to the house. (Leadership, 30th May 2015).

Nigeria's Domestic Condition Prior to Buhari's Administration

Nigeria, even though a colonial creation, nature has been very fair to her. She is endowed with abundant natural resources both human and material. Apart from Mali and Niger Republic, no nation in West African sub-region has the land mass of Nigeria.

According to Charles, Englama, and Adebusuyi (2010:61), Nigeria occupies a total land area of 923, 768 square kilometers (356,669 square miles). The upland covers 910,768 square kilometers, and 13,000 square kilometers is covered by water. The longest distance from East to West is about 767 kilometers, while from North to South is 1,605 kilometers. Nigeria shares a boundary with the Benin Republic on the West, the Cameroon Republic on the East,

Niger and Chad Republic on the Northern axis and on the Southern axis, it is a vast coastline of the Atlantic Ocean measuring about 800 kilometers known as the Gulf of Guinea.

Out of this total land area of Nigeria, about 31.3% is arable. 3.0% is for permanent crop production, 23.0% is for meadows and pastures. The forest woodland covers 15.0%. While 28.0% is for other uses, even though little is used for irrigation. Apart from maritime resources, Nigeria is blessed with abundant mineral resources. The country is number eight oil producer in the world, accounting for about 21.9% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), 56.4% of the foreign exchange receipts and 88.6% of government revenues. (Charles, Englama, and Adebusuyi, 2010:62).

Nature did not also forget Nigeria in terms of solid mineral deposit in virtually all local government areas of the federation. Minerals such as precious metals, barites, gypsum, kaolin, marble, coal, gold, iron ore, lead, etc., abound in Nigeria.

However, this nature gifts have not translated into better lives for the larger proportion of Nigerians. An enormous amount of money running into trillions of naira have been allocated to states from the federation account since the oil boom to over a decade of civil rule from 1999 to 2015. The intention is to provide basic welfare services and infrastructure such as schools, health facilities, water, electricity, roads, etc. Unfortunately, this commonwealth of the nation did not have a trickle-down effect on the rural and urban poor people in Nigeria. The reason is that the ruling elites, whom Buhari termed as 'spoilt children,' determined how the resources were shared to their own parochial advantage with the resultant effect of pervasive corruption and poverty in the land.

The impoverished and miserable situation of Nigeria was put in clear perspective by Asobie (2007:1) when he said:

Poverty is at the heart of Nigeria's socio-economic problems. Poverty manifest as hunger, ill health, or poor health, illiteracy and low level of formal education. It also takes the form of inadequate housing, poor clothing, malnourished off-springs and even early demise. The poor are humans. They are people with flesh and blood. But speaking frankly, this category of Nigerians live not really like humans. They are compelled to exist, nay navigate at a level that is fit more for animals, than for humans. They share the rain filled holes which constitute the main source of their drinking water with pigs, goats, and dogs.

Given this background, Nigerians began to fend for themselves leading to claims over primordial sentiments of ethnicity, religion, indigenes, and settlers, etc. This has taken toll of lives and property and threatened the corporate existence of Nigeria. In all the geopolitical zones of Nigeria, one case of the ethnoreligious or communal clash was recorded. Deadly, clashes that cannot be forgotten in the history of Nigeria are the Ife-Modakeke crisis of the

South West, the Umuleri-Aguleri crisis of the South East, the Ijaw-Itsekiri crisis of the South-South, the Yelwa-Shendam crisis of Jos Plateau and, the herdsmen and farmers crisis of Benue all in North Central Nigeria, the Kafanchan and Kano crisis of North Western Nigeria, the Tiv-Fulani and Tiv-Jukun crisis of Taraba North Eastern Nigeria.

Consequent upon the failure of the Nigerian state within the period under review, these communal clashes at micro-community level degenerated to well defined, well coordinated and well-sponsored terror groups in strategic regions of Nigeria. Heavily armed militants had their stronghold in oil-rich Niger Delta. The violent agitation of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) germinated in South East with multiplying effects of kidnappings across the country. The Boko Haram insurgents found in Northern Nigeria, particularly North East, where they found very fertile for the propagation of their barbaric ideology, walking on foot and convoy of cars, shooting sporadically and in most cases bombing and killing innocent Nigerians and foreigners with pride.

This was the situation when President Buhari won the election, defeating the incumbent President Good luck Jonathan after three consecutive unsuccessful, but the gallant contest in 2003, 2007, 2011.

Buhari's Foreign Policy Approach

The President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria is the single most important Nigerian representative in external affairs with extensive formal authority as chief executive in foreign policy formulation. He appoints ambassadors to other countries and receives foreign ambassadors. Therefore, given the extensive powers of Mr. President and the personal experience of Muhammadu Buhari as the former head of state, he approached his foreign policy from political realist's perspective. The primary objective of political realism in international relations is the use of political power for the pursuit of national interest which is often identified with security, the ultimate goal of foreign policy.

To achieve the objective of national security, Buhari first re-organized the entire security apparatus that make up the Nigerian intelligence community, putting them in proper perspective with a focus on sincere national security. He moved the command unit of the military from Abuja to the war theater in Maiduguri, appointed new defence service chiefs and national security adviser with dogged military doctrine to face the Boko Haram insurgents that threatened national security and foreign direct investment.

This new vigor in fighting Boko Haram with the intention of securing the nation for domestic and bilateral relations was carried out through the following re-organized national security decision making structures.

Office of the National Security Adviser (ONSA)

On 13th July 2015, President Buhari appointed major General Babagana Monguno (Rtd) as the new National Security Adviser (NSA). The NSA is the Chairman of the Nigeria Intelligence Community. He is, therefore, responsible for coordinating the activities of the Intelligence Community using Joint Intelligence Board (JIB). He advises the President,

Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces, the National Defence Council and the National Security Council on matters that affect the security of Nigeria.

National Defence Council

This council is to advise the President on matters relating to the defence of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Nigeria. The council is composed of the following:

- a. President - Chairman
- b. Vice president - Deputy Chairman
- c. Chief of Staff to Mr. President
- d. Secretary of Government of the Federation
- e. Honourable Minister of Defence
- f. Chief of Defence Staff
- g. Chief of Army Staff
- h. Chief of Naval Staff
- i. Co-opted Members

National Security Council

This council advises Mr. President on matters relating to public security. It is composed of the following:

- a. President - Chairman
- b. Vice president - Deputy Chairman
- c. Chief of Staff to Mr. President
- d. Secretary of Government of the Federation
- e. Head of Service of the Federation
- f. National Security Adviser
- g. Honourable Minister of Internal Affairs
- h. Honourable Minister of Defence
- i. Honourable Minister of Foreign Affairs
- j. Chief of Defence Staff
- k. Chief of Army Staff
- l. Chief of Naval Staff
- m. Chief of Air Staff
- n. Inspector General of Police
- o. Director General State Services
- p. Director General National Intelligence
- q. Co-opted Members

Apparently, after putting these national security structures in place, President Buhari forged ahead to discuss with his close neighbours, the member countries of Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) on how to end Boko Haram insurgency and secure the region for investment.

Buhari's Close Neighbour Diplomacy

Buhari's close neighbor diplomacy begins with the revival of the relationship between Nigeria her close neighbours that had gone sour under previous governments of Nigeria.

Prior to Buhari's administration, there were varying levels of distrust between Nigeria, Chad, and Cameroon. In 1983, Chad invaded parts of Borno State. It was President Buhari at that point an Army Major that chased them back to Chad. There have been several border disagreements and distrust between Nigeria and Cameroon, particularly, the Bakasi Peninsula. This lack of trust undermines the fight against Boko Haram under previous governments. There was no systematic share of intelligence. Nigerian troops were not allowed on the soil of Cameroon and Chad and vice versa.

Therefore, in the first three months of Buhari's presidency, he visited Niger, Chad, Cameroon and Benin Republics. Buhari had a bilateral discussion with the leaders of these countries which allay their fears of one country invading the other. The visits led to the resuscitation and expansion of the Moribund Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) and shifted the headquarters from Baga in Nigeria to Ndjamena, Chad. The MNJTF had 8,700 troops legally recognized by the instruments of African Union and United Nations. President Buhari committed one hundred U.S. Dollars to the operations of the joint task force.

Buhari and the Gulf of Guinea

The Gulf of Guinea is very strategic to the national interest of Nigeria, as it is to the rest of the world particularly Europe and America. Damian (2005) concluded that the Gulf of Guinea's tremendous potentials is creating investment opportunities for the region. Some of its resources such as oil, minerals, and forest continue to attract significant investment. Furthermore, the Economist (2004) stated that:

The Gulf of Guinea has a market size of about 300 million consumers. It encompasses a large number of counties from West and Central Africa. Angola, Benin, Cameroon, Central African Republic (CAR), Cote d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Nigeria, Republic of Congo, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo. These countries enjoy a wide geological, geographical and cultural diversity. They range from English speaking countries to French, Portuguese and Spanish speaking nations. Overall, the Gulf of Guinea generates a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of \$112 billion, exports of about \$45.5 billion and imports of about \$31.63 billion.

However, because of the accessibility of this region to the Atlantic ocean, it became open to crude oil theft, sabotage of oil rigs and arms smuggling. Biodun (2016) is of the view that, several forms of illegal activities at sea exist in the Gulf of Guinea including illegal, unreported, unregulated fishing, illegal arms trade, goods counterfeiting and petro piracy. In

2014, over 300,000 barrels of crude oil were stolen per day from Niger Delta and sold on the sea at \$120 per barrel.

In view of the above, on Monday, March 14, 2016, Buhari visited Malabo, the capital of oil-rich Equatorial Guinea where he discussed with President Obiang Nguema Mbasogo on the measures to protect the people and resources of Niger Delta and by extension the entire Gulf of Guinea. Buhari's visit led to the signing of an agreement to establish a combined maritime policing and security patrol committee. This will enhance security in the Gulf of Guinea and help curb maritime crimes that expose Nigerian political economy to danger. Given Buhari's personal integrity and exemplary leadership, his host, Mbasogo decorated him with the highest national award of Equatorial Guinea.

Buhari's Economic Diplomacy with the Rest of the World.

President Buhari has enjoyed tremendous goodwill from the international community during his electioneering campaign and after he won the election in March 2015. He acknowledged this kind gesture in his inaugural speech when he said "Your Excellencies, my fellow Nigerians, I cannot recall when Nigeria enjoyed so much goodwill abroad as now. The messages I received from East and West from powerful and small countries are indicative of international expectation from us".

It is interesting to note that, Nigeria's interaction with the rest of the world since 1960 to 2015 has not been so rosy like Buhari's tenure. 1960 – 65 marked the period of passive foreign diplomacy, 1966 – 69 was engulfed by the civil war with foreign relations highly influenced by religious inclinations. 1970 – 79 was dominated by military elites politics leading to coups and counter-coups with the oil boom and little knowledge of how to spend the money. 1979 – 1999 also witnessed the alternation between the civil rule and military regimes with image laundering abroad. 1999 – 2015 marked a decade of an uninterrupted civil rule with gross legitimacy crisis, incompetence and inept leadership resulting to the high-level corruption that dented the image of Nigeria abroad.

In cognizance of the above, Buhari's personal integrity and track records have earned Nigeria her place of pride in the international community. This is what informed the tremendous goodwill he received from abroad. It is on the basis of this, that powerful countries of Europe, Asia and America extended invitations to him to visit their countries on economic diplomacy with the intention of diversifying the Nigerian economy which over the years have relied solely on petrodollars.

One Year of Buhari's Foreign Policy: So Far, How Far

Within the one year period under review, Buhari has achieved the following:

- ❖ Buhari's personal integrity and impressive credentials have earned the confidence of the neighbouring countries of Chad, Cameroon, Niger and Benin republics to support the war against the insurgency. His foreign relations also encouraged France, UK, and the USA to support Nigeria with intelligence, weapons, and training for Nigerian

military against Boko Haram and Niger Delta militants. This has helped in the technical and tactical defeating of Boko Haram.

- ❖ Relative peace has returned to Nigeria. The mutual fear and suspicion among Nigerians have been eroded. Local governments initially under captivity by Boko Haram have been liberated.
- ❖ Military checkpoints that littered Nigerian roads signifying Nigeria is at war have disappeared.
- ❖ Buhari has redeemed Nigeria's image abroad. He has brought positive attention, love, admiration, importance, respect, and investments to Nigeria. All heads of states in the world now take Nigeria seriously.
- ❖ Buhari's recent visit to China yields over six billion dollars investments in Nigeria in different sectors of the economy such as power, solid minerals, housing, high tech industrial park, gas, agriculture and road infrastructure.
- ❖ The willingness of foreign nations to repatriate looted public funds back to Nigeria is a great achievement.

Conclusion

The thrust of Buhari's foreign policy is to make Nigeria a strong voice in Africa and the rest of the world. His approach towards achieving this objective is the re-positioning and re-strategizing of the Nigerian security apparatus to facilitate national security, regional integration and bilateral relationship with the rest of the world.

Recommendations

- ❖ Buhari should make a radical departure from Africa centered foreign policy to Nigeria centered foreign policy. He should rather encourage mutual trade among African nations.
- ❖ Buhari's diversified diplomacy from America, Europe, Asia and the Middle East should be handled with caution given the hangover of the cold war and the exploitative tendency of neocolonialism. However, in the event of domination by any of the nations among these blocs, he should be bold to take a diplomatic decision in the interest of Nigeria.
- ❖ Nigerians should embrace genuine economic engagements and expunge negative values of corruption.
- ❖ All Progressive Congress (APC) should re-organize itself by re-positioning the party with a view to sustaining the sympathy of the electorates so that they can consolidate the gains of Buhari.
- ❖ It is divine to go through some hardship for a period of time and also have relief for some other time. Therefore, Nigerians should be patient with President Muhammadu Buhari's administration, and he has a good will for the nation.

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