

An Assessment of Nigerian Foreign Policy during Babangida's Regime 1985-1993

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Abstract

The paper examines Nigeria's foreign policy during Babangida's Administration (1985-1993). This is imperative if external relations of a country are to be understood within the context of its foreign policy principles, statements and objectives which define her national interests. The paper examines the achievements and problems faced during Babangida's administration at both bilateral and multilateral levels from 1985-1993. The paper uses qualitative method to analyze data collected from secondary source. The objective is to discuss merit and demerit of Babangida's foreign policy. The paper used linkage theory which posits that there are linkages between foreign policy of a country, domestic and international environments. The findings of the paper revealed that there is the need to further boost and promote security and political relations between Nigeria and other countries. The paper recommends that there is the need to strengthen bilateral and multilateral interactions among countries.

Keywords: Diplomatic Engagements, National Interests, Bilateral and Multilateral Relations.

Introduction

Foreign policy of a nation is an instrument or a “mechanism national governments use to guide their diplomatic interactions and relationships with other countries” (Gambari, 2004). An “interaction between forces originating outside the country's borders and those working within them”, [anchored on well-thought-out and] “general objectives that guide the activities and relationships of...” [the states involved]. Foreign policy of a nation is a reflection of its domestic policies. The development of foreign policy is influenced by domestic considerations, the policies or behaviour of other states, or plans to advance specific geopolitical designs” (Adeniji, 2005). He also sees foreign policy as the pattern of behaviours a state adopts in pursuing its goals, objectives and interests in its relations with other nations in the international system. Elaborating further, Akinyemi (1999) considers it the “action of state which has effect beyond the borders of state taking the activities in the international behaviours of state”. The element of such state behaviours include, (a) the declaration and implementation of state policies which affect other states. (b) The patterns, trends and direction of a state trade and economic relations with other states. (c) Types of friends and enemies they make. (d) The beliefs and attitudes of states towards peace, war, change among others. Therefore, foreign policies are the outcome of a complicated

process in which many actions both within the state and beyond its borders are influential. No state can provide the welfare of its people without participation in the international system or without continuous cooperation with other states. Gambari (2004) is of the opinion that foreign policy is any mutually adopted and fundamentally agreed principles that a state adopts in pursuing its interest in the international system. Foreign policies among nations are contingent on several factors. Heads of State, diplomats, foreign missions and consulates are guided by institutional, legal, socio-cultural and political environments within which they act. Scholars of international relations have highlighted and continue to highlight, the relevance of some key factors such as: bilateral and multilateral relations, leadership conduct, national interests, historical and geographical ties in inter-state relations.

The paper highlighted Babangida's administration and its foreign policy during the 1985 to 1993. Nigeria's foreign policy environment is, both internal and external, and intricately connected to one another. Largely, foreign policy cannot be divorced from domestic environment and domestic politics. Nigeria is Africa's most populous country and had experimented democratic systems of government firstly, from 1960 to 1966, then from 1979 to 1983 and now from 1999 to 2022. Nigeria had vast economic and human

resources. In particular, it is the sixth major oil producing country in the world. The buoyant state of Nigeria's economy in the 1970s, in the continent, where most countries have continued to face chronic economic difficulty, is one of the chief factors that have made it possible for Nigeria to have played a leading role in Africa. This role was accomplished bilaterally, multilaterally or via such international institutions like Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), African Union (AU), Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), the United Nations Organization (UNO) and Organization of Islamic Conference of which Nigeria is a member (Gambari, 1998).

In Africa, Nigeria as the giant played a major role in the socio-economic, political and cultural development of the continent. This is evident by the country's contributions to mediation, and peace keeping operations in Africa and other parts of the world. This can be seen in its role as one of the founders of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and Organization of African Unity (OAU). Nigeria has played a key role in the support for African Liberation Movements, as well as in the promotion of the realization of independence in many African countries.

Theoretical Framework

The paper uses linkage theory as its theoretical framework. The exponents of the Linkage theory include Rosenau (1990), Northedge (1991), Lisca (1992) among others. The theory posits that there are linkages between foreign policy of a country, domestic and international environments. Realists emphasize on the normal channels of inter-state relations. This involves ties between governmental as well as bureaucratic arrangements. Formal ties among Non-Governmental Organizations and those developed through Trans National Organizations such as corporations. The linkage theory takes care of realism, and idealism. The usage of these theories is not new. This is not only because of its significance but also because of the relative ease and comprehensiveness with which it approaches the question of what determines relations among nations? Their background, beliefs and predispositions have important bearings upon foreign policy and the

behaviour of nations. The role of Nigeria's leaders such as Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida, Shehu Aliyu Shagari and Obasanjo in the establishment, severance, and restoration of diplomatic relations with some African states serves to demonstrate the point under consideration. The linkage theory goes beyond the domestic roots of foreign policy. Lisca (1991) posit that whatever the strengths or weaknesses of the domestic factors in determining relations among nations, foreign policies of nations are also influenced by the external or the international environment.

Methodology

This paper used qualitative method to analyze data collected from secondary sources such as the existing literature on Nigeria foreign policy during Babangida's administration. Therefore, the sources of data included textbooks, journals, magazines, newspapers, theses and dissertations, government publications among others.

An Assessment of Nigerian Foreign Policy during Babangida's Regime (1985-1993)

General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida's regime was the eighth political leadership and the sixth military rulership in Nigeria. He shot himself to power after sacking the regime of his former boss, General Muhammadu Buhari on August 27, 1985, and thereafter declared himself "Military President", thus becoming the first Military President in Africa and probably in the world (Akinyemi, 2010). The emergence of Babangida as the 'Military President' did not come as a surprise to many, judging by the fact that he played active role in his predecessor's administration as the third in the chain of command which brought him into many and often open disagreements with the policies of that administration.

Indeed, it became public knowledge that a number of policy-related issues created serious challenges for the administration of Buhari. Among these issues were seniority problem that confronted the administration from the start, the leadership tussle involving some high ranking officers and the abundant disagreements among the members of the Supreme Military Council (SMC) – the then highest ruling body in Nigeria – on what should constitute the substance of its

public policy and the direction the administration should go. These issues remained largely unsolved throughout the period of the Buhari's era (Akinyemi, 1994). Babangida's first Minister of External Affairs reflected on the crisis that bedeviled the Buhari's SMC, thus:

The issues of disagreement were multiple but they all boiled down on governance and the handling of the Nigerian political situation. IBB had a way of registering his strong protests in a mild and unassuming way, but his grouse was on his perceived arrogance and highhandedness of his former bosses. He felt they were not only insensitive to the concerns of Nigerians and the fears of the international community about dictatorship. He felt they were also very insensitive to the thinking and grievances of the military high command that was increasingly growing impatient and disgruntled (Akinyemi, 2010).

Babangida had demonstrated his dissatisfaction and disaffection with his predecessor's policies, especially in the external context which he felt was not in tune with the expectations of the international community. Thus, in the area of foreign policy he registered unmistakable doubt and what he considered as inconsistencies with the country's founding philosophy. According to Babangida,

Nigeria's foreign policy was characterized by inconsistency and incoherence. It lacked the clarity to make us know where we stood in matters of international concern to enable other countries relate to us with seriousness. Our external relations have been conducted by a policy of retaliatory reactions (Akinyemi, 2010).

Therefore, Babangida's administration set out early to repair the damages done to Nigeria's foreign policy by the Buhari administration. Both the IMF loan stalemate and the frosty relations with the west were quickly resolved.

Nigeria soon resumed its diplomatic relations with Britain. In the same spirit, the closure of Nigeria's borders with her neighbours together with the vexing issue of illegal aliens, which had converged to worsen relations between Nigeria and her neighbours were astutely reversed to the admiration of West African countries (Akinyemi, 2010), culminating in the provision of economic assistance to these countries, which won him the Chairmanship of ECOWAS for three consecutive terms (Adeniji, 2005).

Indeed, under Babangida, the country's cardinal principles of national interest, 'Afrocentricity', good neighbourliness and greater integration in the West African sub-region remained unchanged. The period witnessed certain experiments and bold initiatives which reinforced the country's claim to being a power in Africa. The most notable among these were the attempt to organize a 'concert of medium powers' and the introduction of the Technical Aids Corps Scheme (TACS) under the foreign minister-ship of Bolaji Akinyemi, the 'economic diplomacy' initiative, the active response to the perceived threat from apartheid South Africa (Nigeria led thirty-two other countries in boycotting the Commonwealth games in Edinburgh, Scotland, in protest at Britain's reluctance to apply comprehensive sanctions against the apartheid regime), the opening of diplomatic ties with Israel, strengthening of existing relations with Germany and France, mediation in the intractable Chadian crisis, the border clashes between Mali and Burkina Faso, and the disputes between the leaders of Togo and Ghana, and the deployment of a peacekeeping mission to war-torn Liberia under the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) (Osaghae, 2002).

To be sure, the decision by the Babangida administration to initiate the peacekeeping mission in Liberia under the aegis of ECOWAS stood out as the most remarkable and historic sub-continental peace initiative. It was influenced by a number of factors, including the close personal relations between Babangida and the then Samuel Doe, President of Liberia, which led Nigeria to support Liberia in several ways before the war; the evolution of a regional approach to solving regional problems which was welcomed by the UN, whose peacekeeping

capacity was overstretched; the reluctance of the United States and other powers to intervene; and the potential threat of the Liberian civil war to the collective security of the sub-continent (Osaghae, 2002).

The brilliance and dexterity with which the Babangida regime handled the sub-regional security issues earned him both international and continental accolades. Consequently, General Babangida became the Chairman of the (defunct) OAU, hosted the Summit of the OAU in 1991 and got the Heads of State to sign the treaty establishing the African Economic Community (AEC); got the United States of America to forgive Nigeria some of its bilateral debts and obtained financial and technical assistance to establish the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA). It was also at this time that Nigeria's permanent representative at the UN, late Major General Joe Garba became the President of the 44th UN General Assembly Chief Emeka Anyaoku was elected the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth, while General Obasanjo unsuccessfully contested for the office of the UN Secretary-General, but was eventually appointed to the Commonwealth Eminent Persons' Group in recognition of Nigeria's role in the liberation struggle in South Africa (Adeniji, 2005).

Furthermore, as the OAU Chairman, Babangida strongly articulated the demand for reparations to be paid to Africa by the former colonialists for the ravages of the slave trade and exploitation. It is agreed that Nigeria's most notable African policy innovation was the introduction of the Technical Aids Corps scheme (TAC) in 1987 (Osaghae, 2002). Conceived along the lines of the peace corps in the United States, the scheme involved the secondment of Nigerian graduates and professionals – doctors, engineers, lawyers, teachers and others – to various African, Caribbean and Pacific countries, entirely at Nigeria's expense. The programme greatly boosted the country's status as a major contributor to African development (Osaghae, 2002).

Also, under the platform of the defunct OAU, Nigeria, in 1987 sought to strengthen the use of the oil weapon by African countries, thereby joined Algeria, Angola, Benin, Libya,

Cameroon, Gabon and Congo to establish the African Petroleum Producers Association APPA, (Cote d'Ivoire, Egypt, Zaire and Equatorial Guinea joined in later years). The main objective of APPA was to promote cooperation among member states in hydrocarbon exploration, production, refining, petrochemicals, manpower development and acquisition and adoption of technology. Although this initiative never yielded any foreign policy dividend for the country, it nonetheless showed a bold departure in Nigeria's African policy (Osaghae, 2002).

In essence, this era, not only marked a high point of the country's rising international profile, it also conferred commensurate prestige to Nigeria in her foreign policy. Akinyemi (2010) attributed the success of Babangida's foreign policy initiatives to the crop of intellectuals whom he assembled as members of his 'kitchen cabinet'. Among them were personalities such as Elaigwu, Obiozor, Ofoegbu, Akinyemi, Chime, Olagunju, Oyovbaire, Ogunsanwo, Oshuntokun, among others. Despite the remarkable contributions to Nigeria's foreign policy by these intellectual giants, Osaghae (2002) argued that the foreign policy arena under Babangida nonetheless, suffered great confusion and incoherence resulting in the arbitrary change in the Ministers of External Affairs.

This confusion was greatly reflected in the administration's bid to elevate religion as a conscious guide to Nigeria's foreign policy. This was demonstrated by the circumstances that surrounded Nigeria's membership of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) in 1987. The regime decided to change Nigeria's status from that of an observer status to a full-fledged member without due consideration of both domestic and international concerns. The direct result of this was a serious and lasting dent on the administration's credibility. It was all the more so, with the unending transition programme of the administration that permanently eroded the gains made at the external context.

Indeed, the advances that Nigeria recorded at the external relations were eclipsed by the insincerity of the Babangida's administration in its transition programme, where it appeared as though it had perfected the colonial-style policy

of divide and rule, by playing one group against another. General Babangida had not only postponed the terminal date for the transition to civil rule three times, but had also repeatedly banned and unbanned many politicians with every round of postponement of the terminal date until the criteria for participation and non-participation in the electoral process became completely blurred (Gambari, 2004).

This deliberate subversion of its own transition programme by the government became evident when the June 12 1993 presidential election was annulled. The political imbroglio occasioned by this act forced Babangida to leave office hurriedly in August 1993; but, more importantly, it diminished considerably Nigeria's credentials in the international arena (Akinyemi, 2010). In the words of a respected Nigerian politician, Late Alhaji Adamu Ciroma:

It is important to add that Babangida's last days in office attracted a lot of negative publicity in domestic and international arena. His penchant for manipulating institutional processes earned him the title 'Maradona' (after the dribbling skills of a former global soccer genius) and will go down in history as one of the most hated regimes in Nigeria. From a more vintage position, Ibrahim Ayagi passed the verdict on the regime this way:

We have had a worst administration that any country could be unlucky to have (1985-1993) ... The style of the administration was 'Maradonic'. Within the eight (8) years (1985-1993), Nigeria joined the rank of the 13 world poorest countries...poverty has eaten deep into our living conditions, we are and have been poverty-stricken (Ayagi, 1997).

Conclusion

The paper examined Nigeria's foreign policy during Babangida's administration. This is necessary if external relations of a country are to be understood within the context of its foreign policy principles, statements and objectives which define her national interests. The paper

examined the achievements and problems faced during the Babangida administration at both bilateral and multilateral levels.

Even though Babangida's regime qualified as one of the most hated regimes in the history of Nigerian leadership; Nigerians have had a worst administration that any country could be unlucky to have. The style of the administration was 'Maradonic' - deceptive. Within the eight (8) years, Nigeria joined the rank of the 13 world poorest countries, poverty has eaten deep into Nigeria's living conditions, Nigerians are and have been poverty-stricken during this period.

Recommendations

The paper recommended among others that:

1. There is the need to strengthen bilateral and multilateral interactions among countries.
2. There is the need to further boost and promote security relations among countries.
3. There is the need to enhance political and economic ties between Nigeria and other countries of the world.

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