

## A Reflection on Nigeria's Past: Africa as the Centerpiece of Nigeria's Foreign Policy Revisited

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### Abstract

Over the years, Nigeria had lived with the big name and informal recognition as the 'giant of Africa'. Perhaps her population might, of about 140 million, the largest in Africa, and her reputable oil wealth, have placed this diplomatic privilege in clear perspective. In acquiescence, Nigeria had variously lived more than this expectation. The country had overwhelmingly given both solicited and unsolicited supports to African neighbours: intervened positively in their internal crisis, provided humanitarian services, doled out billions of dollars as charity, sent technical aid corps, formed and sent military supports, and so on. In most cases, these flamboyant gestures were defiantly done against home interest and survival. However, there seems to be a disconnect between what is given out and what is given in return. Therefore, this paper seeks to build a linkage between Nigeria's flamboyant foreign policy thrust in Africa and the ironical diminishment of Nigeria's prominence and economic value both home and abroad. The qualitative mechanism of data collection and analysis is applied. We argue that the superfluous involvement of Nigeria in Africa's problems, in defiance of home problems, aimed at acquiring cheap fame, rather makes her unpopular and diminishes whatever prestige that had been built already. Not only that, these beneficiary countries never appreciate such, they rather sabotage Nigeria's interest in global politics in recompense. It is observed, also, that in the present, Nigeria's foreign policy thrust has not shifted radically from the 'Africa centerpiece' bent. We conclude that for Nigeria to achieve genuine economic and political standing/reputation, a holistic revision and redirection of this blind focus on Africa is highly imperative.

**Keywords:** Foreign Policy, Afro-centrism, West Africa, African Union, ECOMOG, ECOWAS, NEPAD, Economy.

### Introduction

Certainly, a nation's foreign policy is the instrument through which it pursues its national interest. In fact, it is generally accepted that in relations among states, every nation should vigorously pursue its national interest and seek to protect it at whatever cause. Hence, Morgenthau (1973) asserts that "no nation can have a true guide as what it needs to do in foreign policy without accepting national interest as a guide". Thus, the question arises as to whether the Nigerian leaders considered Nigeria's national interest in the pursuit of their regimes foreign policy? More especially having overwhelmingly and persistently burdened its successive foreign policy on the cause of Africa's endless problem. With the credit of being the first Nigerian Prime minister, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Bewlewa made the foremost foreign policy statements on behalf of the country and gave it a distinct direction which clearly focused on placing Africa overwhelmingly at the epicenter of Nigeria's foreign policy and hitherto, successive Nigerian leadership have well followed suit. However, it was the regime of Gen. Yakubu Gowon that clearly identified Africa as the centre-piece of Nigeria's foreign policy.

Africa as the center-piece of Nigeria's foreign policy is a foreign policy thrust which primarily and persistently accords utmost attention, total concentration and exclusive recognition to Africa in Nigeria's foreign policy making and implementation before thinking of the outside world (Adekunle, 1986). In his acceptance speech at the United Nations on October 8, 1960, Bewlewa clearly portrayed Africa as the foremost concern of his foreign policy. He reckoned that:

So far I have concentrated on the problems of Africa. Please do not think that we are not interested on the problems of the rest of the world; we are intensely interested in them and hope to be allowed to assist in finding solutions to them through this organization, but being human we are naturally concerned first with what affects our immediate neighborhood.

However, this brotherly gesture have painstakingly demanded of Nigeria, both financial, material, military and other logistical assistance from Nigeria even at times loss of lives of its own citizens which are probably made in the name of brotherly sacrifice. For instance, by 1986, the government was not only indebted to OAU liberation Committee but also defaulted altogether in its contribution to the regular OAU budget (Adekunle, 1986). Remarkably, Nigeria equally dashed out her territory including her people who speak her indigenous language to

Cameroon on the same neighborly ground. Presently, half of the Nigerian population are living below poverty line, yet Nigeria have not wavered in committing scarce resources in ensuring the wellbeing of her African brothers, thus the appellation accorded to Nigeria as the 'giant of Africa'.

Today in Africa, Libya, Egypt and South Africa, who have practically contributed little to African problems are now emerging powers in Africa with fast growing economies, and are seriously contesting for the UN Security Council seat. While on the opposite, Nigeria which suppose to be on the front line is rather plagued with a battered and wobbling economy that could made one to take time to reassess what actually are the very attributes of a really 'giant of Africa'. In these considerations, this paper seeks to reexamine the traditional practice of making 'Africa the centre-piece of Nigeria's foreign policy at all times in order to ascertain if actually such flamboyant and father Christmas African biased foreign policy is still relevant in catapulting Nigeria to the realm of economic prosperity or perhaps UN Security seat.

More importantly, this paper is burdened with the question as to what has Nigeria actually gained in making Africa to persistently appear at the centerpiece of her foreign policy? Is making Africa the centerpiece of Nigeria's foreign policy in agreement with Nigeria's foreign policy? And what should actually preoccupy Nigeria's foreign policy thrust in this globalized international system. Particularly, in order to approach these questions, our study thoroughly reviewed the various foreign policy drives of the successive Nigerian leadership which were irresistibly conditioned by the logic of Africa. Particularly, genuine effort is made to critically examine the diplomatic relevance of crowning Africa, as the centre-piece of Nigeria's foreign policy.

### **The Balewa's Regime (1960-1966)**

Tafawa Belewa's interest in Africa was never really in doubt. He was always interested in the well being and freedom of Africa and Africans. His foreign policy thrust which identified Africa as a key focus of Nigeria's foreign policy was marked by a three concentric circle which has the Nigeria's neighbors in West Africa as its main focus, followed by Africa at large and then the rest of the World. This is illustrated in diagram 1.

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Belewa was particularly committed to the unity and progress of Africa as well as the decolonization of Africa. Belewa played a leading role in the formation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1963 and the Chad Basin Commission in 1964. Nigeria equally contributed substantially to the fund of the OAU liberation Committee. Also, Nigeria severed relations with France on January 5, 1961 after they had carried out the third nuclear test in Sahara on December 27, 1960. The Belewa's government was also deeply involved towards the decolonization of Africa and played an active role in expulsion of racist South Africa from the Commonwealth in 1961. He offered a non-military assistance such as administrative and medical staff training for the provisional Angolan independent government of Holden Robert.

### **Yakubu Gowon (1966-1975)**

General Yakubu Gowon's regime remains so far the longest administration in Nigeria. However, suffice it to say that this regime battled with a domestic environment characterized by civil war but this did not deter Gowon from focusing more on African issues and problems in his foreign policy initiatives. In fact from 1970, Nigeria's commitment to Africa became more pronounced as it declared Africa the centre piece of its foreign policy (Obi, 2006:113). Hence, though the previous administration gave Africa a pride of place in Nigeria's foreign policy thrust, it was however in this regime that Africa was first identified as the centre-piece of Nigeria's foreign policy. This new commitment showed in Nigeria's determination to rid the continent of colonialism and white supremacist regimes. Prior to this period, Nigeria did not back liberation movement with arms and ammunition and other logistics. Against the racist regime in South Africa, Nigeria led the African boycott against South African participation in the 1972 Munich Olympic Games in Germany. Also in trying to identify with the plight of a fellow African nation, Nigeria in sympathy with Egypt, cut diplomatic relations with Israel in 1973, despite the fact that she had no direct problems with Israel.

In playing the big brother role, Nigeria decided in 1974 during the oil boom to sell oil to African nations at concessionary prices, thus losing a substantial amount of money in the process. Also considerable efforts were made by Gowon to enhance Nigeria's trade relations with other African countries while Nigeria led the struggle for collective bargaining between Africa, Caribbean and Pacific States and the European Economic Commission (EEC). This effort led to the signing of the Lome convention in 1975. It is instructive that the ACP team was led by Nigerian Ambassador to the EEC, Olu Sanu. In fact, it was part of this policy of more closeness to its neighbors that made Nigeria's leaders at that time to believe according to Gambari (1979) that "a West African

integration scheme would offer a rational outlet for external aid to African nations and provide an institutional framework for Nigeria's leadership and the erosion of France's political and economic influence..." Nigeria therefore set itself on a mission of forming an economic union in the West African sub-region. According to Gowon;

There was a 'new Nigeria' that recognized its role in West Africa and realized that the gigantic task of economic and political regeneration in which it is engaged will be of little avail unless it was attuned to the requirements of the economy of the rest of Africa particularly West Africa.

Hence, on the 28th May 1975, history was made when fifteen West African states assembled in Lagos and signed the treaty establishing the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Nigeria's efforts at regional integration thus materialized.

### **Murtala/ Obasanjo Regimes (1975-1979)**

Nigeria's Afrocentric posture was highly manifested in this regime especially in the handling of the Angolan crises which eventually launched the Murtala regime into international limelight as a regime that was firmly committed in the African cause not minding whose ox is gored. Nigeria's interest in the Angolan struggle was mainly due to the involvement of the racist South Africa in the conflict. Nigeria had earlier supported a government of national unity in Angolan comprising the three committed liberation movements which include the MPLA, FNLA and UNITA in line with the OAU's position (Sotunmbi, 1990). However, the preponderance of evidence at the disposal of the Murtala government that South Africa's involvement in the conflict was at the instance of both the FNLA and UNITA made Murtala to clearly gave his support to the MPLA despite America's wish on the grounds that the two groups "have forfeited their right to the leadership of the Angolan people by joining hands with neocolonialist and racist soldiers of fortune (Fawole, 2003). This was announced to a stunned world on 25<sup>th</sup> November 1975.

Nigeria's recognition also came up with financial backup. The Angolans were given 20 million dollars, military hardware, fighter planes, clothing and even tons of meat. Later at the OAU's Extra Ordinary Session on Angola which was held in Addis Ababa in January 1976, the Murtala regime lobbied other African countries to give full recognition to the MPLA. Thus, on 11<sup>th</sup> February 1976, the OAU accorded MPLA a full recognition. Ironically, Murtala Mohammed could not well savor the victory of a project which he had invested so much energy, passion and resources as he was cut down two days later by the bullets of Dimka on 13<sup>th</sup> February 1976.

In addition to this, Nigeria contributed enormously to several liberation movements in the continent. This had therefore greatly contributed towards the political independence of most African countries. For instance, on February 13, 1976, Nigeria donated the sum of two million dollars \$2m to South Africa's Africa National Congress, ANC, and 500,000 dollars to Namibia's South West African People's Organization, SWAPO. SWAPO was later granted permission to open office in Lagos. At about the same time, the Federal Ministry of Information inaugurated a committee for dissemination of information about the evils of Apartheid. Fundamentally, the committee was to intimate the government with current news and activities of the racist regime in South Africa and advise the government on the best way to approach her anti-Apartheid policies as well as enlighten the public on the situation in South Africa. In fact, General Obasanjo, in December 1976 launched the Southern African Relief Fund. The money collected was sent to Angola, Namibia and South Africa's liberation forces.

In 1978, Nigeria's big brother role in Africa was also shown by its free grant of 2 million and 5 million dollars, which the new Obasanjo government gave to Zambia and Mozambique respectively to enable the two frontline states strengthen their defense capacity against the racist forces (Aluko, 1990). Also, the Nigeria utilized her economic strength to wrestle with the British government under Margret Thatcher when it gave recognition to the Bishop Muzorewa government who was installed through a sham election organized by Ian Smith regime in April 1979. According to him, in May 1979, the Nigerian government arrested the S.K. Kulu, a tanker owned by the South African Maritime Corporation of Cape Town, but flying the flag of the Panama Republic, which was on charter to British Petroleum (BP), to lift crude oil from Bonny oil terminal to Holland. After the arrest, the government decided against selling the 1,616,636 barrels of oil in the tanker to BP and also decided to reduce to about a third BP's take on Nigerian crude with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> August 1979. The government also in May 1979, barred British firms from tendering for contracts in Nigeria until, the British government clarified its position on Zimbabwe (Aluko, 1990).

In fact, owing to this regime's commitment to Africa's liberation from apartheid, on July 31, 1979, the Federal Cabinet Office in Lagos announced that the Supreme Military Council (SMC) has decided to take over the assets of the British Petroleum (BP) in Nigeria with effect from August 1, 1979 and that the government would pay compensation for British assets. The statement explained that the action was a reaction to the British government permission to BP to start exporting North sea and non- embargoed oil to South Africa and that the arrangement was a 'mere subterfuge' to make Nigerian oil available to the apartheid regime in Pretoria and as such, the most

effective way to stop Nigerian oil from reaching the enemies of Africa in South Africa was to cut BP off from Nigeria's crude oil supply (Aluko, 1990).

### **Alhaji Shehu Shagari (1979-1983)**

When Alhaji Shehu Shagari was sworn in as the first executive president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, he inherited a dynamic afrocentric foreign policy which was heavily backed up by sound economy. Shagari in his first foreign policy speech to the joint session of the national Assembly in March 1980, declared that:

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 blackmen are free (cited in Obi, 2006).

In line with this foreign policy statement quoted above, Shagari was committed to the decolonization process in Africa. Hence, Nigeria took an active part in the Lancaster House Proceedings that led to the independence of Zimbabwe. The government equally gave large financial grant to the new Robert Mugabe led government, to assist her in taking off.

Of course, the Nigeria-Cameroon border crisis was an event which put Nigeria's love for its neighbors in test. The immediate cause of the border crisis in May 1981 was a deliberate killing of five Nigerian soldiers by Cameroonian gendarmes on May 16, 1981 (Nweke, 1990). After the incident, the then Nigerian external Affairs Minister, Professor Ishaya Audu in a press statement had described the incident as a cold-blooded murder and threatened that Nigeria would not take the issue lying low. However, despite the fact that the dominant mood in the country then was that Nigeria should employ a military option against Cameroon, the Federal Government still adopted a diplomatic option leading to the peaceful resolution of the conflict by the end of 1981 with the payment of reparation to the families of the bereaved, which eventually ceded the land to the Cameroonians against the public opinion. Macebuh (1981) has demonstrated this more succinctly:

There is in my view, more than sufficient documentary and other evidence to support the contention that the national mood in June and July was overwhelmingly in favor of military action against Cameroon. The Federal Government was perfectly aware of this, especially as quite a few members of President Shagari's administration seemed inclined themselves towards a more bellicose response to the crisis.

### **Mohammed Buhari (1983-1985)**

The Buhari regime's major preoccupation was the revamping of the Nigeria's battered economy. This clearly made a slight shift from the usual Afrocentric burdened Nigeria foreign policy. This pushed him more towards into taking some foreign policy measures which affected Nigeria's immediate neighbors and as such made them see the era as an inglorious one. Three of such measures that had the highest impact were the closure of the Nigerian borders, the expulsion of illegal aliens and the sudden change of the nation's currency. Usually, whenever there is a military coup in Nigeria, the perpetrators of the coup normally close the country's airports, land and sea borders for a brief period as a security measure aimed at preventing external forces from destabilizing the new regime.

However, in the case of Buhari, the land border remained permanently closed in order to prevent the escape of some of the 'dramatis personae' of the failed second republic, stem the tide of smuggling which was a booming business in the nation's borders, and to also check currency trafficking and stamp out petroleum products smuggling in the light of Nigeria's refusal to accept the IMF's demand for the removal of petroleum subsidy. This caused untold hardship on Nigeria's immediate neighbors especially Chad and Niger Republic that are landlocked. The harsh effect on the border closure got to a level that France and America had to intercede on behalf of Chad thus making the government to grant her permission to use Port Harcourt and Calabar Ports for the supply of relief materials and petroleum (Obi, 2006:173). Leaders of these affected countries came to plead with Buhari to reconsider his policy, with little success. They even went to the extent of offering him the leadership of ECOWAS in November 1984, but citing the need to concentrate on Nigeria's daunting domestic problems, he rejected. However, despite Buhari's image in West African sub-region which was not too wonderful due to the above mentioned policies, his commitment to Africa was never in doubt. Despite Nigeria's lean purse, the liberation movements still received financial assistance from the regime. The unconditional release of Nelson Mandela occupied the regimes attention. Nigeria under Buhari also accorded recognition to the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) on November 11, 1984, whose territory had been unlawfully occupied by the Moroccans since the Spanish left the country.

### **Ibrahim Babangida (1985-1993)**



General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida came to power on August 1995, with a foreign policy clearly directed to take a lead in the African continent. As a reverse from the African policy of the past regime, Babangida asserted in his maiden speech:

Vindictive considerations must not be the basis of our diplomacy. Africa's problems, and their solutions should constitute the premise of our foreign policy. The revitalization of OAU and the Lagos Plan of Action for self sufficiency and constructive cooperation in Africa shall be our primary concern. ECOWAS must be revamped with a view to achieving the objectives of regional integration (cited in Obi, 2006:181).

Thus began, a new era of extreme idealism and flamboyancy in Nigeria's foreign policy. It was simply an era when the dream of making Nigeria look great in the eyes of the outside world overshadowed the realistic goal of really making Nigeria great in real terms. The former Director General of the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs (NIIA), Prof. Bolaji Akinyemi who was the Foreign Affairs Minister of Babangida played a key role. Babangida was able to arrange a cease-fire in the border war that broke up between Mali and Burkina Faso using his External Affairs Minister Prof. Akinyemi. A fruitful rapprochement was equally initiated by this regime with Nigeria's immediate neighbors, who suffered terrible setbacks due to Buhari's rigid policies. In appreciation of Nigeria's benevolence towards them, they made Babangida the Chairman of ECOWAS for three consecutive terms in 1985, 1986 and 1987.

Nigeria's leadership of West Africa again led her into spearheading the formation in 1990 of the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) in order to help bring peace to Liberia as a result of a rebel group led by Mr. Charles Taylor who was fighting to dethrone the government of President Samuel Doe. Gen. Babangida donated 8 billion dollars for the ECOMOG exercise which was seen as too expensive for a poor country like Nigeria. Under this regime, also, Nigeria initiated the Technical Aid Corps (TAC) through which Nigeria sends some of her young professionals like Doctors, Engineers, Lawyers, and Pharmacists etc to needy African states for a 2 year period, which can be renewed on request by the benefiting country. Participant in the scheme were paid 500 dollars per month from the Nigerian purse while the host nations took care of the accommodation and transport. Nigeria's commitment to the OAU never reduced as Babangida was elected the OAU chairman in 1991, when he hosted the most opulent and extravagant summit of the organization in Abuja.

#### **Gen. Sani Abacha (1993-1998)**

Abacha's foreign policy was almost an extension of the Babangida's foreign policy thrust. Thus Abacha ran a foreign policy that was clearly biased in favor of Africa. Abacha continued to lend financial and logistical assistance to ECOMOG until the final negotiations and elections were conducted in Liberia in 1997, which saw the same Charles Taylor that started the crisis emerging as the President.

Abacha also used the ECOMOG force to restore the Sierra Leonean democratically elected government of Ahmed Tejan Kabbah in power who was overthrown by Major Johnny Paul Koroma. This attracted applause from the international community though a foreign media described Nigeria as a country that imports what it has in excess and exports what it lacks. This was in apparent reference to Nigeria's importation of petroleum products and 'export' of democracy to Sierra Leone when it was itself under a military rule (Obi, 2006).

#### **Olusegun Obasanjo (1999-2007)**

The Obasanjo's administration, as a return and reappearance of civilian/ democratic rule marked a new face of the Nigeria's foreign policy which clearly focused on economic diplomacy which is highly defined in terms of attracting foreign direct investments/ partnerships from the West in order to engender economic development. However, Nigeria continued the recognition of Africa as the centre-piece of her foreign policy. In fact, Nigeria demonstrated a strong determination towards the success of the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD). Though the initiative for NEPAD has been attributed to Presidents Thabo Mbeki of South Africa, Obasanjo of Nigeria, and Bouteflika of Algeria, Asobie (2005) has argued that NEPAD is not entirely an African initiative. According to him, the Millennium Action Plan for African Recovery (later named NEPAD), was a response by Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair, who said he would want to see a comprehensive development scheme for Africa by Africa themselves. Consequent upon this, Mbeki with Obasanjo and created a team that developed the plan which was approved by the OAU Summit at Lusaka, Zambia in July 2001, and subsequently presented to the G-8 at their Genoa, Italy Summit by Presidents Thabo Mbeki and Obasanjo on behalf of Africa. However, as the chairman of NEPAD Implementation Committee of Heads of States, President Obasanjo has constantly been in touch with the 'New Partners' of Africa towards the successful implementation of the scheme. Nigeria's continued recognition of Africa as the centre-piece of her foreign policy also reflected in President Obasanjo's support for and key role in the transformation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) to the African Union (AU), an initiative of the Libyan leader, Muammar Gaddafi. Obasanjo who was the first chairman of the Union embarked upon the duty of bringing the pitiable condition of Africa to the attention of the outside

world which eventually attracted debt pardon from the foreign loaners such as the IMF, Paris Club and the London Club.

More importantly too, the country's capital territory, Abuja was made a diplomatic nest for peaceful settlement of many intra and inter-state conflicts involving African nations. This made Obasanjo to create an office in the presidency on conflict resolution with Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary and special Envoy on Conflict Resolution in Africa. Obasanjo himself was involved more than any other leader in Africa in 'Shuttle Diplomacy', travelling all over Africa in search of reconciliation for many troubled lands in Africa and beyond. Akindele (2003) noted this when he asserted that:

Nigeria's foreign policy has not restricted the need to build and strengthen capacity for conflict resolution and security management to the West African sub-region and the entire continent of Africa alone. It has always emphasized the imperative of capacity building and enhancement for the maintenance of peace and security all over the world.

More specifically, Nigeria's enviable commitment towards solving African problems could also be seen in various peace and mediation talks she hosted; these include hosting of mediation talks between Sudanese government and Darfurian rebel factions. She also mediated severally between various rebel factions in the Liberian crisis and eventually granted asylum to the former Liberian President Charles Taylor in order to end crisis in that country. Before this, Somalia's Siad Barre was granted asylum here in Nigeria. Yormie Johnson of Liberia also found a home in this place. Further to this, the restoration to power of the President of Sao Tome and Principe, Mr. Frederique Menezes, after military take-over in July 2003 was largely credited to Nigeria under the leadership of Obasanjo. In a similar vein, Nigeria succeeded in ensuring that due constitutional process was followed in installing democratically elected government in Togo, after the death of President Gnassingbe Eyadema in February, 2005. In fact, the Nigerian Army and police were massively deployed on peace keeping missions in different parts of Africa all in a bid to help bring peace and security in Africa. Thus, in the 2000, the sum of N1.8 billion was approved for a contract to supply equipment and facilities to the Nigerian soldiers in Sierra Leon and the Democratic Republic of Congo, while only the sum of N0.95 billion was proposed by the Federal Military of Finance for all the three arms of the Nigerian armed forces (Asobie, 2005).

#### **Alhaji Umaru Musa Yar'Adua**

President Umaru Yar'Adua had on May 29, 2008 in Abuja stated that Africa still remained the centerpiece of Nigeria's foreign policy. In a televised question-and-answer session forum tagged "Media Chat", Yar'Adua said Nigeria was working to provide leadership in efforts to bring Africa together. Yar'Adua said that efforts were being made to integrate the continent economically before political integration (*Thisday*, May 30, 2008). Hence, for the short period of President Yar'Adua's in government so far, his foreign policy towards Africa has not been as overwhelming as he was primarily concerned towards fixing Nigeria's economy which is almost at the verge of collapse. However, Yar'Adua, as a chairman of the ECOWAS has under a regional arrangement sanctioned and expelled Niger Republic under President Mamadu Tanjan who violated the nation's law to reinstate himself in power.

#### **A Critical Analysis of Africa As Centerpiece Of Nigeria's Foreign Policy**

Nation-states all over the world design and implement foreign policies in order to guide their external relations as well as protect, promote and defend their vital national interests in areas such as defense of territorial integrity, the promotion of economic, military, strategic and diplomatic interests and whatever a country might consider as its vital national interest. It is therefore naturally expected that Nigeria's foreign policy ought to be fundamentally guided by her national interest which should ordinarily serve to either justify or repudiate the nation's action or inaction in the international relations.

Since the first republic, Nigeria's foreign policy had been largely Afro-centric in posture. In an official statement just before independence, on August 20, 1960, Prime Minister Tafawa Balewa at the Federal House of Assembly stated that Nigeria was, "adopting clear and practical policies with regard to Africa; it will be our aim to assist any country to find solution to its problem."

Similarly, one significant event that took place under late General Ironsi's regime was the June 1966 Ambassadors' Conference held in Lagos to re-examine the premises and directions of Nigeria's foreign policy. Among many other things, the conference re-dedicated Nigeria to the total emancipation of all African territories still under colonial tutelage and racial discrimination. This position was further reinforced when General Ironsi stated that, "in the whole sphere of external relations, the Government attaches greatest importance to our African policy" (Al-Hassan, 2008).

It is under the above foreign policy directions, among others, that Nigeria ventured in to the complex theatre of international relations. This position could be appreciated when we consider the fact that successive regimes in Nigeria accorded significant attention to Africa as the centre-piece of Nigerian foreign policy. However, a cursory

look at the various engagements made by Nigeria towards an African agenda in areas such as peace keeping missions, decolonization of the continent as well as other bilateral and multilateral aid she rendered in the continent, would to a very large extent show that the omnibus nature of the principle of African centeredness in the Nigerian foreign policy does not appear to be well aligned to the country's national interests or has not served the national interest in a commensurate measure.

Nigeria has been in the forefront in the establishment and sustaining various continental and regional organizations. For instance, the Organization of African Unity (OAU) established on May 25, 1963, was primarily aimed at achieving two important objectives, namely: to ensure the quick decolonization of the remaining colonies in Africa and secondly to facilitate the rapid socio-economic growth and development of African states. In this respect, Nigeria did a lot in ensuring the implementation of the primary objectives upon which OAU was founded. For instance, in 1975, Nigeria granted the sum of N 13.5 million and military assistance to Angola's MPLA and also enlisted diplomatic support for the Angolan government within the O.A.U.; this had greatly accorded recognition to the Angolan government by many African states who were hitherto unwilling to give such recognition.

In the case of Angola, Nigerian won but at what cost? And in whose interest? Is it in the national interest of Nigeria? Well we have to turn to the man who was at the centre of all this for an answer. According to Joe Garba Nigeria's External Affairs Commissioner then;

Now, here was twenty million dollars in cash going to Angola without even a discussion of what Nigeria might gain, or even what uses it would be put to. Some might argue that to think of a quid pro quo from a country fighting for survival verges on the immoral, but two years later, no one could pin down a 'normal' Angola to any firm bilateral economic agreement (Garba, 1991).

This might be seen as a case of acting before thinking, which Nigeria's diplomacy over the years has been for. How can a nation where over half of its citizens are living below the poverty line continue to waste resources on 'gifts' and 'grants' to 'needy' countries, without thinking about her own needy citizens or the benefits to her. In fact, in international politics there is no free dinner, every 'favor' done ideally is targeted at a future benefit. But on the obverse, the Angolan case was clearly a mere thinking of pride, about being the 'giant of Africa' and about being the big brother. Despite all Nigeria did for Angola, Nigeria's name was conspicuously absent from the list of countries that Angola paid tribute for assisting them in their independence struggle in their first appearance at the OAU Summit in Mauritius in July 1976. To cap it all, after Murtala's death, it took Angola the whole of three weeks to express their condolence over the death of their benefactor. "When eventually the message did arrive from Angola, only its first three sentences made any reference to our tragic loss. The remainder contained another shopping list" (Garba, 1991).

Also, Nigeria tried so very hard, but quite unsuccessfully to conclude an agreement with the Angolan government to allow Nigerian trawlers fish off the Angolan coast. Despite the numerous delegations that went for this agreement, their discussions were inconclusive. Later, the Angolans granted the Russians exclusive fishing right in the coast. In this consideration Joe Garba had asked thus:

What, after all did Nigeria gain? High visibility in the international community; an awakening of our government officials as to what serious lobbying involved; and rallying a large percentage of our population to an international cause. But in bilateral terms which are, after all, the core of relations between states, we gave and gave to Angola, and in return got nothing.

Nigeria's deep involvement in African affairs, a pursuit that had cost the country huge financial and human resources could be seen from other endeavours undertaken by the country in other African states. Nigeria's involvement in the ECOWAS military intervention group, ECOMOG, is a near example. As desirable as it was to bring peace and stability to the West African sub-region, the venture had cost the nation enormous financial recourses and unspecified number of troops who lost their lives. Also, Nigeria lost about 44 soldiers in a ghastly motor accident along Gombe-Potiskum road in 2009. It could be recalled that the soldiers were just back from peace-keeping operations in Darfur. What a national tragedy in an attempt to keep peace in a sister African country. The above scenario was succinctly captured by Ambassador F. George who stated that, "The historic contributions of Nigeria to regional peace missions in Liberia and Sierra-Leon which cost the country the whooping sum US\$ 10 billion, not to mention the gallant men and women of Nigerian Armed Forces who paid the supreme sacrifice in the cause of peace, are hardly acknowledged by the international community". He further emphasized that this does include the sum of about US\$ 90 billion that Nigeria single-handedly incurred in the OAU Peace Keeping Force that was deployed to Chad in 1980s. This is in addition to the sum of US\$ 800 million Nigeria Trust Fund established under African Development Bank, ADB, to assist African countries obtain soft loan to execute vital projects (George, 1990, cited in Al-Hassan, 2008). Surprisingly, it is with connivance of some

of these African states that Nigeria was denied the presidency of ADB in an election that was held right on Nigerian soil. What a back-stab.

The 2008 xenophobic violence in South Africa where Nigerians were brutalized tempted one to ask if Nigerians deserve such brutality taking into consideration the fundamental role played by the country in dismantling apartheid. Eke (2009:138) informed that Nigeria-South Africa's relations has been marked with discrimination against Nigerians in South Africa. He noted that the Nigeria's consulate in South Africa confirmed that many Nigerians were killed in the 2007 extra-judicial circumstances, besides cases of harassment, intimidation and brutalization by South Africa police and security agencies. Also, the torture of a Nigerian, Mr. Adumekwe, by the Gabonese security agents who were said to have set his back on fire for 20 minutes is a big slap to Nigeria.

Therefore, taking into cognizance the contributions made by Nigeria towards African peace and development, one fundamental question that needs to be raised is, upon all these enviable roles and contributions which Nigeria made in the continent, can the nation afford to continue pursuing an African agenda at such a monumental cost without visible tangible benefits to the country and the country's national interest?

In fact, it seems that there is apparent disconnect between national interest and Nigeria-Africa relations. It is apparent that the nation is doing too much in the African continent without corresponding positive outcome. According to Al-Hassan (2008), this phenomenon had attracted several comments by commentators on Nigeria's external relations. For instance, a policy and economic affairs analyst, Dr. Obadiah Mailafiya while commenting on the Nigerian foreign policy framework, graphically captures the above scenario when he says that "the centerpiece of any country's foreign policy ought to be that country itself if it seriously considers itself a rational actor on the world stage...Every single action shall be adjudged by how much it advances our national power and influence and how much it advances our interests, objectives, and purposes". Similarly, Eke noted that another international relations expert, Professor Inno Ukaeje, while commenting on Nigerian foreign policy has this to say: "Our false generosity abroad and penury at home are proof that we are pretending to be what we are not, because in reality we have been overstretching ourselves". One seems to agree with the above assertions, taking into consideration the enormous funds the nation expends in trying to solve various problems in Africa while internally, almost all the sectors in the country are yearning for massive injection of funds and above all the standard of living has been grossly low. Although Nigeria is rich in strategic mineral resources through which the nation earned excessive wealth with which it funds several activities towards solving other African problems, the scale of such expenditure greatly hurts our domestic aspirations. Unfortunately, the Buhari's administration which tried to portray Nigeria's interest first in its foreign policy thrust by closing the border in order to arraign perpetrators of corruption, and stamp out illegal oil business and money laundering was highly criticized for being inhuman and acting against the Nigeria's West African brothers.

#### CONCLUSION

It is apparent that the successive Nigerian leadership has overwhelmingly recognized Africa as the centerpiece of Nigeria's foreign policy. Thus, this directed their foreign policy thrust over the years. However, our study has found that this over burdensomeness of Nigeria's foreign policy towards the cause of Africa at all times has not really benefited Nigeria; as such they have inadvertently acted against Nigeria's national interest rather, as Joe Garba (1991) noted "...in bilateral terms which are, after all, the core of relations between states, we gave and gave to Angola, and in return got nothing".

In fact, the era of decolonization has gone and as such Nigeria should seek effective trade engagement with other African countries if it must, and such engagement should foremost portray our national interest with some concomitant pay offs. Nigeria should in fact, seek a more global partnership that will ensure human development and economic prosperity for the country.

However, while we accept and encourage Nigeria's active involvement in a productive engagement/ commitment in Africa which would yield to development in the region such as Nigeria's role and initiative in drawing up the Constitutive Act of African Union (AU), The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and the African Peer Review Mechanism, Nigeria should seek first economic development after which every other thing shall be added unto her.

Nigeria's attention should be more focused towards achieving our vital national interests such as socio-economic growth and development so as to improve the standard of living of the populace. In this respect, Africa should no longer be the only reason for the existence of our external relations.

Lastly, there is an urgent need for the government to convene a foreign policy summit to, among others, address issues such as re-defining our national interest, refocusing our foreign policy in such a way that it will radically shift from focusing on Africa as the centerpiece of its foreign policy but to a purely national interest driven foreign policy thrust which we will minimize loss and increase gains as well as tying it to the socio-economic growth and development of our great country.

Therefore, it is clear that the Nigeria's acclaimed big brother role in Africa, which encourages her to flamboyantly waste scarce resources on unfruitful brotherly missions in Africa only gained her a cheap popularity as the giant of



Africa without any recorded tangible economic prosperity. Hence, we strongly recommend that Nigeria should seek first ‘economic development’ and then every other things shall be added unto her.

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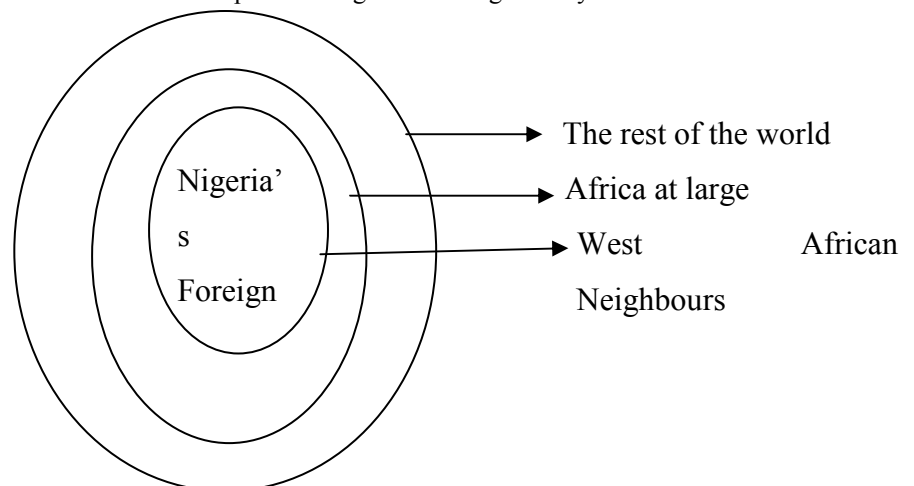
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Diagram 1: A pictorial expression of “Africa as the centerpiece of Nigeria’s Foreign Policy Thrust”



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