

# **Democratizing the Nigerian Foreign Policy Process: An Inquest for Recipes**

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## Democratizing the Nigerian Foreign Policy Process: An Inquest for Recipes

### Abstract

Democratizing many of Nigeria's political institutions, structures, and processes has been a general clamor in the polity for the past ten years of return to civil rule. This is an obvious reaction to the decades of militarization of the system, which has led to very poor administration of civil-based structures. One of the worrisome areas is the foreign policy environment of Nigeria, which even between 1999 and now, has witnessed the personalization and personification of the processes by the chief executive in his "kitchen cabinet". Civil society and indeed citizens have had little or no role to play in the decision-making of Nigeria's external affairs (cases abound, including the ceding of Bakassi to Cameroon). But in democracy, citizens' opinions, desires, expectations, and interests should count. Indeed, citizens have a major role to play in the diplomacy of contemporary times, as typified by the United States. Based on the author's intense participation-observation across the American foreign policy terrains in a special Fulbright program, this paper explores the American foreign policy environment, and offers policy recipes for Nigeria in genuine democratization of its diplomatic environment.

Keywords: Democratization, Civil Society, Foreign Policy, Citizen Diplomacy

### Introduction

For the past ten years, the Nigerian political climate has been heated up by an intense clamor for the democratization of political institutions, structures, and processes with the view to making them more citizen-friendly. The foreign policy arena has not been left out. The general militarization of the polity in the decades of military rule had adversely affected foreign policy making. The foreign policy process had assumed a command structure characteristic of military rule in which the Commander-in-Chief and his tiny "kitchen staff" shaped Nigeria's external outlook in their bedroom, lawn tennis court, or officers' mess. The question is not whether there would be quality foreign policy outcomes passing through critical thinking and reflections; but that the domestic components of foreign policy making which Beasley *et al* (2001) have called "decision units" are clearly out of the picture. This template was handed down to the next generation of politicians who from 1999 to date have managed the policy process as a closed system.

The recently proposed twist of Nigeria's foreign policy to 'citizen diplomacy' suggested a democratization of the foreign policy process. However, from the clarifications by the Minister of Foreign Affairs (MFA), this is not so. It rather connotes the well known diplomacy of consequence or "responsive reaction" as Maduekwe (2007) puts it. Citizen diplomacy, as it is universally known in recent times, is a concept that goes beyond responsive reaction; in the American context, it rather includes a participatory system in which the foreign policy-making

process is optimally populated by the citizens and civil-based institutions. This paper explores this concept and system, and makes suggestions for policy refocusing in Nigeria.

### **Theoretical and Conceptual Perspectives**

The issue of civil society in democratic governance and foreign policy making has to be put in context at this point. To do this, the nexus between civil society, democratic governance, and citizen diplomacy would be established as attempts are made to define them. Democratic governance itself suggests a system that amplifies the voice of the people, and tries to meet their desires. Put differently, democratic governance is people or citizen-driven. It is popularly described as government of the people and their elected representatives. Thus, there is popular participation in governance; and all institutions, processes, and structures become inclusive. Civil society stabilizes and strengthens democratic governance and allows for an inclusive participation in all political-social life, including foreign policymaking.

So, what is civil society and what are the theoretical underpinnings for democratic (foreign policy) governance? In a comparative study of civil society and associational life in Nigeria and the United States, Ogbeyi (1997) opines that there are confused meanings ranging from being “coterminous with the state to being in opposition to it in the struggle against state despotism”. However, a US public document describes civil society as those organizations created by non-state interests within society to reach up to the state and by the state to reach down into society, denoting in Ogbeyi’s terms, relational and associational life of component segments of the nation, or co-existence between government and the people.

Civil society thus represents a socially, economically, and politically stable and conscious populace that checkmates state power, for as Corwin (2000) reasons, it is the emergence of a populace and norms dealing with the nature and limits of power and the creation of a public sphere where despotism or tendencies towards bad governance can be minimized as a result of an active non-servile people. The implication of this definition is that there is either civil society or there is none. There cannot be a weak or strong civil society. Civil society simply connotes a vibrant population that knows its rights, fights for it, and commands respect and a strong voice in public governance. With civil society, it is given that democratic governance is promoted. Without civil society, democratic governance may cave in for a one-man, one-party, or one-

group tyranny, which President Sekou Toure of Guinea once referred to as “democratic dictatorship”.

The relationship between civil society and foreign policy making in democratic governance is therefore not far from the prognosis. The existence of civil society would engender a foreign policy process that accommodates and reconciles citizens’ views, desires, agitations, and interests as policymakers articulate foreign policy (Page and Barabas, 2000). Also, other foreign policy decision units such as the foreign ministry, other ministries, legislature, policy-related research institutes, universities, pressure and interest groups, and opposition parties would have a say in policy making.

Hence, in democratic governance, civil society is expected to engender citizen diplomacy. Generally, citizen diplomacy refers to a political situation in which all citizens-directly or indirectly-may participate in the foreign policy making process. It is a concept of average citizens engaging as representatives of a country or a cause, either inadvertently or by design (Gelder, 2006). It complements-or may subvert- official channels of diplomacy and could be more reliable when official diplomacy is no longer working effectively in a nation’s interest. Such diplomacy may transcend formal state negotiations, but it could be more effective to reach successful negotiations, and to smoothen things when relations between two or more nations has broken down, or when two or more countries desire to start a relationship, or when a nation seeks to polish its image, or regain it (Holsti, 1992). At such rate, governments may step aside for average and internationally respected citizens to take over through such informal channels as scientific exchanges, cultural and educational exchanges, sports or games, and so forth. While these are going on, governments may calculate and consolidate the gains and then step in.

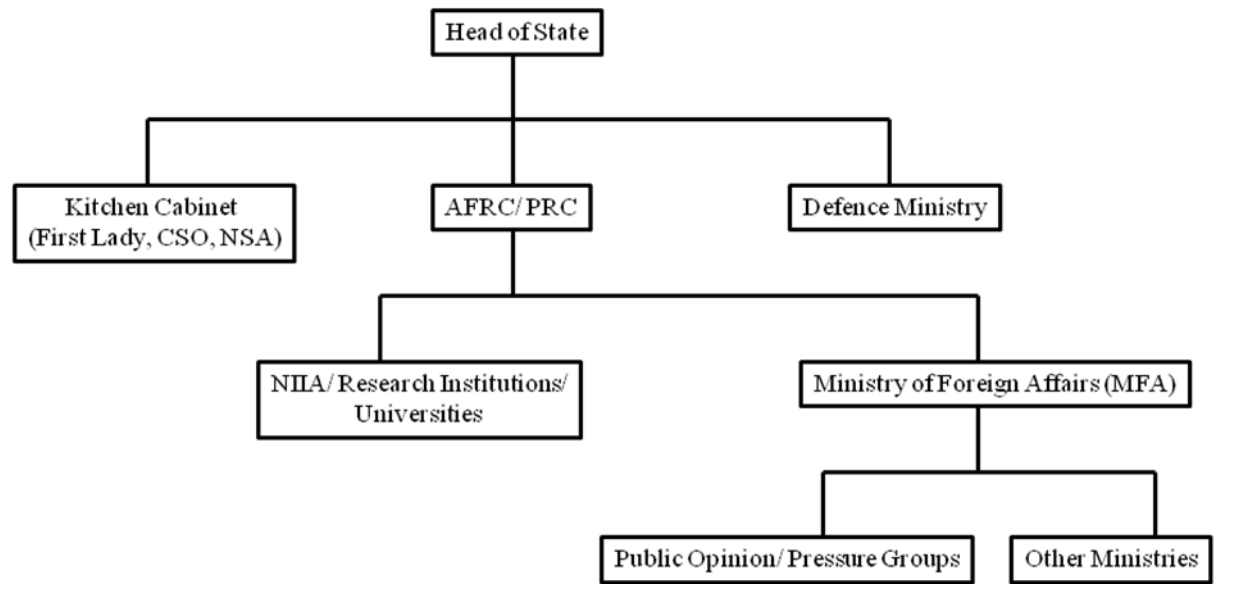
### **Foreign Policymaking in Nigeria**

From independence to date, foreign policymaking has been the exclusive preserve of the Head of State or President as the case may be, and their thin political group. The chief executive personalizes and personifies power-politics in Nigeria is a zero sum game with the winner taking all-and this extends to the foreign policy domain. In fact, foreign policy is seen to be understood only by the government, and the hierarchy of power favors the chief executive to call all the shots. To be fair, universally the President is the *primus* in external diplomacy of a state; there

are however, mechanisms and structures that compel the President and Presidency to accommodate domestic pressures and constraints in foreign policy decision making (Akinyemi, 2009). In Nigeria, during military rule, at the helm of affairs was the Soldier-President from who order flows down to the bottom of the political ladder. There was no room for questioning or checkmating. Decisions literally made at informal times and places among a thinner group outside the cabinet, called the inner caucus were ratified and legitimated at the meeting of the high command. Such were transmitted to the MFA who heads the clearing house for all external affairs, without any National Assembly, research institutes, or pressure groups consulted or acting as checks (Fawole, 2003; Adeyemo, 2002).

The table below demonstrates the politics of foreign policymaking in Nigeria during military rule.

**Table 1: Politics of Foreign Policymaking (Military Rule)**



Source: Author’s compilation from interaction with the Foreign Policy institutions, interviews and documents

**Abbreviations**

AFRC: Armed Forces Ruling Council

CSO: Chief Security Officer

MFA: Ministry of Foreign Affairs

NSA: National Security Adviser

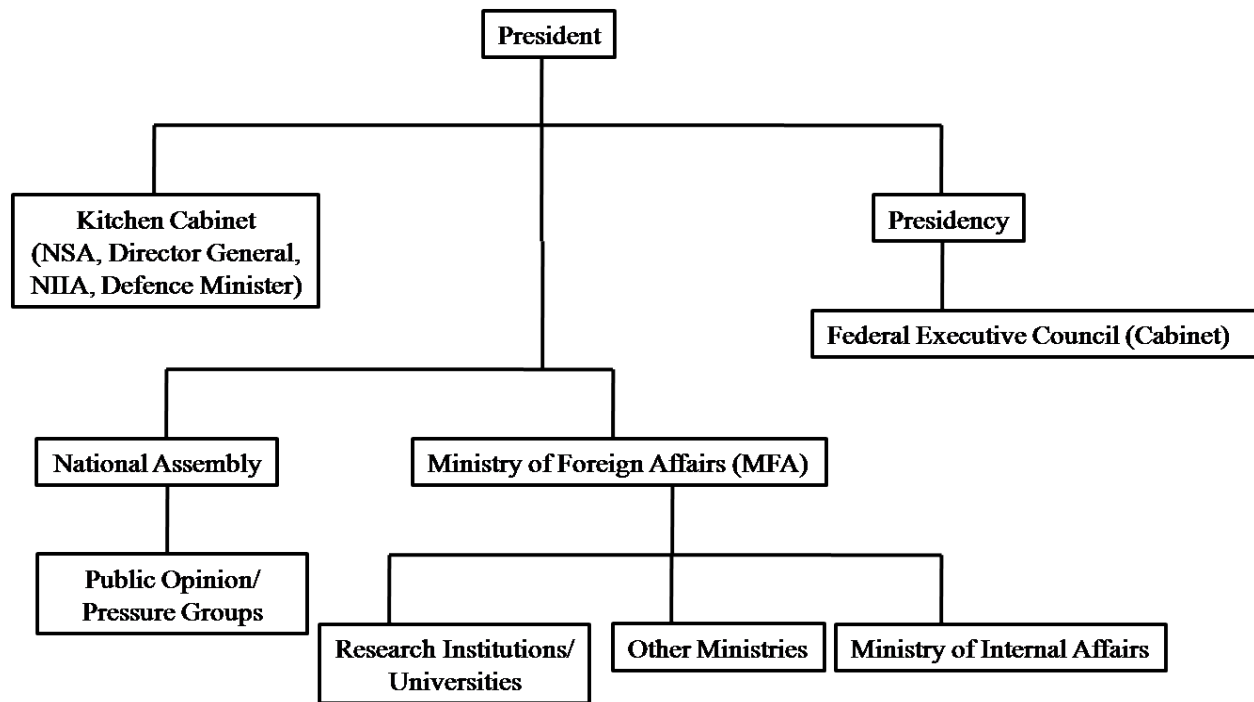
PRC: Provisional Ruling Council

The table above shows an obvious absence of civil society, as public opinion and pressure groups occupy the very rung of the ladder. The clearing house for international diplomacy, the MFA is almost insignificant, while the kitchen cabinet made up in some cases of the First Lady, and the Defense Ministry were pivotal in the making of foreign policy and calculations of the military.

Under democratic rule from 1999 little changed probably because of certain institutions and structures that come along with constitutional government that cannot be wished away. However, the existence of the checks has merely been on paper as the civilian administration steers the foreign policy in a manner not different from the military. The Obasanjo administration was particularly undemocratic as the National Assembly was reduced to the ordinary position of screening ambassadorial and (foreign affairs) ministerial lists; the MFA became a figurehead because the President was his own Minister; and important diplomatic decisions of the time were only known to members of the legislature, pressure groups, and citizens, after they have been reported in the press (Sodangi, 2009).

The table of foreign policy making during civilian rule shows a primary place of the kitchen cabinet, and National Security Adviser, and the less than important role of the policy institutes, universities, interest groups, and mass media. The Nigerian Institute of International Affairs (NIIA) was more important in the formulation of Nigeria's foreign policy than the MFA. The legislature and executive were constantly feuding over the malignment and humiliation of the former in foreign policy decision-making (Sodangi, 2009). This led to the direct antagonism and constitutional sanctioning of the Executive from handing over the oil-rich Bakassi Peninsula to Cameroon after the Washington agreement in 2006 between Obasanjo, Biya of Cameroon and Bush of USA without any recourse hitherto to any democratic institutions in Nigeria (Umar, 2009).

**Table 2: Politics of Foreign policymaking (Civilian Rule)**



Source: Author's compilation

Both military and civilian rule undermined popular participation in the foreign policy formulation and execution of Nigeria. The fact that the political scenario remained the same from 1999 is evidence of the absence of civil society and relative slow and poor democratization process. However, when the Yaradua-Jonathan administration came up with the concept and proposed thrust of citizen diplomacy, it was considered to be a paradigm shift, which would be an encompassing approach to democratize Nigeria's foreign policy processes while still catering more for its citizens' interest. But the Yaradua-Jonathan administration has only one perspective in mind.

### **Yaradua-Jonathan's Monolithic Definition of "Citizen Diplomacy"**

Nigeria's MFA Ojo Maduekwe in 2007 articulated a perspective of citizen-centered diplomacy that would constitute a shift for Nigeria's foreign policy. This refers to Nigeria's reactive response to the way its citizens are treated or handled by other nations. By this approach, the foreign policy attitude of the nation towards other countries would no longer be based on

geopolitical arrangements, but on merit, with individual nations judged by their disposition towards its citizens. Each nation would therefore account for its own stewardship towards the nationals of a particular country and expect same measure of treatment. Maduekwe put it thus: “If you are nice to our citizens; we will be nice to you; if you are hostile to us, we will also be hostile to you” (Maduekwe, 2007: 2).

In this context, the new external disposition would rather venerate the ideals and expectations of the Nigerian people in foreign policy calculations, than on frittering away so many resources on regional, continental and global cause without direct bearing on the wellbeing of its people.

This sounds-and it is indeed-people oriented; but it is in no way a civil society driven diplomacy. It is not a measure of democratization of the foreign policy process. A democratized foreign policy process would however complement the agenda of citizen-centered diplomacy of the Yaradua-Jonathan administration. Let us now examine the American context of citizen diplomacy with the view to exploring what can be learnt from that platform.

### **American Citizen-centered Foreign Policy**

The story of American foreign policy process is not always that of optimism. Those who have written extensively on the politics of US diplomacy including Rosati (2006), Chomsky (2007), and Chait (2007) have sometimes identified elements of autocracy in the formulation of American foreign policy, singling out the Bush era (2000-2008) as probably the most undemocratic because of the Bush high-handedness following 9/11 to the blunders in Iraq and Afghanistan. Indeed, Chait and Rosati have described that period as the era of Imperial Presidency and war-diplomacy in US international relations. This is because President Bush after the initial backing of the legislature and citizens to fight terror from 2001, went unilaterally and illegitimately to invade Iraq in 2003, and pursued a policy of aggression in the Middle East without recourse to public opinion and legislature. This led to the loss of the Republicans in the Congressional and Senate elections that season. However, the author’s interactions with many foreign policy decision units and policy makers across the length and breadth of the United States shows the enormity of the influence civil society wields in the foreign policy process. From the Congress to the Senate in Washington, governmental and non-governmental organizations in New York, the army in South Carolina, the mass media and think-tanks in



Washington and New York, research institutes in Atlanta and Los Angeles, there were demonstrations of participation in the policymaking process, even if government refused to buy their position.

America's citizen diplomacy connotes two broad things: participation of the citizens in the foreign policymaking process, thus implying a democratized process; and ensuring of their wellbeing anywhere in the world, which is the perspective of the new Nigerian prototype. Citizen diplomacy is as old as the American nation itself. It is rooted in the nation's history, and its history is a product of its traditions (Mattern, 2006). From the declaration of independence in 1776, to the writing of the Federalist Papers by Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, the founding fathers, the average American citizen was considered also as a diplomat, or ambassador or representative carrying the full diplomatic baggage of the nation. President Kennedy had in the 1960s called on every American to consider himself as a national servant-leader who first should conceive what to offer the nation and not what the nation could offer him. To this end, the involuntary service and enlistment in the Draft to fight in Vietnam was considered as an act of citizen diplomacy, in which every soldier is a war diplomat of the United States. The idea of citizen diplomacy became clearer after the Second World War when average citizens from the academia, military, science and medicine, and entertainment industry were actively involved in U.S. international diplomacy. The citizen diplomat was considered as an informal character in the foreign policy process with a strong pull or influence-and in some cases people with cross-continental popularity who could help increase the approval rating of the international image of an administration or government of the nation (Patterson, 2007).

The creation of the Public Affairs Section (PAS), formerly US Information Service (USIS) the Department of State in its embassies worldwide became a more effective but informal way of engaging citizens in foreign policy. The PAS, and its other components such as the Bureau of Educational Cultural Affairs, et cetera, promote public diplomacy by the Fulbright Fellowships and other academic scholarship programs, in which American Fellows are sent to African, Asian, Latin American, and European universities for different periods, while scholars from other nations are also selected on merit as Visiting Fellows to U.S. universities. Public diplomacy can be seen as the transparent means by which a sovereign country communicates with publics in other countries aimed at informing and influencing audiences overseas for the purpose of

promoting the national interest and advancing foreign policy goals. This diplomacy includes educational exchange programs for scholars and students, visitor programs, cultural events and exchanges et cetera (Johnson-Pizzaro, 2007). By these, it can be inferred that public diplomacy may be official state-to-state kind of diplomacy; it however, facilitates very informal or citizen diplomacy, as it deals directly with the public in its host-country.

By opening their homes, offices and schools to foreign visitors participating in exchange programs across the U.S., citizen diplomats foster international understanding and cooperation, constructive economic connections and peaceful interaction (Gelder, 2006:12). Citizen diplomacy was a central emphasis of President Carter's administration. Using this informal network, he encouraged meaningful cross-continental interaction between the U.S. and Africa and Middle East, to boost U.S. image and strengthen ties with its traditional allies in the regions. No wonder the Carter era is regarded as the peak of America's *Détente*. No era in the foreign policy history of the U.S. has however taken fuller advantage of citizen diplomacy than the Bush era. Two factors explain this. After 9/11, the American nation realized the attack represented the peak of global disdain, which required their being more friendly with the (Wilson, 2007). Secondly, after Bush had bungled the war on terror in Afghanistan and Iraq, it dawned on him that he needed for himself and America an image damage control, which could not have been done by his mostly war-mongering neo-conservative cabinet, but by the ordinary and popular citizens of the nation. More American citizens, including academics, tourists, celebrities, entertainers (on concerts or charity missions) visited Africa and Asia more during this period more than anytime else because the U.S. government encouraged it despite the fear of being terrorist targets (Segal, 2004; Chait, 2007). The notable visits of American Hollywood and musical stars to Iraq and other areas where Bush had created misgivings towards America were instances of citizen diplomacy.

The US citizen diplomacy has some elements of the Nigerian typology. However, it is significantly different. For the U.S. it is basically the concept that the individual has the right, even responsibility, to help shape foreign relations; it is woven round the idea of "one handshake at a time". Citizen diplomats can be students, teachers, athletes, artists, business people, humanitarians, adventurers, tourists, and journalists. They are motivated by a responsibility to engage with the rest of the world in a meaningful, mutually beneficial dialogue (Mattern, 2006:

23). It is believed that when official diplomacy fails, citizen diplomacy is employed by the American government because of its effectiveness.

The implications of citizen diplomacy are multiple. These include the fact that public opinion would be a central player in the foreign policy process (Lake, 2009). As a corollary to that, civil-society would be active in the formulation of foreign policy as, indeed, the foreign policy can be called a civil-society foreign policy even if the American Constitution grants the President almost exclusive powers to direct external affairs (Rosati, 2006: 56-58).

The Congress and Senate would also be active players because of the fact that they are citizens' representatives, just as other bodies which Beasley *et al* (2001) have termed as "decision units" would also be active. The foreign policy decision units include research institutes/think-tanks such as The Brookings Institution and Carnegie Institution; and think-tanks such as the Center for a New American Security (CNAS), United Nations Association of the United States of America (UNA-USA).

The American citizen diplomacy also manifests in the Nigeria-type citizen-centered diplomacy such that the U.S. government is first and foremost concerned about the welfare of its citizens anywhere in the world, and other considerations in international politics is also about the wellbeing of its citizens. On the one hand, it sets out to protect all economic, military, security and socio-cultural interests of its citizens; and on the other hand it behaves locally and internationally in such a way that its citizens would walk tall wherever they are and be proud to be called Americans (Bardes, 2007).

### **Think-Tanks and American Foreign Policy Formulation**

The expanding American policy space has witnessed a corresponding growth of public policy research organizations. The scope and impact of their work has also witnessed dramatic increase. The growth is informed by the patronage of government, and the belief of the organizations that think-tanks play a major role in the sustenance of democratic government. Think-tanks are an important, very informed component of civil society. They are a group of experts, technocrats or researchers whose deep study of policy issues have made them a vast reservoir of knowledge, information, and associational energy. They bridge gap between knowledge and policy in critical

areas as international peace and security, globalization, governance, environment, poverty alleviation, trade, health, et cetera (FPRI, 2008). These think-tanks include, among others the Center for a New American Security, National Intelligence Committee, Brookings Institution, Carnegie Institute, Cato Institute, RAND Corporation, and the Council on Foreign Relations.

Center for a New American Security is based in Washington DC, with its principal objective being to search for new security measures as recipes for the Homeland Security after 9/11 and finding safety valves for the administration in its pursuit of global peace and security. The Center is made up very young and vibrant staff of American and foreign origins who are commissioned to also find out peoples response around the world to American global security interventions, such as the establishment of US Military Command in the troubled regions of the world. Though the Center complained that their recommendations were never discerned under the Bush administration, but confirmed that the government uses their findings to guide certain actions (CNAS, 2007).

The National Intelligence Committee is a governmental body that works with the Departments of Homeland Security, Interior, State, Central Intelligence Agency, The Pentagon, and the Presidency. It gathers, processes, and works on information that are of national security interest, and foreign policy concerns, and advises the bodies based on its knowledge bank (NIC, 2007).

The Brookings Institution, like Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Cato Institute and Council on Foreign Relations are pure policy research institutes, whose publications, reports, and policy recommendations are consulted by government in formulating public policy. These are also useful in carrying out external relations (Puchala, 2007).

The UNA-USA is a non-governmental organization and a think-tank that focuses on US interests and stakes in the UN. Based in Manhattan, New York, the UNA-USA organizes model UN conferences among US students; IT programs for college students at the UN, workshops for technocrats and eggheads; and has a rich library on UN-US relations materials to guide policy research and consultations on the administration of US policy towards the world (Washburn, 2009). The US Envoy to the UN as of 2007, Mr. Jamal Khalilzad (2007) confirmed the official and personal relationship that exists between his office and the UNA-USA, which according to him, has been rewarding in collection of policy ideas and options.

The final analysis is that the think-tanks and research organizations are central to the formulation of American foreign policy. This suggests a civil society that engenders a strong democratic culture in its diplomacy. The organizations act as both foreign policy decision units and, as Beasley *et al* (2001) have described, as ancillary and direct bodies in the foreign policy processes.

### **Some Recipes from the US**

Citizen participation in the foreign policy process cannot be overemphasized. This is possible first when democratic institutions such as the mass media, National Assembly, academia, and policy-based research institutes make informed contribution in the formulation and execution of foreign policy. Talking about execution, emulating the American system in giving the citizens the opportunity to participate directly and indirectly in the foreign policy process is necessary for Nigeria. Moreso when Nigeria's image is at its lowest ebb, being categorized as a terrorist state, religious crisis in Maiduguri, Bauchi and Jos creating more horrendous image of Nigeria, and the embarrassing absence of the President from governance for 93 days, all require persons more credible and respected internationally than government, such as Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, Yakubu Gowon, Mathew Hassan Kukah, Pastor Adeboye, Bishop Oyedepo, Pastor Kumuyi, topflight academics, musicians and movie stars, et cetera, to be engaged in visits, meetings, businesses, and other levels of informal diplomacy to launder Nigeria's image abroad. This can be done by government asking such personalities to present Nigeria's agenda and influence the international community in its favor. For instance, on the inclusion of Nigeria on the terrorist watch-list, government could set up a Committee of Friends of the USA including very influential and respected figures in the American society and international circles such as Professors Wole Soyinka and Chinua Achebe, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, and Nduka Obaigbena (Thisday publisher) to visit Washington DC and put pressure on the US government to reverse its decision. By this, the Nigerian authorities could expand the base of their citizen centered diplomacy to also include the participation of civil-society (students, teachers, entertainers, pastors, etc), and should strongly consider public opinion and pursue a more people-oriented and not elite-driven national interest.

Secondly, Nigeria could engage its think-tanks in public policy making and foreign policy formulation. The business of governance is a very huge burden, a big task that government alone

cannot handle. Government needs help, and requires the technical know-how to run the affairs of the state. There is the NIIA, National Institute of Policy and Strategic Studies (NIPSS), Center for Peace and Conflict Studies (at the University of Ibadan), Development Policy Center (DPC), and so forth, whose insights and depth on policy research could guide government in policy decisions.

Again, by borrowing from the American citizen diplomacy, Nigeria could better accomplish its long-range objective of becoming most significant African power when it rather institutes cultural, educational and social programs of exchange in which scholars and students, cultural groups, nationals of Africa, are brought into the country to foster a better understanding and cooperation, and open doors for constructive connections and peaceful interaction. By this, a Pax Nigeriana may be more successfully achieved than frittering away the nation's wealth in endless African conflicts with the view to just be called "Giant of Africa". The big powers in the world today use such subtle socio-cultural and economic instruments to establish unquestionable hegemony than wasting resources on nations that would later turn against them like in the case of Nigeria. For instance, Liberia and Sierra Leone-two countries it helped out of wars- have been scrambling with Nigeria to occupy the only African slot in the UN Security Council's Non-Permanent Seat, and Ghana (on whose behalf Nigeria supplies electricity to Togo and Benin), Egypt (for whom Nigeria mobilized African support during the Arab-Israel Wars) and South Africa (for whom Nigeria fought for its liberation from apartheid), have been contesting Africa's slots of the UN Security Council's Permanent Seats.

Also the Nigerian authorities should also emulate the U.S practice of going the extra mile to save Nigerian lives in trouble anywhere in the world. America had to swiftly evacuate its nationals in Somalia, Rwanda and Liberia on the outbreak of war. The Nigerian life should be cherished and protected both from the trigger-happy security agencies at home and the racist elements abroad. Damilola Taylor was assaulted to death in England, soldiers were killing Nigerians along the Cameroonian borders for years, Libyan authorities have been subjecting Nigerian illegal immigrants to physical and psychological torture, killing them sometimes, aliens including oil companies' expatriates in the Niger Delta have been subjecting Nigerians to dehumanizing conditions even right here in Nigeria. These are vices against Nigerians, and indicators of the high point of disregard for Nigeria, which government has to take seriously.

## **Conclusion**

The foreign policy process in Nigeria is undemocratic. Government has the traditional belief that foreign policymaking is a sacred area that the chief executive and his trusted aides alone are holy enough to have thoroughfare. The federal constitution itself reinforces this belief as it categorizes foreign affairs as being in the exclusive list, a position that exacerbates the neglect of important diplomatic agents like citizens, mass media, and policy scientists. The diplomatic plane of Nigeria is flooded by politicians, surrogates, and party loyalists with no idea of governance, let alone technical expertise for foreign policymaking. Even many Nigerian ambassadors abroad are mere politicians who worked towards the electoral victory of the ruling party. This is part of the general problem of the lack of, or limitations of democratic governance. Citizen diplomacy in its broad context of engaging people outside government, democratizing the policymaking process to accommodate public opinion, views of pressure and interest groups, mass media, and opposition in foreign policy formulation; and the rational pursuit of Afrocentrism to ennoble Nigerian citizens first and foremost, is desirable.

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