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Nigeria and the Dilemma of Global Relevance: Foreign Policy under Military Dictatorship (1993-1999)

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Abstract:

This paper examines the metamorphosis of Nigeria's foreign policy from its traditional posture of a responsible nation in the international community, to a reckless player under the military between 1993 and 1999. Nigeria's reputation as a respectable state diminished under the Abacha regime, whose tyranny led to multiple violations of human rights and breaches of international moral and legal codes. This infamous posture eroded Nigeria's track record of provision of regional and global leadership. Its mineral and oil wealth had naturally imposed extra burdens of leadership in the continent of Africa and the world. The paper critically appraises this significant transition and departure from traditional foreign policy posture and international image during the Abacha era; and using the decision-making model of analysis, it discovers that with the Abacha intervention, a new chapter of domestic travails (anti-democracy activities, state-sponsored terrorism, poor human rights records, large-scale corruption and financial crimes, and the creation of artificial insulation against the world), coupled with an unorthodox manner of dealing with the international community commenced, which clouded the good image of the past. Nigeria thus got alienated in the global system. This paper identifies the pacifist role of the successive Abubakar regime, but submits that despite that approach, the grey areas such as the sudden death of Chief MKO Abiola (winner of the June 12 presidential elections) in his (Abubakar's custody), did not allow for a complete restoration of Nigeria's golden era of internationalism. Both regimes had thus bequeathed to the nation an unorthodox foreign policy and an unusual image, a development that compels a curious enquiry. The paper adopts a theoretical approach and relies exclusively on secondary data for analysis.

Keywords: Abacha, Abubakar, foreign policy, isolation

Introduction

On November 17, 1993 when General Sani Abacha took over from the Interim National Government led by Chief Ernest Sonekan, he took a number of measures that were clearly antediluvian in an age of globalized democracy. His dissolution of democratic structures and institutions, adoption of full martial laws and assumption of sweeping powers, massive arrests and detention of political opposition, clampdown on the press and hunting of the winner of the June 12 election after the latter's Epetedo (Lagos) Declaration as President, demonstrated a clear disinterest in resolving the 1993 presidential election crises or stabilizing an already pulverized polity. The Abacha administration itself was not only a child of circumstance, but was also the main beneficiary of Nigeria's protracted political logjam following the annulment of the popularly acclaimed free and fair

presidential elections that had produced Chief Abiola as the winner. This crisis,

coupled with Abacha's anti-democratic posture from the start opened the floodgate of problems for Nigeria's image abroad and undermined its respect in the international community.

Nigeria had suffered some image problems in the immediate past. These had included the Britain-Nigeria misunderstanding over the Umaru Dikko kidnap affair (Fawole, 1999), the Billy Eko and Gloria Okon drug peddling scandals to which erstwhile President Ibrahim Babangida was linked, corruption and advanced fee fraud (419) and Babangida's endless transition programme (Akinterinwa, 2001). However the gross human rights abuse, ridiculous transition to civil rule program under General Abacha and many instances of diplomatic failures in management of the image problem fuelled

the collective western condemnation and accentuated the resolve to dismantle the military fortress in Nigeria's political capital. The highpoint of the regime's blunders was the negligence of global plea for clemency in the death sentence passed on the Ogoni environmental rights leaders, their subsequent hanging and alleged sponsorship of assassinations of perceived political enemies (Saliu, 1996).

The hostile domestic environment was expectedly going to drive the investors away and keep potential investors at a safe distance from Nigeria. Thus Abacha's style created a policy conundrum that made him lose popularity both at home and abroad. In such circumstance brute force always is likely the state art of dictatorship and this was exactly the recourse of the Abacha regime (Mbang, 1997: 6).

The immediate response of the international community to the execution of the Ogoni leaders strategy of the international community was to isolate Nigeria. The Canadian government closed its high commission in Nigeria, South Africa severed ties with Abacha's government and the American and British authorities imposed full military and limited economic sanctions in order to frustrate and, in the process, compel the military government to change its unpopular style of administration.

General Abdulsalami Abubakar contended with a most battered Nigerian international image, an isolated country and a messy foreign policy from 1998 on assumption of power after the sudden death of General Abacha. Abubakar's quest to launder Nigeria's image abroad and renounce the pariah status, made his administration to adopt a foreign policy of retreat. He changed the combative nature of the previous administration in the utilization of instruments of policy to attract foreign pardon and sympathy towards Nigeria. Some authorities in foreign policy, including Ojo and Azeez (2002:216-17) have argued that this was meant to reintegrate Nigeria in the comity of nations. The whole essence of reintegration strategies was to bring Nigeria back into the

mainstream of the global capitalist economy after a long absence (Saliu, 1999: 236). Abdulsalami's approach was however too pacifist and rather than restore Nigeria in the old uncompromising enviable position, it demeaned the country as Nigeria had always occupied a dignified position in global politics, not at all appearing beggarly. These are the compelling factors according relevance and import to this paper. It examines the reaction and retreat in the foreign policy of a nation that had a long-range policy target to assume leadership position like the United States, in the world. The paper is thematically structured to take a full stock of the issues pivotal to the policy conundrum at the external level.

Theoretical and Conceptual Analysis

The foreign policy making and action of Abacha and Abdulsalami, like that of any other's are matters of rational or irrational decisions and calculations, with the primary objective of maximizing gains or recording minimal losses in international politics (Ogwu and Olukoshi, 2002: 17-18). Rational decision making model captures the essence of the arguments in the paper and hence will be the binoculars to look at issues and scale to measure the decisions and actions of the state in the global system during our period.

Decision-makers, out of a list of alternatives, calculate the cost and benefits of taking a certain course of action. They reach a decision by choosing the alternatives with the highest benefits and the lowest costs. The term 'rationality' relates to how decision-making entails purposeful, goal-directed behaviour that is exhibited when the individual is responding to an international event using the best information available and chooses from pool of possible responses that are most likely to maximize his goals (Verba, 1969 as cited in Kegley & Wittkopf, 1989). Decision-makers tend to attach probabilities to the possible outcome of an action as a result of the uncertainties in terms of the cost and benefits of taking such action. However it is necessary to note that while

some decision-makers accept risks others are prone to averting risks.

Rational decision-making is done through a sequence of steps:

1. Problem recognition: This marks the beginning of the decision-making process. Decision-makers perceive the existence of a problem, which they must deal with based on the accuracy of the information available. Accuracy here means the information required for dealing with the problem must be readily available; information about the 'actions, motivations, and capabilities of other actors', the international system inclusive. (Kegley & Wittkopf, 1989: 38).
2. Goal selection: Policy makers determine the rationale for resolving the problem. Hence, all identified goals are arranged in order of preference.
3. Identification of alternatives: A list of alternatives (policy options) is made available with the calculated cost and benefit of choosing each policy option.
4. Choice: Based on the cost-benefit analysis conducted for each policy option, the alternative that is, the policy option that addresses the problem is selected.

According to Rosenau, no framework has energized inquiry in foreign policy as Rostow's theory of the economic growth did in the economic development field, as Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance did in social psychology or as Almond's functional model did in comparative politics, as rational decision making (1980: 119)

Like all theories, the rational decision-making theory has its own shortcomings as well. The rational decision-making model is shrouded in uncertainties, ranging from the effect of events on the international scene on decision-making and multiple goals of

decision-makers. Certain factors impinge on decision-makers' capacity to make decisions, such as the fact that decisions are reached in a group context, that is agreement is required before a decision is arrived at. Problem definition because of lack of information is often delayed, while information that is available is often inaccurate. Goal selection on the other hand, poses some difficulty because of the ambiguities in defining what national interest is. At the choice phase, decision makers engage in what Herbert A. Simon (1982) refers to as 'satisficing' behaviour that involves, selecting the choice that meets minimally acceptable standards in place of optimal alternatives.

Closely related to the above is the difference between theory and practice. The ideal process of rational decision making involves accurate and comprehensive information about the problem, clear identification of goals, analysis of options, choosing the most favorable alternative based on a rational decision criteria and an evaluation of the consequences of selecting the policy option followed by measure aimed at correcting errors. In actual practice however, information about the problem is often distorted, individual interests bias national interest, policy options available are limited, selection is done by political bargaining and compromise, superficial evaluation and delayed correction of errors (Kegley & Wittkopf, 1989: 38).

Against the backdrop of the rational decision making model, the paper determines what points the Nigerian foreign policy process was rational or irrational, particularly as major and crucial decisions were expected at critical junctures between 1993 and 1998, and from then to now. The foreign policy terrain of Nigeria at the earlier points was delicate and intricately interesting, with critical moments at the domestic level capable of turning the international community against the country. It is pertinent to note that the situation at the time is a fundamental example of the important place of the

domestic environment in shaping a nation's foreign policy.

The Abacha years were the most irrational in foreign policy decision-making in the chequered history of Nigeria. The domestic environment of the foreign policy process was characterized by a ruthless manner of handling perceived and real opposition to the government, which attracted western and global concern, and Abacha's prompt use of aggression to challenge what he considered undue external interference in the country. For the five years he ruled therefore, Nigeria's foreign policy was essentially aggressive.

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Abdusalami's pacifist foreign policy, on the other hand, represented a descent of Nigeria's glory that characterized the time. It was the highpoint of a weakened power that had also lost its goodwill and demanded a modicum of legitimacy in the comity of nations.

Foreign Policy Decision-Making: The Person, the Process and Nigeria's Pedigree

As a pattern of behavior that one state adopts in relating with other states and as the strategy and tactics employed by the state in its relation with other states in the international system, foreign policy thus connotes for Ojo and Sesay (2002) a plan or programme of actions of a state, which determines the sum-total of the state's objectives in the international system. In this sense, therefore, national interest deals with the state desires and the definition of the most effective means to go about it.

In the process of making foreign policies, or at the stage of initiating policy objectives, certain factors are considered. These factors naturally condition the foreign policy of a state, and are standards that policy makers use to measure policy aims. Aside considering the factors, including leadership style, pattern and orientations; the geography is taken into consideration as well. All these variables, and external ones, including what is at stake for the country in relating with a state or more states, essentially determine the national interest.

Also, policy makers assess prevailing interest within domestic society with a view to determining what constitutes national interest: providing national security, protecting national prestige, maintaining state integrity and promoting economic interest. In the conducting of foreign policy affairs, and the uses of foreign policy, Hans Morgenthau (1973), identifies the individual(s) who are behind such affairs, and calls them the *power* of the foreign policy of a nation. For him, the foreign policy of any nation is the foreign policy of certain individuals who belong to the same nation. Morgenthau echoes Marcel Proust who says:

The life of nations merely repeats, on a larger scale, the lives of their component cells; and he who is incapable of understanding the mystery, the reactions, the law that determine the movement of the individual, never hopes to say anything worth listening to about the struggles of nations (Proust, 1971)..

The analysis by Morgenthau and Proust reinforces the fact that national interest, in most cases, is the product of individual's personal ideas, ideologies and interest, and the success or failure of foreign policy is not usually a result of weakness of the nation, but more as a consequence of the far- or short-sightedness of the men behind the policy process. The foreign policy failure of Nigeria and its posture of a weakling under Abacha and Abdulsalami respectively were indeed the failures of them as a person.

What Morgenthau considers as elements of national power, such as advantage or disadvantage of geography, natural resources, industrial capacity, military preparedness, population size and resourcefulness, national character, national morale, quality of society, quality of diplomacy and quality of leadership of government; also constitute essential domestic determinants of foreign policy aims, efficacy, richness and consistency. Leadership matters most, because it is the institution that will identify the national potentials, harness them and make a balance between the resources and policy, and among the resources. For, as Morgenthau (1973) puts it, a government

must choose the objectives and methods of its foreign policy in view of the power available to support them with a maximum chance of success. A nation that sets its sights too low, foregoing foreign policies within the reach of its power, abdicate its rightful role in the council of nations (Morgenthau, 1973).

Thus, national power determines the limit of foreign policy. But there is an exception to the rule, and that is when the very existence of the nation is at stake. Then, Morgenthau posits, “the policy of national survival overrides the rational considerations of national power”.

What this implies is that foreign policy may not necessarily mind the pulse of the masses. Alexis de Tocqueville (1945) in *On American Democracy* where he narrated how George Washington’s policy of declaring war against England in 1776 was reprobated by the majority in America but still went ahead with it, posits that popular support or opposition may not necessarily count in the execution of foreign policy. The statesman must think in terms of national interest, conceived as powers among nations. Government must resist the temptation to sacrifice what it considers good policy upon the altar of public opinion. The government is the leader of the public opinions and is therefore not expected to be

goaded and misled by the whimsical opinions of the masses in matters of foreign policy.

Foreign policy, like any other policy, is beset with the lacuna of social theory in political practice. According to Brain Fay (1996) policies are not always executed the way they are set out, there is a missing link between a positivist theory of social knowledge and a social engineering conception of political practice. He therefore advocates what he calls policy science in policy process to achieve the best result. He describes policy science as “that set of procedures which enables one to determine the technically best course of action to adopt in order to implement a decision or achieve a goal.”

The ‘policy engineer’ in the context above is one who seeks the most technically correct answer to political problems in terms of available social scientific knowledge. In terms of foreign policy, the engineers are in most cases, the head of state, foreign affairs secretary or minister as the case may be, and personnel at the foreign ministry, members of the National Assembly, diplomats and diplomatic missions, ambassadors and representatives of a nation at sub-regional and global organizations.

Foreign policy is used in many ways. It is generally a tool for a nation to relate with its contemporaries in the international system of states. It is used in such a way that a nation will benefit from the system, a fact that national interest dictates the nature and aims of foreign policy. Foreign policy is a strategy by a nation to maximize profits and record minimum losses in the global system (Nwolise, 1993). While a country’s foreign policy should be in tandem with the general principles governing international relations, including international law, international morality, etc., it still essentially remains an instrument of international muscle-flexing in most cases. The foreign policies of Great Britain, France and Germany for instance, remained, for a long time, those utilized for establishing political, economic and cultural hegemony over the rest of the globe. This

explains their expansionist policy of colonialism *ab initio*.

Some foreign policies, on the other hand have been servile ones, which have either been parasitic, lacking in ideological focus and dependent on the ex-metropolises. Conversely, dynamic Third World foreign policies have tended to establish the economic independence of their countries in the international system of unequal socio-political and economic relations. Countries with aggressive foreign policy objectives, history has shown, use their foreign policies to enhance their economic development and better the lot of their citizens. As a strategy, Mercado (1995:107-27) notes,

Patriotic leaders practically apply the foreign policies of their nations strategically to pursue the economic development of their states as a priority objective of the of foreign policy. In this way, they progressively transform their technology, environment, industry and, advance their people's living standard (Mercad.o, 1995).

An undynamic and unfocussed foreign policy will bring a nation to its knees in the face of pressures from economic predators. For instance, when Nigeria sought Western technocrats during the civil war, it became tied to their aprons: Britain enjoying 31%, West Germany 30%, and the Netherlands 13% of its exports in raw materials, including crude, while these countries supplied it with 70 of it imports, all in cheap finished products (Nwolise, and Akpotor, 1999).

Nigeria's foreign policy, for several decades, has been fantastic on paper, but when critically reflected on, is vague, nebulous and outlandish. The policy engineers have, particularly under military rule, been "father-Christmassy" and exhibited a lack of understanding of foreign policy substance, ideology and direction. From independence, Nigeria's policy has been geared towards the pursuit of either political goals, international recognition as the giant of Africa, or attraction of foreign

aid. No wonder, Ike Nwachukwu), former External Affairs Minister, said that Nigeria's foreign policy

should reflect our changing national circumstances as well as adapt to the realities of a rapidly changing international environment ...Indeed, considering Nigeria's present circumstances, economic issues have acquired added significance and should in any view be given priority attention in our foreign policy(Nwachukwu, 1988).

Nigeria's use of foreign policy on the African scene is reminiscent of Morgenthau's postulation that foreign policy is all about national power, power being the major tool in the struggle for the minds of men, the struggle which translates into foreign policy. For Nigeria, policy is the veritable instrument of swaggering its political power and political influence in Africa. Its policy earns less of military and economic power, but earns the country the image the military, economic and political giant of Africa. This makes it to have that 'father Christmas' disposition towards any 'needy' African nation.

Like the French foreign policy was at a time, the promotion of foreign economic investment is glaringly absent in Nigeria's policy, but there is the glorification of the pursuit of international status, prestige, grandeur and largely, especially under military rule, the preservation and maintenance of the regime in power (Otubanjo, *et al*, 1985)

The uses of foreign policy thus falls within four broad categories namely: national self-preservation, that is the pursuing of policies for the maintenance of existing values like national independence; territorial integrity of regime in power, etc; national self-extension, that is, furthering policies aimed at achieving external values such as national economic development: and self-abnegation, which connotes pursuit of policies meant to achieve international

peace and solidarity. For most of the period of its 40 years of existence, Nigeria falls within the first and the last categories.

While changes in course and character have occurred till date, the standard principle of Nigeria's foreign policy has however remained the same. They are the principles of dignity of states, non-interference in the local affairs of other states, self determination of peoples under any form of colonial or racist rule, good neighborliness with other countries and a drive towards African unity (Adeniran, 1989:31-34; Okolo, 1989).

In the evolution of the Nigerian post-colonial foreign policy, the Tafawa Balewa administration exercised greater hesitancy and uncertainty regarding international issues and tended to be pro-West. Being a member of the Monrovia Group, which advocated a cautious, gradual and pragmatic approach to African unity, Nigeria's foreign policy tended to lack the kind of dynamism expected of that time, as it even went ahead to sign a defense pact with Britain in 1962. However, the Balewa government still made strides, prevailing on the Commonwealth to expel apartheid South Africa, and breaking ties with France for its nuclear test in Western Sahara. Nigeria also joined the Non-Aligned Movement in the heat of the Cold War, in order not to take sides with any of the two conflicting ideological blocs namely, the Capitalist West and the Socialist East (Aluko, 1981)

Gowon's foreign policy was conditioned by the civil war of 1967-70. The discovery of oil brought Nigeria to greater international limelight. Nigeria placed much emphasis on Africa as evident in the emergence of regional and bilateral bodies as the ECOWAS, Chad Basin Commission and Niger Basin Commission. It also recognized the state of China despite the Western opposition and from the civil war began to maintain a balanced relationship with the Western and Soviet blocs, and exhibited concern for Africans in the Diaspora.

Murtala-Obasanjo's era witnessed a more dynamic foreign policy. It nationalized the British Petroleum (BP) for the purposes of compelling the British in Rhodesia to accept negotiation with liberation movements there and make them set the path for Zimbabwe's quick independence. Nigeria also recognized the MPLA as the legitimate government of Angola, against America's President Ford's persuasion that African leaders should disregard the leftist government of the MPLA (Aluko, 1981; Fawole, 2000).

Nigeria lost its reputation as a Frontline state fighting against apartheid in South Africa during the Shagari regime, and the Buhari-Idiagbon era ushered in an aggressive anti-drug and anti-corruption policy to brighten the country's foreign policy and image prospects.

By and large, Nigeria's foreign policy principle remained the same, with the ultimate concern of transforming the country into a political giant relevant in an African peace and development.

Abacha's Policy Conundrum

In June 1993 Nigeria's military, led by General Ibrahim Babangida, annulled election results, thereby blocking the inauguration of the country's first civilian president in a decade. International observers had declared that the election of Moshood Abiola was "free and fair" and the U.S. Congress had passed a resolution recognizing its legitimacy. In prodemocracy protests that ensued several hundred demonstrators were killed. The military coup of November 1993 and repression angered the U.S. (along with the rest of the world), which viewed Nigeria as both a reliable political ally and an economic powerhouse in Africa. The crisis confirmed widespread suspicion that Nigeria's military elite was unwilling to relinquish power to a democratically elected civilian government. The Clinton administration quickly condemned the Nigerian military's action and proposed limited diplomatic and economic sanctions. By the time General Abacha seized power in November 1993, Washington had canceled the visas of

important military personnel, restricted arms sales, halted all U.S. economic and military aid, and cut off Nigeria's access to trade credits and guarantees (Fadope, 1997). Abacha had shot himself to power on the heels of the illegitimacy of the Interim National Government, headed by Earnest Shonekan. That council was generally regarded as illegitimate, weak, slow and incapable of arresting the socio-economic and political crisis of his time (Eragbe, 1997). Pro-democracy activists had gone to court to seek an injunction declaring the administration illegal and unfit a premise subsequently for the intervention of General Abacha on November 17, 1993 (Obi, 1997).

Despite the initial sanctions and diplomatic face-off with the U.S. and international community designed to persuade the Abacha regime to return to the democratic process, political and human rights steadily deteriorated. General Abacha ruled by military decrees and effectively neutralized all political opposition. Abiola was arrested, thousands of labor leaders, prodemocracy and human rights activists, and other opponents were jailed, and many others, including protesters were killed. The state secret terror squad, Abacha's Strike Force led by Barnabas Msheila assassinated the ruler's perceived and real political enemies in the ever growing camp of the pro-democracy activists (Fadope, 1997).

Abacha had disbanded all democratic institutions, including the electoral body and the National and State Houses of Assembly, and sacked all the federal and state cabinets. While he ignored the June 12 issue which had attracted the military sanctions from the West, a new democratic agenda or transitional programme was not even put up, except nebulous statements on a planned new transition, which would be centered on the outcome of a proposed constitutional conference.

Abacha's broadcast on November 17 met resentment of the local and international publics. Violence in the cities of Ibadan and Lagos, and other major towns prompted London and Western financial institutions to

begin to reconsider its relationship with the Nigerian military government. According to them, only the quick return of Nigeria to democracy could elicit a smooth relationship with the country once again. The junta made a *volte-face*, and sought how to realign with another part of the international community in the course of overcoming the opposition from pro-democracy groups (Lovgren, 1998).

However, Nigerians and the world were no longer sure Abacha wanted Nigeria returned to democracy. Abacha was not upholding his commitment to change Nigeria's government from a military regime to a democracy by 1998. Abacha's failure to meet the deadlines of his first three-year reform program demonstrated that the government was not capable of making the transition on time. Abacha's exclusion of all political parties and individuals that did not support him as the future president showed that the regime was not committed to democracy (Onadipe, 1997).

The restlessness of the world, particularly the U.S. over happenings in Nigeria was not far from the prognosis; there was a mix of political, economic and moral factors. Nigeria, Africa's largest and most populous country (more than 140 million), is one of the U.S.'s largest trading partners in Africa and the world's ninth largest oil producer. When Nigeria became independent from Britain in 1960, its size, natural resource wealth, and well-educated leadership positioned it as a regional power in West Africa. As a member of the Non-Aligned Movement, Nigeria never officially sided with the U.S., but its foreign policies and UN votes did not contradict American interests. The U.S. welcomed Nigeria's political moderation, encouraged its regional prowess, and tolerated a string of military governments, punctuated by brief intervals of civilian rule. Together with Britain, U.S. military assistance and arms sales helped equip Nigeria's army, the largest in Africa. Except for the Biafran civil war (1967-70), Nigeria had been relatively stable and it was just proper for the U.S. to secure its biggest trading partner

in Africa from possible disintegration. Despite tough words and some concrete diplomatic and economic measures, the Clinton administration and Congress refused imposing oil sanctions, the one move that could quickly force the military dictatorship to capitulate. The U.S. had continued to purchase over a half million barrels of Nigerian oil a day. This equals 8% of total U.S. oil imports—just under what the U.S. buys from the entire Middle East. Oil kept the military in power: 90% of Nigeria's foreign revenues come from oil exports. The U.S. buys 44% of Nigeria's oil and four U.S. oil companies are drilling in Nigeria (Fadope, 1997). This was an instance of the burden strategic and economic interests impose on U.S. quest to effective response to military dictatorships and human rights abuses in Africa (Obiozor, 1994).

The international community pressurized the junta to free Abacha conduct fresh elections in which he would be free to recontest. Abacha's failure to heed all entreaties caused the violent protest at the end of 1995 through 1998. The protests were nationwide, but were more multiple in the South-West, namely Ibadan, Lagos, Benin, Ilorin and Abeokuta. Political activists, anti-Abacha politicians, uncompromising student leaders, women leaders, journalists, etc, were arrested and detained.

It was the very act of killing the Ogoni 9 that became the junta's Achilles' heels. According to Emeka Anyaoku, Commonwealth Secretary General during that time,

Things came to a head with the execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa and his other eight Ogoni kinsmen in November 1995, an action that put the regime frontally at odds with the rest of the world, particularly the United Nations, the European Union and the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth in particular had to outright suspend Nigeria from its membership because it considered all of Abacha's conduct a gross violation of its 1991 Harare

Declaration of Commonwealth Principles (Josiah, 2008).

Also, Canada, a leading nation that led the movement against the hanging of the Ogoni 9, took the first major step of freezing relations with Nigeria. It closed its diplomatic mission in Lagos and recalled its staff, while the US imposed more military sanctions on the country, threatened to declare top military and junta personnel *persona non grata* in US, and went ahead to cancel direct flights between New York and Lagos. Britain, leading a group of Commonwealth powers including South Africa, limited diplomatic relations with Nigeria (Meier, 2002).

By the indefinite suspension of the Commonwealth of Nations and other diplomatic moves made to isolate Abacha the country suffered severe economic downturn. Aside its oil, other sources of revenue were blocked. Technology in-flow and products from the west were brought in with much effort, which led to the sliding of the *naira* value in the world market. Petroleum products thus became scarce and expensive as trade and commerce within the global economy had become impaired. Save for France with which General Sani Abacha enjoyed economic relationship (Olaewaju, 1999:50-120), the Nigerian economy nearly lost touch with the western market.

Its pariah status notwithstanding, the military administration as it would later show sponsored state violence secretly, assassinating the active crop of the nation's democrats. In a desperate bid to acquire some false legitimacy a lot of money was spent on pro-Abacha rallies. The only five registered political parties also all held their national convention at which, they, one after the other adopted General Abacha as their consensus presidential candidate. Completely disillusioned with the political development in Nigeria, European nations mounted economic pressure on the country, imposing more sanctions and in some cases, severing diplomatic relations with it (Meier, 2002).

Abacha's administration carried on the job of foreign policy in a most pedestrian manner. While the intrigues at home and his international problems made him to lose foreign policy direction and misdirect the country's policy objective, Abacha's idea of foreign policy, it seemed was to earn more enemies for Nigeria. Nigeria was embarrassed several times by this approach, which by all means was 'area boy' diplomacy, as Fawole (2004) and some other scholars have noted. Abacha challenged the world to mind its business by asking them that Nigeria's problems at the time were entirely Nigerian affairs, which should not concern the international community. Hence, Nigeria's foreign policy objective rather attracted bitter resentment from overseas and generated greater unease and disaffection at home.

However, Nigeria under Abacha fared well in its peacekeeping efforts in Liberia and Sierra Leone. The ECOWAS Peace Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) got Nigeria's maximum support to end the civil wars in those countries. An achievement for General Abacha was that Nigeria was able to use ECOMOG to end the wars in Liberia and supervise an election in which Charles Taylor, former rebel leader, emerged as Liberia's President (Mazrui, 2006).

The alleged coups of 1995 and 1997 in which prominent Nigerians, including General Olusegun Obasanjo, Shehu Musa Yar-Adua and Abacha's deputy, General Oladipo Diya were indicted and consequently jailed attracted more international condemnation and isolation for Nigeria. The general feeling was that the two coups were arranged to frame and eliminate Abacha's perceived obstacles to his presidential bid. The death in prison of General Yar'Adua in 1997 further caused more global disaffection towards Nigeria and its elimination from the group of dignified world nations (Olaewaju, 1999).

Abdusalami's Foreign Policy: Change or Continuity?

Abubakar's regime was a very short one. During both the Abacha and Abubakar eras, Nigeria's main decision-making organ was

the exclusively military Provisional Ruling Council (PRC) which governed by decree. The PRC oversaw the 32-member federal executive council composed of civilians and military officers. Pending the promulgation of the constitution written by the Constitutional Conference in 1995, the government observed some provisions of the 1979 and 1989 constitutions. Neither Abacha nor Abubakar lifted the decree suspending the 1979 constitution, and the 1989 constitution was not implemented. The judiciary's authority and independence was significantly impaired during the Abacha era by the military regime's arrogation of judicial power and prohibition of court review of its action. The court system continued to be hampered by corruption and lack of resources after Abacha's death. In an attempt to alleviate such problems, Abubakar's government implemented a civil service pay raise and other reforms (US State Dept, 2008).

In August 1998, the Abubakar government appointed the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to conduct elections for local government councils, state legislatures and governors, the National Assembly, and president. INEC held a series of four successive elections between December 1998 and February 1999 (US Dept. of State, 2008).

The PRC promulgated a new constitution, based largely on the suspended 1979 constitution, before the May 29, 1999 inauguration of the new civilian president. The constitution included provisions for a bicameral legislature, the National Assembly, consisting of a 360-member House of Representatives and a 109-member Senate. The executive branch and the office of president retained strong federal powers. The legislature and judiciary, having suffered years of neglect, are finally rebuilding as institutions and beginning to exercise their constitutional roles in the balance of power (Ameh, 2008).

In terms of foreign policy and Nigeria's external relations, General Abdusalami Abubakar met a declining power and image of Nigeria, engendered by a combative

foreign policy of Abacha. The regime had, by this time, isolated itself from and had been further ostracized by the international community. Hence, the first task of General Abubakar was to overhaul the foreign ministry and set out a new policy agenda that would carry Nigeria out of its dwindling international fortunes. Abubakar confirmed this in his Budget of Realism in 1999, viz:

This administration will continue to pursue its policy of constructive engagement with other members of the international community. We are committed to ensuring that Nigeria takes its rightful place among the comity of nations based on the principles of mutual respect and protection of our national interest. We ...hope the international community will continue to support Nigeria at this critical stage ... not only in ensuring the successful implementation of our political transition but also our economic reform programs (Abdusalami, 1999).

Abubakar began the process of reintegrating Nigeria in the global system by going on trips to world's leading democracies namely, USA, Britain, France and South Africa. He had visited South Africa earlier, and reached Cotonou and Lome for talks on bilateral relations. In the UK, Tony Blair and Abubakar reached agreements on the transition programme and economic reforms in Nigeria. Abubakar also met British industrialists and businessmen with whom he also struck new business deals for Nigeria. President Bill Clinton had discussions with the Nigerian government on issues of human rights, rule of law and the democratization process in Nigeria. France insisted that the repressive laws, particularly Decree 2 of 1984 be repealed and political detainees released (Taiwo, 1998:18).

During Abubakar's tours of the UK, London-based international human rights groups impressed it on the British

government to prevail on the Abubakar government to resolve the outstanding human rights issues in Nigeria. Peter Takiramibiodde, Malcolm Smart and Eno Usua asked that journalists, politicians and other democracy activists arrested and detained by the past Nigeria government be released. Another group lampooned Nigeria for not accepting the proposal for the convocation of Sovereign National Conference (SNC) or the forming of the Government of National Unity (Taiwo, 1998:20).

Abubakar's major objectives for the sojourn were to convince the world that a genuine transition to civil rule was on course, and that a process of national reconciliation at home had commenced. His declaration that elections would start in December, 1998 with the local government polls and terminate in February, 1999 with the National Assembly and Presidential elections were heart-warming to the international community. Addressing the 53rd session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York, Abubakar declared,

I do not intend to run for any office. I do not belong to any party. Every serving soldier is going to return to the barracks... Our people are determined to ensure that a sustainable democratic government is established in the country (Abubakar, 1999b).

Aside the fact that it is an expensive venture, it is the kind of government that encourages an atmosphere of liberty or freedom and an auspicious climate for market economy to grow within a social space. Abubakar discussed Nigeria's debt burden with the US, averring that a burdening economy should not be bequeathed unto a nascent democracy. President Clinton promised relief for Nigeria's \$28 billion debt, but reiterated that sanctions on Nigeria would remain until an elected president was sworn in. US sanctions included limiting military sales to Nigeria, restricting visas for Nigerian officials and banning of air links

between Nigeria and the US (Awowede, 1998; Meier, 2000).

Back home, the Nigerian government attempted reforms. Abubakar released some political detainees, including former head of state General Olusegun Obasanjo, Bola Ige, Olabiyi Durojaiye, Beko Ransom-Kuti, Frank Kokori, President of Nigeria's petroleum transporters' union, Christie Anyanwu, a renown female journalist and Niran Malaolu, editor of the *Diet* newspapers. He also began probe into the alleged looting of the country's treasury by the Abacha family, recovering in the first instance, a whopping \$727 million and inviting former Abacha top aides for questioning (Taiwo, 1998).

Again Abubakar freed himself from the process of party formation and electoral process. This paved way for a free and fair electoral process that boosted the country's international image. He also recognized the multiplier effects of the shortage of petroleum products at the time and vowed to nip in the bud, the problems of fuel scarcity, unstable supply of electricity and communications services, with a view to reviving the economy (Taiwo, 1998: 20).

But the economy was far from being revived, with the country's foreign reserves even sliding from \$7 billion to \$3 billion, the prices of oil products soaring from #11 per litre to #20 despite their recrudescence importation and scarcity, and the minimum wage crisis wreaking its own havoc on the economy. On the political scene, Abubakar did not release immediately the winner of the controversial June 12 1993 presidential election, M. K. O. Abiola and several other political detainees detained by the Abacha junta. Also controversially left unreleased were Abacha's former loyalists who Abacha himself had framed in the coup of 1997. Abubakar's political re-engineering did not also take into consideration the agitations for SNC and GNU (Oyinlola, 1998: 14).

These fuelled resentment and doubts from social crusaders. Constitutional lawyer, Gani Fawehinmi expressed doubts in Abubakar's transitional agenda, saying,

“anybody who believes in the transition programme must have his head examined by a qualified and experienced psychiatrist.” Abubakar's broadcast in July 1998 further indicated that his administration was not interested in the issues of equal citizenship, internal decolonization, true federalism and the GNU. The United Action for Democracy (UAD), posited Abubakar's disposition was “arrogant and unrepentant” and a “brazen relegation of the popular demands of the people.” Abubakar's assumed brazen relegation of the people was followed by the agitations from the South-West for the creation of *Oduduwa* State, the establishment of Radio *Biafra* in the South-east transmitting on 154.60 megahertz at 19 metre band shortwave from Washington DC, USA and the emergence of the *Odua* Peoples Congress (OPC). There were also insinuations that the US and UK were secretly backing Abubakar not to make too many concessions and that even the death of Abiola was engineered by Western conspirators and their Nigerian government accomplices to end the June 12 crisis once and for all (Ojebisi:1998:15-16).

The visits of UN's Secretary-General, Kofi Anan and Commonwealth's scribe Emeka Anyaoku, were exploited by the Abubakar government to earn international goodwill. Anan was allowed to meet Moshood Abiola. But the death of Abiola in July 1998, during the visit of the US Under-Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Thomas Pickering, few days after shook the world and further caused national crisis.

But the junta's transition received a major boost in 1999 when Abubakar released more detainees, including General Oladipo Diya and other alleged 1997 coup plotters. The release and smooth transition process prompted the home-coming of Nigeria's prominent exiles, some of who came to participate in the electoral process. Also gratifying to the international community was the successful hosting of the World Youth Soccer Championship (Nigeria '99) which further endeared the government to the world. The FIFA nod was in itself an

indication of vote of confidence on Nigeria once again and that meant it had been socio-politically re-integrated in the world system. Abubakar's government became popular for its economic and political reforms. America's Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright (cited in Oladeinde, 2000:9) confirmed this in a remark on the attitude of Abubakar after they had met in Washington,

I had a chance to reiterate our great pleasure with the remarkable progress that he has made in a very short period of time in restoring Nigeria's international standing... we have a great respect for the people of Nigeria and wish to be of assistance however we Can (Albright, in Oladeinde, 2000).

General Abubakar (cited in Oladeinde, 2000:9) declared why his administration took decisive steps in its domestic and foreign policies,

My administration was acutely aware of the heavy, dark clouds in the air which were only but ominous and imminent prelude to potentially destructive storms that portended a mortal threat to the ship of the Nigerian nation. We knew we had a historic responsibility to get our bearings right and move very fast, to avoid ship wreck (Abdusalami, in Oladeinde, 2000: 9).

He further said his interactions with the superpowers were boosted by the countries' willingness to open up with Nigeria once again in the interest of "their own countries as well as for Nigeria."

Nigeria's Economic Diplomacy

In the Budget of Realism of 1999, General Abubakar vowed to pursue an economic diplomacy that would "mobilize the support of the international community for Nigeria's policy reform." He also declared that Nigeria would faithfully operate its economy within the framework of the ECOWAS trade liberalization scheme so as

to eliminate trade barriers, including taxes and levies, but which would not be to the detriment of the country's manufactured goods. Due to "resource constraints," Nigeria set aside 1.5 billion dollars for external servicing for 1999 as against 2 billion dollars it used to gulp hitherto. The country's foreign reserves having dropped from 9 billion dollars to 3 million dollars, the Nigerian government sought to appeal to international financial institutions to assist in reducing the country's debts. Negotiations were opened up with the Paris Club, Bretton Woods and other creditors to seek debt reduction or relief. During his talks with the British authorities, US, France and other countries, Nigeria sought debt cancellation or at worst reduction. Debt conversion was also sought. This was a vehicle for debt reduction as it meant creditor-nations would have a leeway to invest in the country. Interestingly, embargo on external borrowing was also lifted. The embargo imposed in 1994 was on concessionary and project-tied loans and credits (Oladeinde, 2000:9).

Expectedly, Nigeria's aggressive drive for debt reduction and renewed external borrowing was a paradox that rubbed on the country's economy. First was the sliding of the Naira in the exchange market and the attendant deregulation of the oil sector. Second, this resulted in cheap prices of Nigeria's crude oil in the world market, which escalated shortage of foreign earnings and dwindling external reserves (Oyinlola, 1998:14). Much funding had to go to into the oil sector as petroleum products were imported in large quantities, and earnings/revenue from that sector was all-time low considering the huge expenditure and yet the losses in attempt to get debt reduction and more loans.

Sino-Nigeria Economic Relations

The Abubakar administration met a strong Sino-Nigeria ties. The belief by Abacha in a strong ties with China was boosted by his conviction that the only way for him to maintain a power balance and a political leverage in the international community, where he had lost so much goodwill was to

befriend an eastern Socialist power. Also, he needed military leverage characteristic of dictators to perpetuate his stronghold and suppress internal opposition. Since the west would not provide him with such, Abacha sought China's assistance. It is noteworthy that China was at the time, also a country with a poor human rights record, its government using threat and coercion to foist a brutish rule on civil-society. It is pertinent to note that Abacha also made friends with traditional enemies of the west-Libya, Iraq, Sudan and Afghanistan.

China was considered a veritable nation with which to do business. Contracts for roads and railways reconstruction were awarded to Chinese companies. Also, China sold arms and ammunition to Nigeria regularly. China was also given the contract to produce military trucks for Nigeria. For instance, the China National Heavy Duty Truck Corporation, in collaboration with Steyr, a trucks-manufacturing company in Bauchi, began the production of the famous 1291 and 1491 truck models. The Abacha administration had sent a military delegation headed by General Abubakar himself, then the Chief of Defense Staff to China on tour. Abubakar toured China's military formations, units and institutions in Beijing, Nanjing and Shanghai and inspected military drills and demonstrations by the Chinese army for lessons for the Nigerian army. Sino-Nigeria defence agreements were reached between Abubakar's team and Chinese Premier, Li Peng, Defence Minister, General Chi Haotian and liberation Army Chief, General Fu Quanyou. China was at the time, between Abacha's last days and Abubakar's emergence as the country's ruler, infamous for fuelling tension in Asia. It assisted Pakistan, a country at diplomatic-military loggerheads with its immediate neighbor, India, in developing a nuclear reactor and a plutonium reprocessing facility. In May 1998, India and Pakistan began a nuclear race as both carried out a number of tests to determine mutual capabilities (*Tell*, 1998:21).

The Abubakar administration did not cancel the contracts awarded to Chinese companies under Abacha, nor sever military links with it. Neither were the anomalies replete in the Nigeria-China relations addressed. Bank vaults of Abacha politicians and defense contractors allegedly in China and Hong Kong were for instance, not investigated (*Tell*, 1998: 22).

The China Civil Engineering Construction Company (CCECC), an integral part of the Chinese government was, during the Abacha regime, given the contract to refurbish and overhaul the Nigerian railways. Ironically, back in China, its railway system was being overhauled by German and Japanese companies. The CCECC contract, misnomer as it seemed, went on under the Abubakar administration. To this extent, substandard railway equipment and facilities were imported from China and little surprise it was, that the Nigeria railway system remained moribund and non-functional for the better part of the Abubakar regime (Bukarambe, 2005).

The Chinese government itself was unwilling to allow its ties with Nigeria go sour. It was ever anticipatory of matching the US in the lifting of Nigeria's crude oil and so, did not cease in giving agro-economic and educational aides to Nigeria in order to make the pre-Abubakar agreement continually relevant. Being a product of the Abacha regime itself, the Abubakar government kept upholding the content of the former relations (Chibundu, 2000).

It is therefore pertinent to submit that the Abubakar administration changed little in Nigeria's low ranking in the world because of the low times of its foreign policy during the twilight of the Babangida regime and the reign of Abacha. Abdusalami sustained much of what his predecessor had engineered and his pacification abroad constituted a manifestation of the low times for Nigeria's international standing. It was a marked departure from old when Nigeria stood tall in the globe.

Continuity in Foreign Policy Thrust

Nigeria's foreign policy thrust has, in theory and practice, remained pro-Africa. It also goes *pari passu* with its international relations objectives. Nigeria under Abacha and Abdulsalami was very active in joining multi-national military forces to defuse tension in conflict-ridden areas of Africa and the world. This was in continuation of the principles and fundamentals of Nigeria's foreign policy. Nigeria had unilaterally quelled the southern Cameroon crisis and the Nigeria-Cameroon border conflicts of 1960-61. The country also played a part in containing the Somalian crisis, the Middle East conflicts, and the crises in Eastern Europe of the 1990s. During the Babangida regime, Nigeria committed billions of dollars into the Liberian civil crisis. The formation of the ECOWAS monitoring group (ECOMOG) was Nigeria's initiative and the peace-keeping force continued in the Abacha regime. Abacha bankrolled the ECOMOG ventures in Sierra Leone in the wake of a civil war there. General Abubakar committed human, material and financial resources into the Sierra Leone crisis more than the previous ECOMOG experiences in war-torn areas of the sub-region. Put together, Nigeria had committed over 250,000 soldiers in peace-keeping operations since 1960, which is more than the entire size of its armed forces (Uwalaka, 1999).

General Abubakar (cited in Uwalaka, 1999), represented by his wife at the Africa First Ladies Peace Mission meeting in Abuja on May 10, 1999, however gave reasons for his government's commitment to international peace-keeping (including monitoring, observing, enforcement, etc). He lamented the spate of wars and conflicts in Africa, which had claimed millions of lives and property, and which had created a major refugee problem. Six million refugee and 18 million displaced persons were at the time, all over Africa. He said,

Nearly 40 years after independence and the establishment of the OAU, it is time for Africa to take its destiny in its hands, it is time for us

to take responsibility for our own mistakes and move vigorously to correct them (Abdulsalami, in Uwalaka, 1999).

Nigeria's presence in Sierra Leone cost 3 million dollars per day, which was four times Sierra Leone's annual budget. A breakdown of the expenditure on soldiers showed that aside the numerous cases of 'ghost soldiers' whose allowances went into officers' pockets, the commanding officers opted to keep records of dead soldiers away from Abuja, so as to keep receiving the dead soldiers' allowances on their behalf. In spite of the huge spending, Nigerian soldiers still suffered deprivations and hunger-induced deaths. This not only weakened the morale of new recruits for Sierra Leonean mission, but raised fears of mutiny in the Nigerian barracks. The Nigerian officials decided to cajole the volunteers that there were good allowances and insurance scheme sponsored by Britain, US and Canada for each soldier (Seminitari, 1999:26).

The Abubakar government embarked on international trips soliciting money to maintain its ECOMOG contingent. Ignatius Olisemeka, the External Affairs Minister, got promises of \$2 million worth of logistics support from the UK in the fund drive. Also a total of \$13 million in contract was got as contributions from the US and UK in 1998 for ECOMOG operations. The contracts were even awarded to a US company, PAE (Seminitari, 1996:26)

Nigeria's foreign policy commitment to the civil war in Sierra Leone was a major pre-occupation in its international relations. This is understandable in view of the fact that Nigeria was transiting into democracy and wanted other democratizing African countries along, particularly threatened democracies like Sierra Leone. The restoration of Tejan Kabba's administration by Abacha notwithstanding, Abubakar's military commitment was to guide and sustain that country's restored democracy and rid Sierra Leone of the remnants of anti-Kabbah rebels. It was argued at the 1999 ECOWAS summit that it was pertinent to retain ECOMOG to forestall future military

interruptions or rebellion that might again lead to civil war in West Africa. ECOMOG was thus supposed to be a kind of West African high command or standing army.

General Abubakar also played mediating role in the Congo Kinshasa crisis in which rebels opposed to President Laurent Kabila's government continued to push into the capital with aerial bombardments of non-combatants communities. This is a role Abubakar still plays as the UN's Special Envoy in Congo.

Conclusion

General Abubakar's approach may have played Nigeria down as a honourable and respectable member of the international community, it however brought the world to understanding that the nation as a whole wanted to make progress in its relationship with others. The Abacha regime had caused much damage which would require a restarting from the beginning. The reconstruction process would imply ample humbling disposition by Nigeria to its counterparts in the global system. No wonder, General Abdusalami Abubakar routinely made pleas in the public to the world to "forgive and forget". Abdulsalami's approach may be reminiscent of Chamberlain's weak and terse response in the face of German aggression, but it sure guaranteed Nigeria's re-entry into global reckoning. Nigeria re-integrated in the world community and recognized again as the giant of Africa. Positive results were yielded as national powers such as the US, Britain, France, Germany, Canada, South Africa and Netherlands began to reopen their doors for Nigeria: its head of state, ministers, other top officials and citizens. The acceptance by FIFA to have Nigeria host the 1999 world youth football championship was indicative of the international recognition and acknowledgement of the transition process in the country, and the passing of vote of confidence on the progressive government.

Canada, which had severed diplomatic ties with Nigeria during the Ogoni crisis, restored links when it sent a delegation to Nigeria to reopen diplomatic talks on how to normalize Canada–Nigeria relations. The visits of UN's Kofi Anan, Commonwealth's Emeka Anyaoku and US' Thomas Pickering in quick successions in 1998 were a measure of Nigeria's reintegration in the global community.

Exiles returned shortly after all other "phantom" coup plotters and political detainees had been released. They included Wole Soyinka, Dan Suleiman, Bola Tinubu, Tokunbo Afikuyomi etc., just as the repeal of the obnoxious Decree 2 of 1984 got local and international appraisal.

To what extent, however, was Nigeria's image crisis remedied? The Abubakar administration was accused of gross mismanagement of public funds as his government was even accused of siphoning billions of petrodollars allegedly shared among his lieutenants. Oil lifting and licenses were also reportedly arbitrarily and fraudulently given to Abubakar's loyalists just as jumbo contracts running into several millions of dollars were also awarded within a period of five months. Furthermore, choice-lands, properties and house allowances were allocated to past rulers and old loyalists just as insinuations arose that the Abacha loots recovered were shared among government functionaries (Awowede, 1998).

Moreover, corruption still pervaded high places and Nigeria's image problem exacerbated by the perpetration of advance fee fraud (419) by syndicates persisted under the dispensation. The Transparency International (TI), a global non-governmental organization ranked Nigeria as the second most corrupt nation in the world during this period. The Abubakar administration thus failed to use Nigeria's foreign policy to launder Nigeria's image well, like the Obasanjo administration is presently doing.

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