

THE POLITICS OF INTERNATIONAL VISIBILITY AND RELEVANCE: AN OVERVIEW OF NIGERIA'S ROLE CONCEPTIONS IN WORLD POLITICS

By

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Abstract

National Role Conception (NRC) is a fresh perspective in foreign policy analysis in Nigeria. It is however, not as new in western scholarship. Beginning with Holsti in 1970, and further explored by Walker in 1978, Wish in 1980, and Krotz in 2001, NRC has become an attractive prism by which the foreign and defence policies of nations are examined. Nations are viewed to be driven in international politics by roles they have domestically identified, which they wish to perform with the view to securing and furthering their national interest. National Role Conceptions (NRCs), the art of articulation by policymakers of the national roles for the external context, however, constitute the incubation stage of external policymaking, which involve a lot of calculations, strategizing, and rigorous analysis of cost implications of external roles to undertake. This paper examines the role conceptions of Nigeria since independence, arguing that the basic ingredients for conceiving strategic roles towards the realization of core national interest seemed lacking. It adopts the National Role Theory, and interrogates the policymaking process to determine the clarity and strategic importance of national or international roles. While the paper scooped data from oral interviews from the relevant research population and secondary sources; it concludes that Nigeria's roles in the continent and world are motivated more by visibility and relevance, and not so much of a strategy for national development, which is the basic goal of foreign policy.

Keywords/Phrases: National Role Conceptions, National Roles, National Interest, Foreign Policy, Strategy, Visibility

Introduction

Nigeria's roles in Africa and the world have in more recent times come under criticism for lacking basic strategy that characterizes most ambitious foreign policies whose principal goal is to secure and further national interest. From independence, Nigeria has set out with an ambitious foreign policy with the long-range aspiration to become a world power, after establishing its regional and continental relevance. The founding fathers and political leadership had at various times justified the natural selection of Nigeria as the powerhouse of African politics by a number

of favourable factors. These included a huge black population, a rich socio-cultural and historical diversity, abundant economic fortunes, the power of oil, and a strong military (Aluko, 1981; Shaw, 1983). Indeed, the founding fathers had, with these forces of nature behind the nation, argued that it was a “manifest destiny” for Nigeria to take the lead and assume the credible voice of the continent (Azikiwe, 1961), and that it would not concede this position to any other nation for any reason whatsoever (Balewa, 1964). Consequently, at independence, the Nigerian leadership had set the tone for a role-driven foreign policy, and had articulated what would be the roles Nigeria would assume in the world.

The problem however, was that the roles identified were relevant only for the times, and there would be need for successive leaders to identify strategies or instruments of realization. Nigeria was to fight apartheid, contend with neo-colonialism, unite Africans against racism, engender liberation in countries contending with comprador elements stifling development, and use its military might to keep the peace in the continent. But because the international system is a dynamic one, global developments and challenges would change, just as national roles too are expected to change in content and strategy. However, subsequent political leaders hung on to the old roles for the preceding years, thus making the national roles conceived and assumed static and antiquated. The major problem was probably the fact that the leaderships pursued these old role conceptions, without reflecting on the challenges of Nigeria, with the view to refocusing the foreign policy and re-conceiving international roles that would more likely enhance national development. This was because the country continued to slip in development index while still offering enormous helps and assistance to the international community in areas such as power supply, conflict mediation, resolution and peacekeeping, grants, giving of loans and debt cancellation, and even the hosting of international festivals and events that bear little or no advantage for national development.

This paper examines the politics of external role conceptions of Nigeria since independence. It establishes the fact that while there have been role conceptions by national leadership (sometimes vague, sometimes clear, and at times recycled old conceptions), most of them are simply over-magnanimous towards the African and global contexts, while they make little or no impact on national interest. Against this background, it interrogates Nigeria’s real intentions in

the world: either to only become visible and be considered relevant as well as recognized as a “giant” as it appeared to have been; or to gain considerable leverage and mileage in global politics for the purpose of advancing core and other objectives of national development and citizens’ prosperity.

Conceptual Clarifications

For the purpose of understanding the salient issues in this paper, and to have a logical build-up of the central arguments, an analysis of the major themes and concepts would be done. These concepts include national interest, national roles, NRCs, foreign policy, and strategic policy.

1. National Interest

National interest is a generally controversial concept in foreign policy analysis. Scholars do not agree on the fact that national interest has a universally accepted definition, and contend with the view of whether there is anything that can be called “national” in view of the multitude of prevailing personal, class, group, sectional, and public interests in a state. This is because there is no definitive measure or a common plank for the streamlining of all these conflicting interests to a “nation-al” interest. Hence, some view national interests as the interests of the political or ruling class because they may have been constitutionally or traditionally empowered by their leadership position to decide for the rest having been given the general will by the people through popular or dubious election (Rosati, 2006), or by forceful submission in the case of military dictatorship. This is why when a state has taken a particular position on a certain issue, there may not be a public domestic backing of it. National interest may thus be ambiguous and create the smokescreen for the justification of parochial individual, class or group interests by those in government. Henderson (2005) regards national interest as the collective aspiration of a state on a world-wide scale. This denotes the official declaration that a nation’s political leadership has made about what its desires in international politics are. It is generally, a country’s goals and ambitions in global politics whether economic, military, or cultural (Gvosdev, 2004; Byrd, 1996; Church, 1973). The interests are multifaceted: primary, secondary, or long-range. Primary interests are central to a nation’s immediate survival and security, a nation’s wealth, economic growth, preservation of national culture or heritage, and power. The external attitude (foreign policy and national roles) of a nation is therefore expected to be shaped by its national interest.

The pursuit of national interest and the primacy of national power are considered to be in the calculations of nations from the foundation of the realist school of International Relations. From Sun Tzu, Thucydides, Machiavelli, Clausewitz, Carr, to Morgenthau and Waltz, political realism celebrates national interest and holds that foremost in national role conception are pursuits of national interest and power, negating the moralistic and legalistic fusion into foreign policy by the idealists with the view to creating a utopian and impossible institutional framework on global scale.

It is debatable whether Nigeria has a set of clearly articulated national interests. For a nation that has played many leadership roles in Africa and global politics, a set of national interests should have been documented, from which reference could be made to actions of the government whether they are in the interest of the nation. What is relied on as Nigeria's national interests are the outline of national leaders which change from time to time, and what the 1999 Constitution sets out as the foreign policy of the country (Folarin, 2010). Both the leaders' and the constitutional outlines appear more like a set of roles to occupy than what the interests of the nation should be. The weak outlines or lack of documented set of well articulated national interests could have also been responsible for the ambiguous and weak line of role conception. For the bigger countries such as Germany and Britain, national interests are clearly articulated, classified in time and space, and justified. In the case of Nigeria, a set of five or six roles set out in the constitution would not suffice to be national interests, hence the conclusion that Nigeria requires clearer guidelines to its external roles and foreign policy by way of clearly defining its national interests through democratic processes (Pham, 2007).

2. National Roles

The concept of national role ascribes to the state an organic and social nature, which national interests may not do. According to Folarin (2010: 26), national role establishes the basis for the social functionality of states, and provides the platform for the comprehension of state behaviour. It allows foreign policy analysis to be more robust when talking about state behaviour or functionality of nations in the international system. National interests as discussed are a set of objectives. These may have been rationalized, articulated and outlined by policy makers. They may remain non-actualized until the state acts (or plays certain roles). The policy makers have more "roles" to play than articulating national objectives. They also may have to conceive roles

for the nation. Such roles may be conceived within the frameworks of national interest and objectives. Roles a state wishes to fill or which it has assumed in international politics often represent steps by which it hopes to realize or carry out its national objectives. Thus, national roles can be described as identified positions a state wishes to assume or play, and a set of tasks by which a state realizes its objectives or interest in international politics. It may not be enough for a state to articulate on paper its interests in world politics. It also needs to define its roles so as to effectively carry out its objectives. The interests are theoretical, the roles are practical. All states may have national interests, but not all states may conceive or play any external roles. However, all states require national roles if they want to fulfil their national aspiration (Krotz, 2001: 5-7). National interest is therefore not the same thing as national roles. However, both complement each other and represent stages of national aspiration fulfilment on the international scene. The national role thus helps in a state's foreign policy formulation and implementation.

Thus, it becomes apparent that national interest defines the national roles to occupy. For instance, if it is the long-range interest of Nigeria to be a global power, it behoves of it to define roles to play to attain that objective or interest. It is America's interest to give its best ally, Israel a safe haven in the Middle East and have considerable control of the oil-rich region. It has had to play active roles there, like dislodging or fighting real and imagined anti-Zion Islamic extremist leaderships, including Saddam Hussein, Al-Qaeda and Hamas, to attain its national interest. National interest is a potent force. National role is the moving force (Rosenau, 1980).

Consequently therefore, such terms as national interest or national objectives do not explain state behaviour as much as roles states play. Only national roles clearly define state behaviour, just in the same manner that the role of a right-full back, a goal-keeper or striker explains the behaviour or attitude of players in a football match. The objective of a football team may be to win and qualify for the World Cup. But they have to play certain roles on the pitch first before they actualize that interest. Their interest to win cannot take them beyond their wish. Their roles accomplish their interest. So it is in the case of national roles. This understanding is generally lacking in the literature of Nigerian foreign policy so much that it has been difficult to identify and measure role conception in the formulation of Nigeria's foreign policy and implementation of the Nigeria-Africa policy.

3. National Role Conception

Simply, national role conception is the identification or articulation of the external or national roles a state would fill in international politics. Flowing from Biddle and other social psychologists' perspective, down to Holsti and the newly emerging role-influenced foreign policy analysts, national role conception has been described as a function of three basic influencing factors namely, perceptions of the political or ruling class, their interpretations of a nation's external outlook, and the expectations of the domestic and international publics. States in contemporary international system set out tasks and assume particular roles they seek to undertake. Such tasks are conceived of and articulated in the foreign policy making process by the policy decision makers. As the state occupies or fills its formally conceived roles, this may ascribe to it a distinct image (Eulau, 1963) and make its behaviour predictable (Isaak, 1975). Therefore, national roles can be viewed as positions states attempt to occupy premised on general orientations governments adopt toward the outside world.

Krotz gives a classic definition of national role conception of states. He conceptualizes it as

The internal construction of collective self...what we want and what we do as a result of who we think we are, want to be, and should be; where the "we" represents nation and state as a social collectivity (Krotz, 2001: 1).

The first exponent of NRC, Holsti (1967: 29), captures it as "the domestically shared views and understandings regarding the proper role and purpose of one's own state as a social collectivity in the international arena". The views often represent the policy makers' own definitions of the general kinds of decisions, commitments, rules and actions suitable to their state, and of the functions their state should perform on a continuing basis in international politics. These policy makers are in different categories including formal and informal, governmental and nongovernmental bodies- working interdependently- whom Beasley, Kaarbo, Hermann and Hermann (2001) have identified as "decision units" or groups. Such roles create certain obligations and commitment which policy makers will usually attempt to fill. Thus, national role conceptions may refer to the external orientations adopted by government, a set of formally identified tasks a state is likely to assume in international politics which may ascribe to it a distinct image.

Therefore, role conception can be described as the act of identifying international or external roles to fill by a state. In addition, it may refer to the rationalization of strategies and steps to actualizing objectives of a nation in international politics done by foreign policy decision makers (Isaak, 1975; Kaplan, 1957). The process can be complex, secretive and very political (Rosati, 2006).

4. Foreign Policy

Foreign policy is the rational pursuit of a set of national objectives. The “pursuit” here suggests action, steps, roles, that will delineate the attitude or behaviour of a state in the external context. Foreign policy may be like a wedding ring with which the domestic context of a nation solemnizes its union with the international community. Such political “marriage” is underlined by the ambitions and desires of state; hence foreign policy is a means to an end for states (Goldstein, 2001). For Henderson (2005) foreign policy is a pattern of behaviour that one state adopts in relating with other states, an idea that Waltz (2005) considers as the strategy and tactics employed by the state in its relation with other states in the international system. Idang (1973) regards foreign policy as a plan or programme of actions of a state which determines the sum-total of the state’s objectives in the international system. Holsti (1967) defines foreign policy as the actions of a state toward the external environment and the conditions-usually domestic- under which such actions are formulated. This seems to agree with Kissinger’s (1994) often quoted submission that in foreign policy analysis, the domestic structure is taken as given; foreign policy begins where domestic policy ends. Simply, foreign policy could mean external attitude of a state. The ultimate goal is to maximize greater advantage for the country. To this end, according to Nwolise (1999), the foreign policy of a developing country like Nigeria, should be geared towards national economic development so as to have a better leverage in international politics.

5. Role Conception and Foreign Policy

National role conception is considered as the moving force of foreign policy (Holsti, 1967, 1970, and 1987; Wish 1980; Krotz, 2001; Bilcik, 2004; Chafez, *et al*, 1996; Adigbuo, 2005 and 2007; and Folarin, 2010), For instance, Wish (1980: 532) considers role conceptions as “foreign policy makers’ perceptions of their nations’ positions in the international system.” They include perceptions of the general kinds of decisions, rules, commitments, and long-term functions

associated with these international positions.” Wish holds that national role conceptions provide norms, standards and guidelines which affect many aspects of decision making. In agreement with Walker (1978), Wish posits that the variation in foreign policy conduct is a process of “role location”, an idea in tandem with Holsti’s earlier postulation (1967). Holsti also uses the term perception to denote conception. This study disagrees in part with the usage. Perception may refer to a set of ideas or the thinking about role a nation can play. Conception is a stage higher than perception; it can be viewed as clearly identified roles, and strategies defined by a state with which to effectively play its roles in international politics.

Holsti (1967 and 1987) offers two typologies of national role conceptions. In the first typology, nine role conception types are identified while the second has seventeen role types. Holsti attempts to prove that the international system is made up of states filling up roles to fulfil their national interest, and that national power, capacity, wealth, et cetera condition the roles conceived. The context of Holsti was however more suitable for the Cold War era and the accompanying ideological conflict and power politics of the time. It may therefore not be applicable wholesale to this study. However, there is no work on national role conception which can afford to deny the critical influence and contributions of Holsti to the clarity and usefulness of national role conception as a theoretical instrument to study foreign policy.

Nevertheless, from the analyses of the forerunners of national role conception, it can be inferred that states define tasks and assume defined roles in the international system. Such tasks are conceived of and articulated in the foreign policy making process. The roles may ascribe a distinct image to the state and make its behaviour predictable. In this way, the role conception constitutes a nation’s attribute, shapes its attitude in international politics, makes its behaviour predictable, and provides a state with a stable sense of identity.

Role conception is described by Rosenau (1990:220) as the “attitudinal and behavioural expectations that those who relate to an occupant of a role have of the occupant and the expectations that the occupant has of himself in given situations.” Hence, roles are synthesized phenomena, created by the combination of an actor’s subjective understanding of what its behaviour should be (role conception), international community’s demands (role expectations) and the particular context in which the role is being acted out (role performance). Put differently, national role conception is expected to manifest in role performance. Role performance finds

expression in decisions, policies and actions (Holsti, 1970:234).

Role conceptions are thus the categories of behaviour that states rely on to simplify and to help guide them through a complex world. The inference from the foregoing is that role conceptions are guiding principles which are then translated into policies. From the analyses of the scholars, it could be deduced that national role conceptions are prompted by any or a combination of the following:

1. National interest- a set of rationally thought out and articulated objectives a state seeks to actualize in the international system. National interest also accommodates expectations of the domestic public.
2. National capabilities- the calculated strengths a state has, which give it an edge over others and favourably position it in a bargaining situation.
3. Attitudes and values- a set of national cultural traits, ethnic and religious values which shape a state's foreign policy.
4. Personality needs- the subjective perceptions of policy makers of what a national role should be based on, including domestic needs, critical international needs and personal desires of the leaders.
5. Systemic prescriptions and expectations of other governments- the compelling forces from outside a domestic environment, including international law, critical events or trends in the external environment, including nuclear proliferation and conflicts.

6. Strategic Interest

Strategic interest defines strategic planning. Strategic interest refers to the desires and aspirations that are of direct importance to the security, military, social and economic advancement of a state. Such interest is driven by a national motivation to relate with an international community only or principally with the view of national gain. This thus requires strategic thinking, planning, and strategic or results-oriented role conceptions.

Analytical Framework: National Role Theory (NRT)

There are several theories relevant to foreign policy analysis. These include National Interest Theory, National Power Theory, Game Theory, Bargaining Theory, Decision Making Theory,

and National Role Theory. The National Role Theory (NRT) is most apposite for obvious reasons: the topic of discourse naturally determines the suitability of the theory in use; it explicates the social functionality of states more than other theories; and it ascribes a distinct image to the state in the international community; while it enhances the predictability of state behaviour.

NRT is derived from the concept of role as used first by psychologists and anthropologists in distinguishing individual and/or group role perceptions and actual performance in any social gathering be it family, peer group, religious group, workplace, community, market, et cetera. A number of social psychologists pioneered the role theory. These included Cooley, Linton (1936), Parsons (1937), Newcomb (1950), Sarbin (1966), Ackerman (1958), and Biddle (1979). Originally, the role theory is a perspective in social psychology that considers most of everyday activity to be living up to the roles, or expectations, of others. Role theory argues that in order to change behaviour it is necessary to change roles; roles correspond to behaviours and vice versa. In addition to heavily influencing behaviour, roles influence beliefs and attitudes; individuals will change their beliefs and attitudes to correspond with their roles.

The successes of the role theory in psycho human analysis and in understanding of human and group behaviour/relations had probably been responsible for the adaptation by Holsti to explain state behaviour in the international system. In his piece “National Role Conceptions in the Study of Foreign Policy” (1970), Holsti adapts the role theory to nation’s behaviour positing that “national roles” are possible causal variables in the operation of the international system or in explaining the foreign policies of individual nations. According to Holsti most versions of balance of power theory posit three kinds of state in the system each of which is to make certain types of commitments (or enact roles) if the system is to remain stable. The three kinds of state are the aggressor state or group of states; the defender state or defending group of states; and the balancer. If the states do not play the roles imbalance, war and system transformation may result (Holsti, 1970:234). Holsti however observes that the balance of power theory does not make it explicit if it is the national attributes or roles that shape the system or it is the system attributes that rub on national roles. This is reminiscent of the level of analysis problem in foreign policy.

Holsti also notes that national roles are peculiar to the circumstances and nature of the changing international system. For instance, the national roles in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s reflected the

peculiarities of the Cold War. Put differently, they were roles or attributes that exhibited the feeling and intent of states in the polar world. The roles were variants of the Cold War system namely, bloc leaders, allies, satellites and non-aligned states. However, the role of the smaller states during this period was insignificant as theirs were subsumed in the larger roles of the in the two “big boys” clubs. By this Holsti points out the weakness of the old conception of national role.

Consequently, Holsti (1970:235-236) advances some typologies of national role that are richer in details and more sensitive to distinctions in actual diplomatic behaviour. Holsti constructs these typologies around the perceptions of policymakers about what should be their national roles in international affairs. He raises a number of questions: are there multiple role perceptions same time? Does a government organize its policy to suit a single role? Does a state play several roles simultaneously, including incompatible ones? Is it all states that have role perceptions? What are the sources of role conceptions by policymakers?

The arguments in respect of the application of role theory to the state suggest two lines of investigation. First it is seen to be a truism that nations have experiences which have persistent after-effects on their policies. For instance defeat of a nation in a war may produce a strong element of anti-militarism, as in the case of Japan, which will make that country to see itself as a natural leader in the vanguard of arms reduction or disarmament in international politics. Second there is an articulation among various roles within the state psychology and between roles and the conceptions states hold of themselves, their self-concept. With respect to the latter, research and theory on how the self influences role selection and in turn is fashioned by roles imposed by the exigencies of the situation and the requirements of the social structure, suggest some interesting parallels on the international level (Backman and Secord, 1968).

It is pertinent to ask at this juncture: to what extent is the adoption of a role as an aggressor inhibited by a national self- conception as a peaceful state? Also how does a nation’s conception of itself change as a consequence of engaging in a role inconsistent with its national self-conception? It is against this backdrop that Nigeria’s external role conceptions would be critically examined.

Nigeria's Role Conception and Role Types since Independence

Nigeria's attitude in the African continent and the world from independence has suggested a number of role conceptions following Holsti's typology. Using the prism of the first typology, which is the Mediator role type, it loosely describes Nigeria's regional and global policies. The Mediator role stresses the interposition of bloc conflicts and policy of integration of the system. The sources of such role include location and traditional policy. Nigeria's "traditional policy" has been the uncompromising placement of Africa at the centre of its foreign policy and one of its objectives is the strengthening of African ties through policies aimed at regional and continental integration. It has done this by its position in the 1960s to form an African organization, through a gradualist and cautious process in view of the diversities of the continent, which would unify the peoples and states and help them fight the common standing blocks to their nationhood; by the initiative to establish a functional regional body, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in 1975; and the contribution to the formation of the African Union (AU) in 2001/2.

Holsti's second typology poses a serious problem of choosing the most appropriate role conception type for Nigeria. This is the Regional Leader role type. Nigeria tends to assume different roles at some points and in some ways that are explicable by the role types. It does not have a definite or specific role type. For instance, Nigeria perfectly assumes the role of Regional Leader, championing great causes, offering cutting edge initiatives for West African progress. As a Regional Protector, it has been a key player in the security, well-being and progress of other regions in Africa, including Central Africa (DR Congo, Rwanda), East Africa (Uganda, Eritrea, Somalia and Sudan), and Southern Africa (Angola, Namibia, South Africa, Mozambique, Botswana, and Zimbabwe). Its numerous peace and security initiatives, conflict resolution, dispute settlement landmarks and initiatives for economic and political integration in West Africa in particular and Africa in general, confer on it the position of a Mediator-Integrator. The New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD), African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), and economic initiatives towards African development, impose on Nigeria the burden of Developer.

However, these four role conception types (Mediator, Regional Leader/Protector, Mediator-Integrator, and Developer) seem to have a central thread running through them. Hence, it will not

be out of place to make an adaptation of Holsti's taxonomy in such a way that the Regional Leader, Regional Protector and Developer role types are subsumed in Regional Protector role conception type because of the outreach of the roles which include other regions. The other role conception that best fits Nigeria's role conception type from 1960 is the Mediator-Integrator role conception type.

As a result of the reciprocal character of the role relations, one partner may present itself to another in a fashion that requires the latter to adopt a role advantageous to the former. Assuming the role of a Regional Protector, Nigeria in West Africa and the African continent casts other nations in the region into such roles as protectee or faithful allies because they see Nigeria as a more powerful ally. Such a role type carries with it obligations on the part of nations in counter-positions, which should be advantageous to the "defender," Nigeria. In other words, because they regard it as their "benefactor", Nigeria is supposed to take advantage of this survivalist disposition of these dependant-nations/allies to attract loyalty from all of them, while it creates division among them for the establishment of its own economic and political hegemony in such regions. Where such is conceived and underlies foreign policy implementation, the role conceptions are deemed to be strategic. But has that been the case with Nigeria?

Nigeria's role conceptions towards Africa and the world have expressed themselves in rapid response to peacekeeping, conflict resolution, and crisis management; drive towards economic integration, financial, technical and military assistance to needy African states, restoration of democracy, and promotion of good governance in the continent. The motivating spirit behind these acts of magnanimity and international morality has been the vision of national leaders that it is Nigeria's 'manifest destiny' to assume leadership in Africa. This was more pointedly stressed by Olusegun Obasanjo:

We imported and distributed for Africa. We sacrificed, fought and died for Africa. We have done so and we will not stop doing any of these. When the great nations of the world are vowing not to send their nationals to fight for any cause abroad, we have fresh in our mind, our 1000 troops who, in the last decade, have died trying to restore peace in Our West African sub-region alone. All over Africa, there are tombs of Nigerian soldiers who went to sacrifice their lives for peace. Our troops are still out there. History will surely record for ever Nigeria's inimitable

African Nationalism...and there is no stopping us. Wherever there is a real need for us, we will be there (Obasanjo, 2000).

Indeed, from inception of his second coming in 1999, Obasanjo had himself showed an appearance of a statesman whose orientation was not different from that of the founding fathers and other leaders before him, that Nigeria must employ all its endowments and resources for the sake of entire Africa and any troubled nations of the world. His words:

Needless to say that, for us, development and progress is not an idle debate. For us, it is a matter of life and death! We certainly cannot afford the intellectual luxury of writing off our continent. Nor can we even begin to weigh the possible validity of the rather racist connotation that underdevelopment is innate to the character of Africans. Almighty God has also used our country (Nigeria) and her leaders to assist African states, especially those facing political and economic turmoil and those engulfed in leadership crises. We thank God that we have, as a people and nation, been able to make some positive impact in the areas where we have intervened. (Obasanjo, 2000: 3).

The speech by President Olusegun Obasanjo at the Sixth Montreal Conference in 2000 captures the essence of this discussion. Nigeria's diplomacy in Africa has always been hinged on the belief, exemplified in the actions of its successive leaders, particularly General Obasanjo that the country, with its vast human and natural endowments has a natural role to play in the development of the continent. What can be natural a role to play than for national leadership to enhance the living standard of its own people by many realist-driven roles in Africa and the world? This is where Nigeria may have differed from big powers such as the United States whose foreign policy is moved primarily by national economic interest for the overall happiness of its citizens and residents. Nigeria by its Mediator-Integrator roles has been playing certain exclusive roles in Africa: conflict management, restoring democratic governments, lending money to needy African states, and even supplying uninterrupted electricity to neighboring states. But at whose expense? This pious nature of pursuit of these Regional Protector or defender roles since 1960 has made Nigeria to assume a leadership role that gives it the image of a nation much more responsible abroad than at home.

There are certain factors that place Nigeria in a position not only to assume a natural leadership role, but to have cause to maximize its leadership position more for the benefit of its citizens. Being the most populous black nation in the world implies that it has more mouths to feed and more tasks of national security to grapple with. As a multiethnic state with deep cultural diversity, it means that there are more daunting tasks and challenges to forge a greater, stronger and more united nationhood. As a nation made up of enterprising and intelligent populace, there would be more expectations from the world to see Nigeria contributing more to ground-breaking inventions and innovations, which would accord its people respect in global reckoning as it is the case in India and China. With its oil, the country would be expected more to be reinvented into another United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, or Qatar (fellow oil-rich nations) in terms of development of infrastructure for the good of the populace. Hence, all these rich qualities of Nigeria should go beyond being used for military swagger, wealth showmanship, and resource exhaustion in order to earn the sobriquet ‘the giant of Africa’.

All the factors favouring it, the Nigerian leadership seemed to have erroneously perceived the nation as the “messiah” of the continent. The messiah or big brother mentality has conditioned Nigeria’s foreign policy to make Africa its centrepiece with the intentions to liberate, defend and integrate the continent. Unlike the way the US considered Mexico as its backyard and claimed the “manifest destiny” to possess it and become the sole hegemon in the Western Hemisphere in the 19th century; Nigeria rather sees Africa as a continent in need of its plenteous and accessible goodwill.

Visibility or Strategic Roles?

A number of justifications have been offered for Nigeria’s Afrocentric role conceptions and huge cost of regional protection. These justifications are embedded in the principles of Nigeria’s foreign and defence policy, namely: to guarantee Nigeria’s security, a secure neighbourhood must be its priority (King, 1996). Hence huge spending would rather imply investing in Nigeria’s betterment for the assurances of its own national security. Secondly, the largesse and goodwill to African neighbours have also been explained away as pertinent to maintain a good neighbourliness in order to enjoy the loyalty of the neighbouring states in the days of trouble like during the 1967-70 Civil War, when all the immediate neighbours stood behind Nigeria (Adeyemo, 2002).

Thirdly and flowing from the first two analyses, is the argument that Nigeria's rapid response is desirable so as to ward off the impending doom of refugee backlash and reconstruction, which at the end of the day, Nigeria would be expected to bear. Fourthly, Nigeria's numerous interventions are also justified by the fact because Nigerians in large numbers live in virtually every African state it behoves it to protect them by averting crisis or stopping the conflicts their host countries.

All of the above appear strategic and thus tend to place Nigeria's foreign and defence policies in the class of strategic policy like that of the western nations. However, there are certain problematic questions that arise from them, which pale the significance. The multiple military interventions to keep the peace in Africa may be prompted by avoiding backlash; however, the dissipation of human and material resources, it is probably not conceived, becomes a liquidation factor in Nigeria's human and material reserves for national security and economic stability in the future. Response to all other peacekeeping missions outside the region and continent are simply unjustifiable, geo-strategically.

Also, Nigeria's participation in almost all conflict resolution cases may be award-winning, but this may not translate to national development, political stability at home, as well as peace and security. There have been more cases of conflicts in Nigeria from independence to date than the conflicts it has assisted in resolving abroad, which compels inquisition about the local relevance of Nigeria's conflict resolution ingenuity in the world.

Moreover, the utility of the oil-power and wealth seems to have been of little or no relevance at home. Oil has been a resource-curse for Nigeria (because of the national poverty in the midst of plenty of it, wars and conflicts, and the growing spate of local terrorism), while it has been more of a blessing for other producing nations. While oil money facilitates foreign assistance to needy nations, funding of the highly capital-intensive Technical Aid Corps Scheme (TACS) to support poorer nations of the world since the Babangida days, and to roll out grants and loans to African nations, among other things; oil, which cannot even be refined in Nigeria, is resold to the country in its refined state at prohibitive cost. The country generates electricity for some nations in West Africa, including Benin, Burkina Faso and Ghana (Folarin, 2008). However, the nation has not been able to generate sufficient capacity to guarantee a regular supply of electricity for its own people for over forty years. Nigeria assisted in restoring democratic governments in Liberia, Sao

Tome, and Sierra Leone (Okoroma, 2005), in some cases while under military rule; and in other cases while incredible elections and electoral fraud and violence overwhelm the home-front.

Nigeria's assumption of generous external roles at the expense of national strategic interest suggests the intention of Nigeria's foreign policy to be the pursuit of visibility, recognition as the African giant and most credible spokesman in world affairs. The role conceptions and roles are not strategically calculated before assumption. While the good and secure neighbourhood principles and roles appear strategic, the fact that the domestic plane suffers a state of total insecurity and poor neighbourliness among the many ethnic groups that make it up renders it absolutely farcical.

Lastly, the continued decline in Nigeria's external profile and respect despite its many international roles (aside the problems of corruption and government irresponsibility) shows that strategy and tact are lacking in the foreign policy initiation, articulation, and execution. The decline began in the immediate neighbourhood where Nigeria has always sought to keep good friendship and security. For instance, before a volte face to appease it in 2003, Laurent Gbagbo of Ivory Coast had turned down Nigeria's offer to send troops and military tanks and ships to Abidjan to help quell the political violence that had engulfed that nation at the time. Similarly, Equatorial Guinea rejected Nigeria's warships sent to Malabo to stop a raging political crisis in the neighbouring country in 2005 (Oyo, 2005).

More unfortunate for Nigeria is the fact many of the nations of Africa believe that Nigeria has too many internal problems to tackle than to spend so much on other nations' problems. The Botswana envoy for instance argues that "a giant can no longer be measured by geographical or population size, or the amount of resources it has; but by how much it can use the little it has to solve many mundane problems for its population and join the league of states that can meet the basic needs of its people" (Lukes, 2009). Thus, Nigeria's committal of resources to African affairs are viewed as a waste (Nuhu, 2009), and sometimes also perceived as means to actualize a grand, long conceived agenda to establish a Nigerian political and military hegemony in Africa, but with Nigeria not knowing yet, how to get this completed (Mvundura, 2009).

Conclusion

Nigeria's role conceptions and roles in the world are multiple and high-staked. The challenge with these "very high" stakes is multifaceted: more regional burdens; high risks of being considered an incursionist in places where it may even believe it has positively intervened; placing national interest or economic diplomacy below African concerns; and earning for itself regional enemies. Moreover, the role conceptions are devoid of strategic dynamism to make Nigeria both internally and externally stable. The NRCs are most times unreflectively done, while they are sometimes the mere grandiose statements of uneducated soldiers in power or impressionistic politicians who delight in mere rhetorics. The scientific means to occupy the roles are often loosely stated, which do not often go beyond intervention in crisis situations, giving of financial and material donations, and restoration of stability as a "big brother" in Africa and the world. Economic and geo-military permutations and considerations to become and remain a world power/ hegemon are still not evident in Nigeria's foreign policy attitude and role assumptions.

Nigeria seems content in simply being recognized and commended for assisting other nations. It still lives in the past where it was a celebrated 'Frontline State' in Southern African affairs. The political leadership must however see into the future and conceive roles which, while still placing Nigeria in leadership position, would rather be with the view to building in instruments such as economic diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, and military diplomacy that would create the desired leverage. The kind of cultural diplomacy of the US in which educational and cultural exchange programs offered by and sponsored by the country has over the years created a wide global group of scholars and persons of other nationals that have become more America-friendly and indeed Americanized, which also translates to trans-national cooperation and friendliness towards America and its trade and commerce.

Lastly, the Nigerian government should bring more attention home, with the objective of reconstructing Nigeria and rehabilitating the infrastructures before it embarks on post-conflict reconstruction outside the country. The ennoblement of its citizens economically, and the creation of an enabling economy, with stable power supply, good roads, and internal security, would naturally attract enormous foreign investment that would grow the economy like that of South Africa and Ghana, which are fast overshadowing Nigeria as African giants.

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