

FOREIGN POLICY AND THE QUEST FOR CITIZEN-CENTRED DIPLOMACY: THE 'NIGERIA FIRST' CONUNDRUM

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ABSTRACT

Nigeria's foreign policy formulation and implementation has been carried out by successive administrations in Nigeria and consistently tailored to be Afrocentric in consonance with the commitment of the country towards Africa's stability and development. However, in the year 2020, the Federal Government of Nigeria repositioned its international relations apparatus and adopted 'Nigeria First' as the new foreign policy anchored on citizen centered diplomacy to reflect domestic realities. The realities bordered on nine priority areas in which the Nigerian government planned to pursue its bilateral and multilateral affairs in the interest of the nation. This development, indeed, represents a paradigm shift from the norm- the traditional Africa-centred foreign policy. Beyond the familiar foreign policy sloganeering, appreciation of the 'Nigeria First' foreign policy conception and how it can be practiced for the benefits of Nigerians became imperative. Thus, this paper interrogated the new foreign policy in the area of its protection of Nigeria and Nigerians around the world. The article also explored the 'America First' approach to citizen centered diplomacy in order for lessons to be learnt in the execution of the Nigeria's new foreign policy construct. The main sources of information for this work were the relevant textbooks, journals and the internet. In order to harness the gains of the 'Nigeria First' foreign policy, this paper argued that Nigeria needs to invest heavily on Nigerians then use the instrumentality of the new foreign policy direction to protect and promote the greater good of Nigerians across the globe.

Introduction

Diplomacy is viewed as the action of a State towards the external environment with the ultimate aim and objective of achieving specific goals toward the enhancement of national interest.¹ While diplomacy is the conduct or execution of foreign policy, it is sometimes confused with foreign policy itself. Foreign Policy is formulated by government, not diplomats.² While foreign policy broadly represents the principles, objectives and attitudes struck by one State towards another, diplomacy is a key instrument employed for conveying and giving effect to the spirit of foreign policy. Therefore, foreign policy is essentially the instrumentality by which all states influence or seek to influence the external world and to attain objectives that are in conformity with their perceived national interest.³

The formulation and execution of Nigeria's foreign policy from independence, has been carried out in no fewer that fifteen different administration through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) coined by successive government with phrases such as Dynamic Foreign Policy, Africa as the Centre Piece of Nigeria's Foreign policy, Economic Diplomacy, Concentric Cycles and Citizen Diplomacy. Citizen Diplomacy is the foreign policy thrust that has been embarked

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¹ Akingbola Ayo, *Foreign Policy Analysis: Issues and Trends in Selected Countries* (Caltop Publications Ltd 1995)4

² Ivon Roberts, *Satow's Diplomatic Practice*, (6th edn Oxford University Press 2012)3

³ National Open University of Nigeria(NOUN), 'Introduction to Foreign Policy' (INR 2322007)11

upon since the advent of democratic governance in 1999. It was spearheaded by the Olusegun Obasanjo's administration and has been in place since then through the administration of Musa Yar'adua and Goodluck Jonathan⁴.

Citizen diplomacy was officially adopted as a foreign policy by the government of President Musa Yar'adua in 2007, as a means of correcting the poor image of the country abroad, stemming the poor treatment meted out to the Nigerians in the diaspora and tapping into the enormous potential of wealth, expertise, skills, and resources that were available to various Nigerian Diaspora groups abroad.⁵The administration of President Muhammadu Buhari in its first term, 2015-2019, failed to launch officially, foreign policy framework. Therefore, doctrinally, President Buhari's foreign policy trajectory was devoid of the usual labels in the first tenure but it can be deduced from the administration's diplomatic posture that its foreign policy was anchored on security, war against terrorism and corruption, trade and economic relations. However, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Geoffrey Onyeama, in an interaction with the International Community in January, 2020 unveiled nine priority areas of President Buhari's Second-term administration foreign policy thrust termed "Nigeria First".

In view of the new direction of Nigeria's foreign policy thrust anchored on Nigeria, this article basically examines Nigeria's foreign policy as it relates to the protection of Nigeria and her citizens at home and in the Diaspora. Recourse would be had where necessary, to other jurisdictions in the practice of citizen centered diplomacy for possible lessons to be drawn in the implementation of the present Nigeria First foreign policy.

Foreign Policy

Foreign Policy of any country deals firstly, with preservation of its independent and security and second with the pursuit and protection of its economy.⁶ Thus, it has been asserted that 'a country's foreign policy consist of self-interest strategies chosen by the state to safeguard its goals within the international relations milieu'.⁷This definition appears to appreciate foreign policy as strategies adopted by a given State in order to jealously protect its defined national interest in international relations arena. Joseph Frankel⁸ sees foreign policy as a dynamic process of the interaction between the changing domestic and the changing international environment. Frankel's definition connotes that foreign policy consist of decisions and actions which involves, to some appreciable extent, relations between the domestic and external environment and in accordance with the national interest of the States concerned.

According to Vital, foreign policy is "a product of interaction between internal and external forces".⁹Vital's postulation implies the formulation of desired outcomes which are intended or expected to be a consequence upon decision taken by those in authority or who have the ability to commit the State towards that end. In the words of Shitta¹⁰, foreign policy is a

⁴ Atah Pine, 'Nigeria Foreign Policy, 1960-2011: Fifty One Years of Conceptual confusion' < <http://m.modernghana.com/news/354264/nigeria-foreign-policy-1960-2011-fifty-one-years-of-concept.html>> accessed 15 August 2020.

⁵ C.N Odock, 'Global Turbulence and Nigeria's Citizen Diplomacy: 2007-2016' Global Journal of Social Science (2016)(15)(73-86) <<https://www.ajol.info/index.php/gjss/article/download/150753/140328/0>> accessed 16 August 2020

⁶ NOUN, n3, 63

⁷ Ikedinachi Ayodele Power Wogu and others, 'A Critical Evaluation of Nigeria's Foreign Policy at 53' Journal of Research on Human and Social Sciences [2015](5)(2) 137-147. <<http://www.iiste.org/journals/index.php/RHSS/article>> accessed 16 August 2020.

⁸ Joseph Frankel, the Making of Foreign Policy (Oxford University Press 1963)1

⁹ Vital D., Cited in Mbachu D., Foreign Policy Analysis: The Nigerian Perspective (Kosha Press 2008)50

¹⁰ Shitta Olusoji Emmanuel, 'Nigeria's Foreign Policy'<shittaolusojiemmanuel.blogspot.com/2010/11/nigeria-foreign-policy.html?m=1> accessed 19August 2020

strategy or planned course of action developed by the decision makers of a country aimed at manipulating the international communities in order to achieve certain national interest. Shitta's intervention indicates that foreign policy of a nation is an articulated strategy evolved by a country to protect its national interest in foreign relations. For the purpose of this work, we view foreign policy as self-interest strategies chosen by the State to safeguard its national interest to achieve goals in relations with external environment. To this end, Ogunbambi defines national interest as pertains to Nigeria thus:

The National interest of Nigeria, which ambassador, ideally should sell and prosecute include political stability, security, export promotion, access to external resources and technology, foreign aid, the protection of its citizen abroad, the cultural and moral expressions of Nigeria and a fair, effective and rigorous presentation of Nigeria's point of view on the regional and global issues."¹¹

Robinson corroborates this view point by maintaining that, the primary interest of all nations consists in the security of national territory and safeguarding of the lives and values of citizens.¹²In this connection, we tend to agree with Childs who states that:

Foreign policy of a State is the substance of foreign relations whereas diplomacy is the process by which policy is carried out. Policy is made by many different persons and agencies, but presumable on major matters in any state to many kinds of control. Then it is the purpose of diplomacy to provide the machinery and the personnel by which foreign policy is executed, one is substance, and the other is method.¹³

The formulation and execution of Nigeria's foreign policy from independence, has been carried out in no fewer than fifteen different administrations through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). The successive civilian administrations in Nigeria including the different military regimes for about sixty years of the existence of Nigeria's foreign policy claim to pursue the same national interest with regards to the nation's foreign policy. As Anyaele¹⁴ puts it, "the protection of our national interest has remained the permanent focus of Nigeria's foreign policy, but the strategies for such protection have varied from one regime/government to another". Ashiru corroborated this position when he asserted that "Nigeria's Fundamental principles of foreign policy have been fairly consistent since there were first espoused shortly after independence in October, 1960. Yet the specific interests, priorities and emphasis of Nigeria's foreign policy, have continued to change and evolve in the context of the domestic and international environment".¹⁵

Indeed, Africa has been the Centre-Piece of Nigeria's foreign policy from the onset although there have been other nomenclature such as dynamic foreign policy, economic diplomacy and citizen diplomacy in Nigeria's foreign policy pursuit. Successive governments

¹¹ Cited in Vincent Onyekwelu Sunday Okeke 'Citizen-Centre Diplomacy: The Challenges for Nigeria's Defense and Security in the 21st Century.' <<https://www.iiste.org/journals/index.php/IAGS/article/view/18217>> accessed 18 August 2020.

¹² *ibid*

¹³ James Rivers Childs, 'American Foreign Service' Cited in Okeke, *Ibid*

¹⁴ J.U. Anyaele 'Nigerian Foreign Policy' Cited in Wogu, n7

¹⁵ Olubenga Ashiru, 'Nigeria's Foreign policy: New Realities in a Changing World'. <<https://trumpetmediagroup.com/trumpet-nigeria/opinion/nigeria/%27s-foreign-policy%3A-new-realities-in-a-changing-world/>>accessed 20August 2020

have been able to adapt its principles, objective and priorities to the prevailing circumstances. Owing to the Afro-Centric posture of Nigerian foreign policy, the founding fathers of Nigeria would anchor the country's foreign policy thrust of the decolonization of the African Continent and the promotion of African Unity. An important component of the stance according to Ashiru¹⁶, was Nigeria's commitment to the eradication of apartheid in South Africa and the deployment of substantial resources in the various theatres of liberation struggle in Southern Africa, particularly in Zimbabwe, Namibia, Angola and South Africa.

Today, Nigeria's foreign Policy objectives are clearly articulated and specified under section 19 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (CFRN) 1999 (as amended) to include, Promotion and protection of Nigeria's national interests; Promotion of African integration and support for African Unity; Promotion of international cooperation for the consolidation of universal peace and mutual respect among nations and elimination of discrimination in all its manifestation; Respect for international law and treaty obligations as well as seeking settlement of international dispute by negotiation, mediation, conciliation, arbitration and adjudication; and Promotion of a just world economic order.

It should be noted that there had been a few foreign policy review in the chequered history of Nigeria since independence in 1960. However, the guidelines for Nigeria's foreign policy have not change significantly. The original Landmark content of the country's foreign policy as enunciated by Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa's government in 1960 remains virtually the same in substance. Joe Garuba¹⁷ attested to this position thus:

...let me state that I have in my possession the original tape containing the formal intervention of Alhaji Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa at the admissions of Nigeria as the 99th Member of the United Nations on 7th October, 1960. I play the tape from time to time for inspiration, as it contains a thought-out and forward looking prescription for Nigeria's foreign policy. While listening to it in recent years, I have been struck by how durable the goals are enunciated. Despite the catch phrases coined by successive foreign ministers-"Afrocentrism"; "Concentric Circles"; "Medium Powers"; "Economic Diplomacy" and the like-the continuities in Nigeria's national interests are there...

In the same vein, Ashiru adopted Joe Garuba's position when he stated that "Nigeria's fundamental principles of foreign policy have been fairly consistent since they were espoused shortly after independent in 1960"¹⁸. What can be deduced from the present scenario is that Nigeria has an ambitious and consistent foreign policy over the years but same cannot be said of national interest. Successive Nigeria government has hidden under the shadow of national interest to indulge in their individual interests at the detriment of Nigerians. As it is argued, Nigeria's national interest is susceptible to personalized interpretations, manipulations and distortions by different political regimes. In other words, national interest becomes different strokes for different folks, depending on how each perceives and wishes it¹⁹.

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ Joe Garba, *Diplomatic Soldiering* (Spectrum Books Limited 1991) xiv

¹⁸See Ashiru, n15

¹⁹ Lady Adaina Ajayi and others, 'Nigeria's Foreign Policy and Codification of National Interest: A Prescriptive Analysis'. <https://www.researchgate.net/publications/309391029_Nigeria's_foreign_policy_and_codification_of_national_interest_a_prescriptive_analysis> accessed 16 August 2020

Depending on the exploitation of Nigeria's interest by the successive leadership, a nation's foreign Policy is said to be successful to the extent that it has achieved its objectives without sacrifices that outweigh their resources and surpass their objectives. As such, success in foreign policy depends on the nation or person viewing it²⁰. Therefore, the argument as to whether or not Nigeria has successfully implemented her foreign policy in the general interest of Nigerians depends on how Nigerians view it.

Citizen-Centred Diplomacy

Citizen diplomacy was seen by some observers as Nigeria's modest attempt to join the train of globalization by evolving its own peculiar brand of alternative diplomacy based on giving voice to ordinary citizens, groups and organizations the opportunity to participate in promoting the country's national interest and external relations²¹. Citizen diplomacy therefore means the rebranding of Nigeria's foreign policy under which the Foreign Affairs Ministry and Nigeria missions abroad are totally committed to the welfare of Nigerians at home and abroad with renewed vigour. It is also a policy under which the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is committed to the protection of rights of Nigerians and ensuring that they are treated according to the tenets of the rule of law in the countries of residence, or to ensure that they get what in the field of international law is generally referred to as the international minimum standard of treatment.²² Commenting on what the concept of citizen centered diplomacy is all about, Mbachu²³ posits that, "the basic thrust revolves around concern for the basic needs, human rights and socio-economic welfare of Nigerian Citizens in conducting bilateral and multilateral engagements with other countries". Thus, citizen-centered diplomacy refers to a nation's reactive response to the way its citizens are treated or handled by other nations. By this approach, the foreign policy attitude of a nation towards other countries would no longer be based on geographical arrangements, but on merit, with individual nations judged by their disposition towards its citizens. Each nation would account for its own stewardship towards the national of a particular country and expect same measure of treatment.²⁴ As Eke puts it:

It is therefore, practiced at the level of citizen to citizen, a form of reciprocal relationship, it is counter strike diplomacy, it is the tit-for-tat diplomacy because it hinges on the axiom that the actions and reactions are equal and opposite. It acts to wait to reciprocal response or reacts in a payback fashion. This is because it involves essentially reciprocal relationship between Nigeria and other nations in terms of their citizens, likes, properties and business undertaking²⁵.

The repositioning of Nigeria's foreign policy to embrace citizen centered diplomacy is rationalized by the then Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ojo Madueke, that the Policy would put the interests of Nigerian citizens at home and abroad ahead of all other considerations. According to

²⁰ James Rivers Childs, n13

²¹ See Odock, n5

²² See Okeke, n11

²³ Ozoemenam Mbachu, 'Citizen Diplomacy: The Challenges for Nigerian Defense and Security in the 21st Century'. A paper presented at a seminar on Citizen Diplomacy organized by the Nigeria Institute of International Affairs, Lagos on November 29, 2007.

²⁴ Sheriff Folarin, 'Nigeria's New Citizen-Centered Diplomacy: Any lessons from the United States?' <https://www.researchgate.net/publications/319956390_Nigeria's_new_citizen_centered_Diplomacy_any_lesson_from_the_United_States> accessed 16 August 2020

²⁵ Onyemachi Augustine Eke, *Globalisation Challenges & Nigerian foreign policy*: (Willyrose and Apple Seeds Publishing Coy 2009)73

Madueke, Citizen-Centered diplomacy entails an intentional behavior characterized by “diplomacy of consequence” or, put differently, a principle of responsive reaction and reciprocity with States, in which the act of Nigeria towards other countries, and vice versa, would be determined by reciprocal niceness.”²⁶

The Citizen Centered foreign policy approach suggests a paradigm shift from the traditional Africa-Centered foreign policy. In the African Central policy, Africa’s interests are central and appear equal in scope to Nigeria’s national interest; a development that has had little or no direct benefit to Nigerians with its attendant scathing criticisms. Thus, through the instrumentality of citizen diplomacy, it is envisioned that Nigeria will harness the resources and potentials of her Diaspora, mainstream the doctrine of reciprocity, and create an enabling environment for her citizens to prosper and engage in broad issues of human importance at both the national and international level. In the event too, according to pine²⁷ it will enhance Nigeria’s export portfolio and attract foreign direct investment.

The ‘Nigeria First’ Foreign Policy

The Federal Government of Nigeria in January, 2020 unveiled nine priority areas of President Muhammadu Buhari’s second-term administration anchored on ‘Nigeria First’ as the new foreign policy thrust of the government. The Minister of Foreign Affairs, Geoffrey Onyeama, while briefing the diplomatic corps in Abuja, identified the priority areas to guide the government direction to include building a thriving and sustainable economy; enlarging agricultural output for food security and export, expand business growth, entrepreneurship and industrialization; expand access to quality education, affordable health care and productivity of Nigerian; reduce poverty, build systems to fight corruption; improve governance and create social cohesion and improve security for all. Onyeama noted further that the Nigerian government would pursue realistic foreign policy that will reflect domestic realities of the country and that “basically, it is going to be a ‘Nigeria First Foreign Policy’”.²⁸

Indeed, the outlined priority areas of the present administration that will define the nation’s foreign policy are laudable. It will be underpinned by how many countries around the world and multilateral organizations reciprocate and incorporate Nigeria’s interests above other considerations. By implication, in Nigeria’s bilateral and multilateral engagements, international community must capture the interest of Nigerians and issues on the priority list for any deal to be successful.

Nigeria First Foreign Policy: Any Lesson From Other Jurisdictions?

The new foreign policy thrust, ‘Nigeria First’ has been practiced and entrenched in other jurisdictions across the world particularly in the United States of America (US) described as “America First” from which, apparently, the MFA has borrowed the expression.

²⁶ Cited in Folarin, n24

²⁷ See Pine, n4

²⁸ See “Nigeria First is new Foreign Policy thrust of Nigeria as FG lists nine priority areas” <<https://businessday.ng/lead-story/article/nigeria-first-is-new-foreign-policy-thrust-as-fg-lists-nine-priority-areas/amp/>> accessed 14 August 2020

America First is a foreign policy stance in the United States that generally emphasizes American nationalism, unilateralism, protectionism, and isolation²⁹. Though America First has a long history in the US, it first gained prominence after the World War I and was advocated by the American First Committee, a non-interventionist pressure group against the US entry into the World War II.³⁰ Since 2016, an identically named campaign slogan and foreign policy that emphasis similar objective has been pursued by the administration of US President Donald Trump.

At the Donald Trump's inauguration speech on the 20th January 2017 he made it abundantly clear that "a new decree to be heard in every city, in every foreign capital and hall of power...will be only America First".³¹ Trump outlined some specific plans in order to deliver the policy to the American people. First, he pledged that every decision on trade, on taxes, on immigration, on foreign affairs will be made to benefit American families and vowed to get Americans off of welfare and back to work, rebuilding the country with American hands and American labour by following two simple rules: "buy American and hire American".³² For Nigeria to effectively achieve her new 'Nigeria First' foreign policy mantra, we submit that a lesson can be learnt from the United States in this regard. While it is important and healthy for Nigerian economy, the fulcrum of the new foreign policy, to have more foreign direct investment (FDI), it is also not economically sound to surrender the choice and viable Nigerian market to foreigners alone. Deliberate and sustainable policy should be entrenched in the system to put the economy in the hands of patriotic Nigerians in the overall interest of Nigerians.

Another important plan of the Trump administration to realize its American First philosophy is the fight against terrorism. Defeating terrorism is Trump administration's "highest priority", as terrorism is considered as the greatest threat to the US. The strategies to achieve this important national assignment include nullifying terrorist groups' propaganda and recruitment network.³³ Trump's "highest priority" in the fight against terrorism is the defeat of Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), a terror organization headed by Abu Bakir Al-Baghdadi. The self-declared caliph of the Islamic State leads a global terrorist network seeking to establish a radical empire in Iraq and the Levant.³⁴ Al-Baghdadi commandeered the planet's attention with a series of barbaric beheading and earned copious amount of cash, largely through black-market oil sale. The ISIL committed the Speicher massacre against the Iraqi Shiites, the Shaifait Massacre of Syrian Sunni tribesmen and the sexual enslavement of Yezidis and genocide against male population³⁵ among other countless daily emotional and physical abuse to the human race. In consideration of ISIL's threat to mankind and US' national interest particularly and in a bid to eliminate ISIL leader, al-Baghdadi from the face of the earth, Trump's administration in a well-

²⁹ Lynne Olsen, *Those Angry Days: Roosevelt, Lindberg, and America Fight over world War II, 1939 -1941*, (Random House Publishing Group 2013) 220

³⁰ "Donald Trump and America First: History Behind the Phrase/ Time" <<https://time.com/4273812/america-first-donald-trump-history>> accessed 17 August 2020.

³¹ "Trump Inauguration: A dark, threatening first speech as president promises to end 'American carnage and put American First' – Quartz". <<https://qz.com/890414/trump-inauguration-a-dark-threatening-first-speech-as-president-promises-to-end-american-carnage-and-put-america-first/>> accessed 19 August 2020

³² Ibid

³³ "Donald Trump's 'American First' Foreign policy is now official. Here's what it means- Quartz" <<https://qz.com/890868/donald-trumps-america-first-foreign-policy-is-now-official-heres-what-it-means/amp/>> accessed 19 August 2020

³⁴ See "Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi" <<https://www.forbes.com/profile/abubakir-al-baghdadi/6bib9e270afc>> accessed 19 August 2020

³⁵ See "Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi was a more important Jihadi than Osama bin Laden". <<https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/10/29/baghdadi-is-dead-but-his-legend-lives-on-isis-terror/>> accessed 20 August 2020.

coordinated offensive, destroyed the ISIL Chief in October, 2019 during a night-time raid by US' special forces in Barisha, a village in Syria's northwestern province of Idlib. According to Donald Trump, Al-Baghdadi detonated a suicide vest after running into a dead-end tunnel beneath a compound, killing himself and three of his children.³⁶

Similar in operation to ISIL is Boko Haram Militant Islamic Group which has caused havoc in Nigeria through a wave of bombings, assassinations and abductions to overthrow the legitimate government and establish Islamic State. Boko Haram promotes a version of Islam which makes it "haram" or forbidden, for Muslims to take part in political or social activity associated with western society. This includes voting in elections, wearing shirts and trousers or receiving a secular education.³⁷ The group's official name is "Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad" which in Arabic means "People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teaching and Jihad". Originally founded in 2002, initially focused on opposing Western education but launched its military operations in 2009 to create Islamic State and declared a Caliphate in areas controlled in 2014.³⁸ Since its inception, Boko Haram has killed thousands of people, destroyed homes, religious buildings and displaced more than two million people in the Lake Chad basin across its borders with Chad, Niger, Nigeria and Cameroon.³⁹

It is the consensus of foreign relations commentators and practitioners that foreign policy must necessarily reflect the domestic realities for a sustainable development. A strong and beautifully couched foreign policy cannot be effectively implemented in the interest of a nation such as Nigeria under threat of perpetual attacks from Boko Haram, armed bandits, kidnappers, armed robbers and other similar armed elements. Therefore, it is our submission that for the new Nigerian foreign policy slogan, 'Nigeria First' to have any meaningful impact on the lives of Nigerians, there must be an extraordinary steps taken by the government and all stakeholders to work together with avowed commitment to bring the menace of the security threat to the country to a permanent end. Lessons should equally be learnt from the US in this regard in view of the careful, systematic and pragmatic approach in which Osama bin Laden and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi of this world were brought to justice.

Furthermore, in keeping with the tenets of American First policy, the US has drastically reduced the notion of the 'leader of the free world' with global super-cop trying to spread democracy everywhere. America's foreign policy today sees international relations as a dog-eat-dog realm.⁴⁰ As US President, Donald Trump, argued in his inauguration speech, "it is the right of nations to put their own interests first"⁴¹ and we cannot agree less with president Trump in this regard. In keeping with this tenet, Trump administration continues to place priority on local issues over burden-sharing elsewhere and where the interest of the US or any of its citizenry is undermined, Washington readily matches economic strength with military might to challenge the aggressor and turn the table⁴². While it is important for Nigeria to champion unity, cohesion and

³⁶See "With Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi gone, what next for ISIL?" <<https://www.aljazeera.com/amp/news/2019/10/abu-bakr-al-baghdadi-ISIL-191028140353503.html>> accessed 20 August 2020

³⁷ See "who are Nigeria's Boko Haram Islamist Group?-Bcc News"<<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-13809501>> accessed 20 August 2020

³⁸ ibid

³⁹See "Fears for Civilians in Chad after army suffers devastating Boko Haram attack"<<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/apr/01/fears-for-civilians-in-chad-after-army-suffers-devastating-boko-haram-attack>> accessed 14 August 2020

⁴⁰See Donald Trump and America First,n30

⁴¹ ibid

⁴² See " That 'Nigeria First' foreign policy initiative-Opinion-The Guardian Nigeria News-Nigeria and World News"<<https://m.guardian.ng/opinion/that-nigeria-first-foreign-policy-initiative/>> accessed 31 August 2020

integration in Africa, it is also of paramount importance for the nation to re-evaluate its priority in the interest of ‘Nigeria First’ foreign policy before any engagement in Africa and the world at large. Nigeria should endeavour to reap tangible benefits from the new policy in view of the loss of human and material resources in the drive to bring wars to an end and other liberation struggles in Africa without commensurate benefits there from. Thus, we submit that the present Nigeria’s foreign policy should be grounded in consideration of the economic growth and national development and not on the basis of the usual “big brotherly role” in Africa. It is in this consideration that we further submit that Nigeria’s lukewarm diplomatic posture towards addressing the incessant harassment and arrest of Nigerian traders and closure of their shops in Ghana, the seizure of the Nigerian Mission’s premises and the demolition of parts of Nigerian Mission’s Property by the Ghanaian authorities⁴³ in clear violation of the provisions of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations greatly cast a doubt on the implementation of the new Nigeria First foreign policy thrust for the benefits of Nigerians.

The success of the ‘Nigeria First’ Policy, no doubt, will be measured by the impact made on the well-being of Nigerians across the world. In this wise, priority should be accorded to the lives and welfare of Nigerians home and in the Diaspora. Lives and welfare of Nigerians should not be compromised on the basis of diplomatic considerations. Nigeria must act swiftly and decisively in the protection of her citizens and not to adopt lackadaisical diplomatic approach that would make her citizens suffer maltreatment and sometimes killed before a belated appeal is made to foreign countries to repatriate Nigerian bodies’ home for “decent burial”.⁴⁴ In this connection, we submit further that it is not in the interest of ‘Nigeria First’ foreign policy for the Nigerian Minister of Foreign Affairs to merely invite the Chinese Ambassador to Nigeria to communicate Nigeria’s “extreme concern at the allegation of maltreatment of Nigerians in China”⁴⁵. This was the period media reported that amid rising xenophobia, Africans, mostly Nigerians, have been evicted from their homes by landlords and turned away from hotels in the wake of the novel coronavirus pandemic in China. The racist backlash followed the Guangzhou authorities report that five Nigerian had tested positive for Covid-19.⁴⁶ The inhuman and degrading treatment meted out to Nigerians in China coincided with the period Nigeria’s senior government officials queued up at the Nnamdi Azikiwe International Airport Abuja to receive the imported Chinese medical personnel to Nigeria⁴⁷ in a highly dignified way despite the opposition of the Nigerian Medical Association⁴⁸ which argued that Nigeria did not need external intervention to manage the covid-19 pandemic. We are quick to add here that citizen-centred diplomacy thrives in reciprocity. Thus, we submit that the action of Nigerian senior officials with regard to the Chinese episode is a confirmation that Nigeria has a long way to go in the implementation of ‘Nigeria first’ foreign policy.

⁴³ See “FG reads riot act to Ghana on hostility towards Nigerians”<https://www.vanguardngr.com/2020/08/fg-reads-riot-act-to-ghana-on-hostility-towards-nigerians/amp/>> accessed 31 August 2020

⁴⁴ See “Federal Government Demands Bodies of Four Nigerians Executed in Indonesia” <www.punchng.com/news/fg-demands-bodies-of-four-nigerians-executed-in-indonesia> accessed 17 August 2020.

⁴⁵ See “Covid-19: FG Summons Chinese Ambassador over Allegation of Maltreatment of Nigerians in China”. <<https://thenigerianlawyer.com/covid-19-fg-summons-chinese-ambassador-over-allegations-of-maltreatment-of-nigerians-in-china>> accessed 20 August 2020

⁴⁶ See “Africans in Guangzhou are on edge, after many are left homeless amid rising xenophobia as China fight a second wave of coronavirus”<<https://edition.cnn.com/2020/04/10/china-coronavirus-hnk-intl/index.html>> accessed 20 August 2020

⁴⁷ See “African news/Chinese Experts arrive to help Nigeria in corona virus fight, opposition kicks”<<https://www.africannews.com/amp/2020/04/09/chinese-experts-arrive-to-help-nigeria-in-coronavirus-fight-opposition-kicks/>> accessed 21 August 2020.

⁴⁸ See “Covid-19: Nigerian doctors oppose Chinese team’s visit”< <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/covid-19-nigerian-doctors-oppose-chinese-teams-visit/1794073>> accessed 21 August 2020.

Relatedly, it is not in the best interest of ‘Nigeria First’ foreign policy to allow Nigerians to be left stranded anywhere in the world in emergency situation. It would be recalled that after a long diplomatic inaction, a private commercial airline, Air Peace, volunteered to evacuate stranded Nigerians home from South Africa⁴⁹ in 2019 in the wake of the heightened xenophobic attacks against other Africans particularly Nigerians residence in South Africa, where lives were lost and properties destroyed. Similarly, amid the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, and in the spirit of citizen-centered diplomacy, whereas citizens of foreign countries such as the EU,⁵⁰ US⁵¹ and Canada⁵² were proactively evacuated from Nigeria, the Nigeria MFA was engrossed in what analysts described as diplomatic politics ranging from “Nigerians in abroad registering for evacuation”⁵³, “we are identifying airlines to evacuate Nigerians from abroad”,⁵⁴ and finally to “Nigerian evacuees to bear cost”⁵⁵ for evacuation after many weeks of torrents of requests made by Nigerians stranded abroad to be evacuated home. When it was time for evacuation after the delay, the government engaged the services of foreign airlines despite earlier assurances that indigenous airlines with capacity would be used for evacuation of Nigerians abroad⁵⁶. There is no gainsaying that citizens of a nation ideally should be the hallmark and epicenter of citizen-centered diplomacy. We submit, therefore, that the action of the Nigerian Government in this regard falls short of the expectation of the newly championed ‘Nigeria First’ foreign policy and should be positively and timeously addressed in national interest.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the concepts of foreign policy and citizen-centered diplomacy in the context of protection of Nigerians across the globe. The Paradigm shift in Nigeria’s foreign policy anchored on ‘Nigeria First’ is a welcome development. The success of this new policy however, will be measured by deliberate entrenchment of good governance, rule of law, security of lives and properties, strong and competitive economy and above all, huge investment on Nigerians, the target beneficiaries of the new foreign policy thrust.

Recommendations

Foreign Policy is an instrument for the promotion of international intercourse and mutual inter-states relations. Having Nigerians as the Centre-Piece of the new Nigeria’s foreign policy is a radical departure from the norm and indeed a commendable decision. In view of the issues raised in this research paper based on the noticeable gaps in other jurisdictions, and in addition to some

⁴⁹See “Xenophobia: Air Peace to airlift Nigerians from South Africa” <<https://punchng.com/xenophobia-air-peace-to-airlift-nigerians-from-south-africa/?amp=1>> accessed 21 August 2020.

⁵⁰See “CORONAVIRUS: EU begins evacuation of citizens from Nigeria” <<https://www.ripplesnigeria.com/coronavirus-eu-begins-evacuation-of-citizens-from-nigeria-april-2/>> accessed 21 August 2020

⁵¹See “Nigeria: US. Begins Evacuation of Citizens from Nigeria over COVID-19 Pandemic” <<https://africa.com/stories/202003310169.html>> accessed 21 August 2020

⁵²See “COVID-19: 137 Canadians evacuated from Nigeria” <<https://www.aa.com.tv/en/africa/covid-19-137-canadians-evacuated-from-nigeria-1794467>> accessed 21 August 2020

⁵³See “Nigerian in UK, US, China registering for evacuation-NIDCOM.” <<https://www.barristerNG.com/nigerians-in-uk-us-china-registering-for-evacuation-nicom/>> accessed 18 August 2020

⁵⁴See “we’re identifying airlines to evacuate Nigerians abroad – Onyeama” <<http://www.sunnewsonline.com/were-identifying-airlines-to-evacuate-nigerians-abroad-onyeama/amp/>> accessed 15 August 2020.

⁵⁵See “COVID-19: Nigerian evacuees to bear cost, quarantined on arrival- FG” <<https://www.sunnewsonline.com/covid-19-nigerian-evacuees-to-bear-cost-quarantined-on-arrival-fg/>> accessed 15 August 2020

⁵⁶See “COVID-19: Reps, AON Knock FG over Foreign Carriers Evacuating Nigerians”. <<https://thenigerialawyer.com/covid-19-reps-aon-knock-fg-over-foreign-carriers-evacuating-nigerians/>> accessed 17 August 2020

suggestions already proffered in the course of the discourse, the following recommendations are made for utmost realization of the new ‘Nigeria First’ foreign policy:

1. Citizen-Centered diplomacy envisages the paramountcy of the welfare and protection of rights of Nigerians at home and abroad. Therefore, Nigerian government should emulate other nations’ practice of prioritizing the protection of lives and dignity of their citizens especially in trouble zones and emergency situations anywhere around the world.
2. Critical to the successful implementation of the new foreign policy thrust is the entrenchment of security of lives and properties of Nigerians as a deliberate policy. Therefore, the menace of boko haram, armed bandits, kidnappers, armed robbers and other criminal elements in Nigeria must be addressed and eliminated. Extra-ordinary efforts must be intensified to have Nigerians unlawfully held captive be released forthwith. Government and all stakeholders should be more committed to ensuring the safe return of the remaining adopted Chibok girls⁵⁷, the Dapchi Girls⁵⁸ and other boko haram captives in line with citizen-centered diplomacy and the provision of the constitution⁵⁹ which stipulates that the primary reason why government is in place is the security and the welfare of the citizenry. Security agencies should adopt international best practices in the discharge of their statutory responsibilities to the nation and her citizens. Life of Nigerians must be protected from the trigger- happy security operatives at home and unwarranted attacks in abroad. In this regard, we submit that it is counter- productive to ‘Nigeria First’ foreign policy for security forces enforcing the lockdown directive of government in some parts of Nigeria in the wake of coronavirus pandemic to have killed more Nigerians than the coronavirus itself⁶⁰ in the period under reference.
3. Nigeria should appropriately define her national interest before engaging in foreign relations. The country should not be in haste to intervene in international affairs without properly weighing its national interest and the benefits to be derived from such an intervention. Comments are made as to whether the national interest was promoted by Nigeria’s historic contribution to regional peace mission in Liberia and Sierra Leon, which cost Nigeria the whopping sum of USD 10billion, not to mention the gallant men and women of Nigerian Armed Forces who paid the supreme price in the course of peace, which are hardly acknowledged by the international community.⁶¹ There is also the question as to whether Nigeria’s huge contribution to decolonization efforts and termination of apartheid policy in southern Africa is recognized and appreciated in view of the several xenophobic attacks on Nigerians by South Africans at the slightest provocation. We recommend therefore, that Nigeria’s foreign policy and implementation henceforth should be anchored on her national

⁵⁷ The 276 female students kidnapped from Government Secondary School, Chibok, Borno State on the night of 14-15 April, 2014 by Boko Haram. About 112 of the girls are still in captivity of Boko Haram. See “Despite COVID-19: BBOG marks 6th Anniversary of Chibok Abduction on Twitter”. <<https://www.africanews.com/amp/2020/04/bbog/marks-6th-anniversary-of-chibok-adoption-on-twitter/>>. accessed 16 August 2020

⁵⁸ On February 19, 2018 about 110 School girls were kidnapped by Boko Haram from the Government Girls Science and Technical College Dapchi; Yobe State. All other girls were released in March 2018 except the lone Christian girl, Leah Sharibu as she refused to abandon her faith and convert to Islam. See “Nigeria Dapchi Abductions: Schoolgirls finally home”. <<https://www.bbc.com/news/amp/world-africa-4353872>> accessed 19 August 2020

⁵⁹ Section 14(2), Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (as amended)

⁶⁰ See “Coronavirus: Security Forces kill more Nigerians than Covid-19”. <<http://www.bbc.com/news/amp/world-africa-52317196>> accessed 17 August 2020.

⁶¹ See Wogu, n7

interest with practical reciprocal benefits to justify the nation's action in international relations.

4. To effectively harness the gains of 'Nigeria First' foreign policy, there is need for a paradigm shift. Since a country's domestic policy is the extension of its foreign policy abroad, Nigeria needs to invest heavily in Nigerians then use the instrumentality of foreign policy to promote the greater good of Nigerians abroad. Chunk of the nation's budget should be allocated to education. Every Nigerian child should be educated as a matter of government policy for sustainable development. Therefore, we are in agreement with Bill Gates who advised Nigerian Government "to anchor (Nigeria's) economy over the long term, investments in infrastructure and competitiveness must go hand in hand with investments in people. People without roads, ports, and factories can't flourish. And roads, ports, and factories without skilled workers to build and manage them can't sustain the economy."⁶²
5. In order to have a landmark success in the implementation of the new foreign policy thrust, we recommend increase budgetary allocation to the MFA and special funding to take care of the implementation of Citizen Diplomacy. Inadequate funding has been one of the major challenges in the conduct of Nigeria's foreign relations. Some of Nigeria's foreign missions have at different times faced a lot of embarrassment for their inability to settle ordinary electricity and telephone bills. The situation was so bad that the then Foreign Affairs Minister, Ojo Madueke, had to lament in his speech before the House of Representative Committee on Foreign Affairs in 2008 that, "we have a mission where the Ambassador's car would have to be pushed on the road in an important capital in the world (referring to New York). It does a great damage to our image."⁶³ Poor funding manifest its head in the present administration where it was reported⁶⁴ that Nigerian consulate in New York had not paid its workers for months, neither is the consulate able to repair its faulty air conditioners for months thereby making visitors to wait outside while their passports are being processed. As if that was not enough, processing of passports took longer than necessary owing to shortage of laminating supplies and ink. Similarly, the Federal Government guidelines for evacuation of Nigerians stranded abroad in the wake of the Covid-19 Pandemic which include "financial implications will be borne by prospective evacuees",⁶⁵ we submit, is largely owing to the MFA's shortage of funds to execute the evacuation exercise. It is obvious that when the MFA and diplomatic missions constantly face financial embarrassment, it will be practically impossible to pursue their tasks and functions with the much needed vigour and confidence.

⁶²Cited in Femi Aribasala, 'Revamping Buharis Shambolic Foreign Policy' <www.vanguardngr.com/2019/revamping-buhari-shambolic-foreign-policy/>accessed 19August 2020

⁶³ Cited in Johnson Olaosekan Aremu, 'Structure and challenges of Nigeria's overseas Diplomatic Mission'. *European Scientific Journal* (2016)(12)(11)533

⁶⁴ See "Nigeria Consulate in NYC owed Salary, Forced to work in Major Heat wave with No A/C" <<http://saharareporters.com/2016/07/22/Nigeria-consulate-workers-nyc-owed-salary-forced-work-major-heatwave-no-ac/>>accessed 16August 2020

⁶⁵See Covid- 19: Nigerians evacuees to bear cost, n55.