

**Buhari Civilian Regime, Change Mantra and  
Nigeria's Foreign Policy: a Mid-term Assessment**

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**Abstract**

The election of President Muhammadu Buhari (PMB) in April 2015 and the inauguration of his administration in May 2015 was seen by both local and international communities as a turning point in Nigeria's history. This is against the background of his reputation for discipline and integrity on one hand, and the All Progressive Congress (APC)'s promise of positive change in all spheres of national life on the other. On external relations, the President not only promised to reinvigorate Nigeria's foreign policy to ensure that the country regains its traditional vibrancy, vigour and commitment but also strike the right balance between the domestic reality and external environment. It is on the premise of this promise that this paper assesses PMB's conduct of foreign policy within the first two years of his civilian administration, using historical-descriptive-content analysis methodology. The analysis shows that there has been an improvement in the conduct of foreign policy, particularly in the areas of securing cooperation of neighbouring states and commitment of the global community toward fighting Boko Haram insurgency and corruption. However, the President's promise of change in terms of strengthening Nigeria's leadership position in Africa and linking her foreign policy with domestic socio-economic realities still remains a tall ambition. It is therefore concluded that PMB's civilian administration has not fundamentally altered the conduct of Nigeria's foreign policy as promised; it has indeed been a two-year foreign policy of change in continuity. Given the fact that the actualization of a country's foreign policy objectives is partly a function of its domestic socio-economic stability, PMB's international prowess and respect should be exploited to build a strong economy at home through a national interest propelled foreign policy. Doing this will enable Nigeria to close the gap between her domestic realities and her sub-regional, regional and global ambitions.

**Keywords:** Change mantra, National interest, Global system, Shuttle diplomacy, Domestic reality, Regional leadership, Afrocentricism.

**Introduction**

President Muhammadu Buhari was sworn in on May 29, 2015 as the 8th democratically elected president of Nigeria since independence, after his party's (the APC) historical defeat of the incumbent ruling People's Democratic party (PDP). APC's victory during the 2015 general elections was greeted with high hope and expectations given the deplorable state of things during the PDP-led administration. Majority of Nigerians were of the belief that a new dawn (change) had eventually arrived in the country that would bring into reality the long desired positive transformation in all spheres of life and overall development of Nigeria. The high optimism and encomium that greeted the victory of PMB could therefore be situated within the framework of the precarious socio-politico-economic situations in the country and the attendant frustrating experiences which Nigerians have had to contend with since the return of democracy in 1999. The precarious security situation across the country, the nose-dived economy, corruption at an

unprecedented proportion, Nigeria's loss of prestige among the comity of nations, among others were some of the notable features of Nigeria towards the tail end of President Goodluck Jonathan's administration. The high hope and expectations were also informed by the credible personality of PMB. Given his past record of incorruptibility and his avowed stand on fierce crusade against corruption that has pervaded all parts of national life, Nigerians strongly believed in his capacity to turn things for better both domestically and internationally.

As such, the election of PMB was seen as a turning point in Nigeria's history. The President was inaugurated amidst massive hope and expectations at home and abroad, that Nigeria now has a leader who would stop the slide and lead the country to progress, development and the realization of her destiny. This was more so as the APC's campaign was centered on the idea of 'change' in all spheres of national life. On foreign relations, inspired by the goodwill of winning election as an opposition candidate, PMB entered the international system with this party's 'change' mantra, which encapsulates the ideology of his administration (Akwaya, 2016). Though his foreign policy has not been tagged with any nomenclature, he has consistently promised to reinvigorate Nigeria's foreign policy to ensure that the country regain its traditional vibrancy, vigour and reclaim her leadership position in African affairs. With the 'change' agenda, he promised a foreign policy that would strike the right balance between the domestic scene that was (and is still) characterized by countless challenges or internal paradoxes and an external environment that is competitive, dynamic, fluid and volatile. Most remarkably, he promised to break away from the culture of national-interest-negligence in the conduct of foreign policy and diplomacy by ensuring that Nigeria and her citizens' interests constitute the primary determinant of his foreign policy.

These promises conveyed a message of change from the past, most especially, the promise of a national-interest-based foreign policy. Since 1960 when Nigeria got her independence from Britain, most foreign policy actions were not geared towards the improvement of the well-being of Nigerians and meeting domestic needs. However, national interests should guide her foreign actions as a nation's foreign policy is not only a direct continuation of its domestic policy, but also a reflection of its way of life (Aron, 2003). In essence, PMB and his party promised to bring about positive change in the conduct of Nigeria's foreign policy. More than two years of his administration, one could ask 'to what extent has the President and his party brought about the promised change?' In other words, 'how far has Nigeria's and Nigerians' interests determined the foreign decisions taken so far by the President?' Or 'is there any difference between PMB / APC regime's foreign policy approach and that of previous administrations since 1999?' Providing insights into these questions represents the main thrust of this paper. Though two years may be insufficient to assess the value of the President's foreign policy, but it is sufficient enough to gain insights on his policy trajectory and determine if the conduct is bringing or capable of bringing the professed change. The remainder of the paper is divided into four sections. The first is a review of the dominant themes in Nigeria's foreign policy since independence in 1960. The second gives a brief account of the state of Nigeria's foreign policy shortly before May 29, 2015. The third is the analysis of PMB's conduct of foreign policy within the perspective of the professed 'change' mantra while the last section is conclusion and recommendations. The method of analysis adopted is historical-descriptive-content analysis

### **Revisiting the Dominant Theme in Nigeria's Foreign Policy since Independence**

The theme of Africa as the centerpiece of Nigeria's foreign policy remains the most enduring theme that runs through her foreign policy since independence. Although, a deep reflection on the objectives of Nigeria's foreign policy would depict what is described as 'concentric circle' (Amuwo, 2016: 9) of paramount importance on Nigeria's interest, African interest and global interest, her foreign activities since independence shows that an overwhelming and significance emphasis has been placed on African issues and problems. Africa has remained the centerpiece of Nigeria's foreign policy. Her major concerns in Africa, as identified by Ashaver (2014: 287) include the promotion of peace, prosperity, stability and development in Africa; promotion of political goodwill and understanding among African countries; the promotion of rapid socio-economic development in Africa through regional economic integration; the strengthening of sub-regional economic institutions and the reduction of economic dependence on extra-continental powers; the

development of cultural cooperation as a means of strengthening political ties with all African countries; and eradication of all forms of colonialism and racism in Africa.

Thus, driven by Afrocentricism, Nigeria had deeply committed herself to African issues and problems. Her roles in the decolonization of some African countries, such as Angola, Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Namibia; crusade against apartheid policy in South Africa; promotion of African unity and self-reliance through the formation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and its transformation to African Union (AU); promotion of intra-African economic cooperation (ECOWAS, New Partnership for African Development [NEPAD] etc); settling intra and interstate crises, supporting developmental projects and providing reliefs for disaster prone African states are well captured in literature (Jega and Farris, 2010; Fage, 2002; Agwu, 2013; Akinboye, 2013; Adetula, 2014). In sum, it is well recognized that Nigeria has served as the arrowhead of many continental and regional initiatives and institutions. However, the country is believed by many not to have benefited from her enormous sacrifices in Africa (Agwu, 2013; Mailafia, 2010; Adebayo, 2008; Amuwo, 2016). In specific, it is criticized that Nigeria's Africa centerpiece foreign policy is not linked to her domestic interest. As poignantly puts by Amuwo (2016: 18), literature speaks to a Nigerian "continental policy driven by altruism and morality than by rationality".

Being the springboard of foreign policy, national interest should determine steps taken by a country in the international scene. Africa centerpiece was justified as at the time Nigeria adopted it (even now) based on the theory of harmony of interest. Harmony of interest suggests that by promoting the interest of other African states, Nigeria is also promoting her national interest at the same time. This is more so giving the internal dynamic, location and population of the country. Foreign policies are a function of domestic configurations; as the domestic policy goes, so goes foreign policy. In Nigeria's case, foreign policy has largely been determined by the need to maintain national unity and stability and the right to exercise a leadership role in Africa. However, Sinclair (1983: 12) observed that it is paradoxical that "the more imperiled is domestic stability the greater the need for assertive external action...and consequently, the more forceful the projection of Nigerian [African] leadership". Sinclair view is in consonant with that of Mustapha (2008) who opines that due to the fractious nature of Nigeria as a state, the formulation of the state's foreign policy has been adversely affected by the absence of a single dominant and coherent nationalist movement capable of establishing a hegemonic hold on national imagination.

The internal dynamics of the Nigerian state are therefore fundamental to her pursuit of Africa centerpiece and overall foreign policy at large. Due greatly to these dynamics, after gaining independence from Britain in 1960, Nigerian leaders were primarily concerned with internal solidification as the country represented a contrived federal balance between three ethnically and politically divided regions (Ibeanu, 2010). Consequently, in formulating foreign policy, the political elite had to grapple with the dilemma of internal dynamics and a patently unstable federal structure. In an attempt to bridge the cleavage between this internal polarization and the wider notion of 'Nigerianism' the political elite sought to project Nigeria's foreign objectives into a wider pan-Africanist framework (Sinclair, 1983: 1). This, to a large extent, explains why Nigeria's foreign policy statements are vague and unspecific as to her aspired role in the external environment and clothed in the notion of 'national interest' which, although persistently referred to as the sole parameter of Nigerian external interaction, remained undefined and intangible. Given this dynamics, Sinclair (1983: 12) asserts that "as long as domestic tranquility prevails, the Nigerian government will seek to play an active and constructive role in African politics, while seeking to advance Nigerian plans for economic development". Sinclair, however, seems to over-emphasize the dynamics. In as much as domestic division might explain Nigeria's resolve for African Centerpiece foreign policy, other factors such as geographical location and human and material endowment also account for the decision of the country to play leadership role in Africa.

As rightly observed by Adetula (2014), geographical location of a state plays a crucial role in defining the behaviour of such a state in the international system. Regionally, as of the year of independence, Nigeria was overshadowed by Ghana under the leadership of Kwame Nkrumah, who was suspected of organizing externally motivated radicalization capable of flaming up centrifugal forces in Nigeria (Ibeanu, 2010). Nigeria was also resisting French encroachment as all her immediate neighbours are former France colonies which were strongly being 'protected'

by France. Nigeria's size, natural resources, and maritime coastline also make it imperative for it to play a significant role in Africa. Her efforts to reconcile with her geographical neighbours and achieve regional leadership position were facilitated by the oil boom of the 1970s. By 1973, Nigeria was the world's ninth largest oil exporter and the United States' second largest international oil supplier (Gambari, 1975). As Nigerian economic prosperity (based on the fortunes of crude oil) increased, the country sought to assert itself economically and to consolidate African economic cooperation. Regional economic integration was therefore used by Nigeria as a means of advancing its leadership and reducing local French influence. This was in addition to providing financial assistance to its neighbours with the aim of weaning them off dependence on France. It is within this geographical framework that one can adequately understand the Africa centerpiece of Nigerian foreign policy.

What can be deduced from the above is that, whatever the rationale, Africa has been the cornerstone of Nigeria's foreign policy since independence, and that given her geographical and demographic advantages in Africa, the continent will continue to be accorded paramount consideration in her foreign policy. Despite the fact that most Nigerians would like their country to play considerable role in the regional and global affairs, they would as well want this role to be rooted in a clearly articulated vision of national interest. However, the current reality is that, Nigeria's foreign policy is seemingly lacking a well-articulated national interest. More so, the promotion and protection of national interest is not only about defense of territory and sovereignty. It is much more about elimination of poverty, inequality, and contestation and agitations. With persistent problem of human insecurity, economic stagnation and high poverty rate, it is irrational to focus on African unity and global peace. This is the key area where Nigerians are expecting Buhari civilian regime to launch its change mantra by initiating concrete steps towards harmonizing Nigerian's national interests with Nigeria's foreign policy, particularly the domestic interest of economic development.

#### **The State of Nigeria's Foreign Policy from May 1999 to May 2015**

Since May 1999, when Nigeria transited from military rule to civil rule, a number of trends are clearly discernible in Nigeria's foreign policy. The most remarkable of these trends is the frantic effort of the successive administrations to redeem the battered image of the country in the international community through establishing friendships with global powers and multilateral organizations and the emerging powers in the global political system. Alao (2011: 6) identified six major ambitions that have shaped Nigeria's foreign policy since 1999. These include:

- i. removing the near-pariah status that the country attained during the last phases of military rule;
- ii. remaining a key player in regional and continental politics, particularly in light of the increasing importance of the Gulf of Guinea;
- iii. ensuring that the external relations assist in domestic economic development, especially through strategic co-operation with traditional and emerging global economic actors;
- iv. bringing about debt relief;
- v. obtaining assistance to consolidate democracy; and
- vi. improving the image of the country affected by negative press on the illegal activities of some of its nationals in Diaspora.

What is discernible from these intentions is that Nigeria's foreign policy since 1999 has been a cautious balance of devotion to traditional obligations towards Africa issues, and the desire to ensure that external relations also assist in domestic concerns.

In specific term, Nigeria has struggled since the return of democracy in May 1999 to regain her 1970s assertive, dynamic and activist position in global politics as well as her leadership role in Africa. The early years of the Fourth Republic (1999-2007) witnessed some improvements in this regard, but afterwards (2009-2015), the country began to slide back to pre-May 1999 status. The retrogression, as rightly observed by Amuwo (2016: 5) was due to:

*a chaotic ... domestic political economy, worsened, since 2009, by the Boko Haram Islamist or terrorist group's activities in the country's north-east region; a docile, self-centred and venal ruling elite, ... bereft of the moral courage to critically interrogate and proffer solutions to Nigeria's vexed national question; and seemingly weak*

*and incompetent presidents ...who have done precious little, beyond grandiose public grandstanding, to realize the goals of ECOWAS and the AU.*

As such, the inability of the political elite to positively transform the domestic socio-economic conditions of Nigerians and stem the tide of ethno-religious agitations have led to the failure of transition to democracy to bring about the expected improvement in Nigeria's foreign policy, most especially as concerned her role in regional and sub-regional affairs.

Most notably, towards the tail end of President Goodluck Jonathan's administration, foreign policy took a dismal dimension. Under this administration, Nigeria further lost her strategic hold in AU and ECOWAS. For example, President Jonathan was absent at the crucial 19th AU summit held in Addis Ababa in July 2012 where Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma of South Africa was elected as the Chairperson of the AU Commission in a contest in which Nigeria had shown her support for the incumbent Gabonese Jean Ping who had no known pro-Nigerian sentiment. With this election, South Africa's challenge to Nigeria's 'primus inter pares' (Amuwo, 2016: 19) position in Africa became manifest. South Africa's ascendancy in the continent was becoming noticeable not only on account of her stronger and more functional economic and diplomatic system, but also on account of stronger politics and military. President Jonathan was also absent at the 50th anniversary of the creation of OAU (now AU) and in the continental effort to find lasting peace in the Central African Republic, Sudan and Congo. Nigeria also failed to play the expected leading role in helping the people of Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea in the height of their Ebola epidemic. The country also 'betrayed' the people of Palestine by abstaining from voting in the United Nations in December 2014, in the organization's effort to determine Palestine's statehood (Toyo, 2015).

As shown in the preceding section, Nigeria hitherto enjoyed relative advantage in Africa's foreign policy realm. Regrettably shortly before 2015, the country seemed to be taking a back seat in the continental diplomacy. During the decolonization and anti-apartheid struggle, Nigeria was the arch-defender of Africa's sovereignty. However, in the new post-decolonization, post-apartheid era, Nigeria was no longer in charge. This was mainly due to the poor governance quality at home, as there is a direct relationship between domestic politics and foreign policy. The failure of the Nigerian elite to positively transform the socio-economic conditions of Nigerians is negatively impacting on Nigeria's foreign policy. This is due to the fact that only by being strong at home can a country effectively contribute to solving problems abroad; a country at war with itself cannot project power abroad; and a country that is not valued at home cannot be valued abroad. As succinctly puts by an editorial, "nothing symbolizes the poor governance quality in Nigeria than the bewildering irony of a polity that is awash with cash, yet rich only in misery" (The Nation, July 17, 2014). This is mainly due to the kleptomaniac disposition of the ruling elites in general and the political elite in particular.

A country that is inflicted with cankerworm of corruption cannot parade itself as an influential actor in the contemporary global system. Though no regime is completely immune of the virus of corruption in Nigeria history since independence, it notched up to an unprecedented level during President Jonathan's administration, with \$7.92 billion lost to corruption in one year; a multibillion naira oil subsidy scam; fire arms procurement scandal among other mind-boggling cases of loot, resulting into galloping poverty and the perennial insecurity across the country, manifested by Boko Haram insurgency in the North; pastoralist and farmer clash across the northern region; settler vs indigene crisis in Plateau and Kaduna; militancy in the Niger Delta; and kidnapping for ritual (in the South) and for ransom in almost all parts of the country (Hassan, 2014; Vanguard, May 29, 2015).

Perhaps, the most threatening was the Boko Haram insurgency. However, the way and manner President Jonathan handled the insurgency portrayed him as an inert, inept and insensitive leader. In spite of the destructive activities of the sect, the issue was politicized based on the assumed conspiracy of the North against the President. In consequence, the government did not resolutely act to nip the issue in the bud before it escalated to a monstrous phenomenon, taking over territories with ease thereby accentuating Nigerian's worries about the rapidly diminishing capacity of a once internationally recognized military, strong and economically capable of maintaining the country's territorial integrity and national security. The recent revelations from the 'Dasukigate' i.e. fire-arms-procurement scandal,

where money meant for the purchase of arms and ammunition for military operations against Boko Haram was shared to finance the re-election bid of President Jonathan in 2015, is a clear testimony to the inept and insensitivity of the regime. The 'back-to-back, cash-for-cash' scandal totaling \$15 million, exposed in September 2014, involving high-profile Nigerian state officials and prominent politically exposed personalities, further showcased the derogatory level of Nigeria's diplomatic sagacity. This foreign policy 'faux pas', according to Amuwo (2016: 20), "betrays a ruling elite that sets little store by national image, branding and packaging. It also evinces an Africa policy, under Jonathan's watch, bereft of public morality, coherence and focus".

The inability of the Nigerian state to quickly rescue the school girls who were kidnapped on April 14, 2014 in Chibok, Borno State by the Boko Haram insurgents was also attributable to the non-challant attitude and incapacity of the Jonathan's regime to the deleterious activities of the insurgents. Instead of taking quick action to rescue the girls, the President was of the opinion that there was no abduction in the first place; that it was a propagandist scheme from the 'enemies' of his administration with the motive of painting him incompetent, heartless and indifferent (Hassan, 2014). This explains the reason why it took the President more than two weeks to speak publicly on the abduction.

*As argued by a columnist, President Jonathan did not show the mental alertness and sure-footedness his office demands in handling [the] many crises that have rocked his administration. But the Chibok abduction and his manner of dealing with it has exposed his inadequacies as never before and not just to his compatriots who always had their doubts. Now, the whole world has a good idea of the leader of Africa's most populous country and largest economy, home to the largest aggregation of black humanity (Dare, 2014; Quoted in Amuwo, 2016: 15).*

Though in an attempt to defeat the insurgents and rescue the girls, the regime entered into bilateral and multilateral partnership with Nigeria's immediate neighbours - Benin Republic, Cameroon, Chad and Niger - and formed MNJTF against the sect but the fact that these partnerships were arranged only after a push by France during a summit held in Paris in May 2014, demonstrated the low ebb of Nigeria's status in both West African sub-region and Africa region. In consequence, the capacity of Nigeria to spearhead dominant issues at both continental and global levels was greatly downgraded.

The foregoing background shows that, PMB, not only inherited a nosedived economy, dwindling foreign reserves and crashing oil prices but also inherited a much-diminished foreign policy capacity and credibility, coupled with the fact that Nigeria's diplomacy cannot be operated in a vacuum; but in the economic, political and institutional environment (Obaze, 2016). The President was not oblivious of the high stakes. During his campaign in 2015, he repeatedly reiterated his resolve to bring his party's change mantra to bear in Nigeria's foreign policy if elected. In its manifesto on foreign relations, the All Progressive Congress (APC) promised to:

- i. make the Nigerian national interest the overriding factor in its foreign policy and international relations;
- ii. work to reform global governance in multilateral institutions and agencies;
- iii. work to strengthen the AU to become a more effective organization on global affairs;
- iv. engage the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) countries on the basis of equality; and
- v. play a leadership role to develop a MINT (Mexico, India, Nigeria, and Turkey) as a counterforce to BRICS (Fashola, 2016).

It is however paradoxical that MINT will counter BRICS when India is a member of both. The extent by which President Muhammadu Buhari's administration has been able to bring about its promised change mantra in Nigeria's foreign policy is examined in the subsequent section.

President Muhammadu Buhari's Conduct of Foreign Policy and the Change Agenda: Matters Arising.

From the above, it is revealing that PMB's administration ab initio faced enormous challenges due to the failure of the preceding regimes to positively transform Nigeria and nip in bud, the centrifugal forces threatening the survival of the

country; leading to low ebb recognition in regional and global system. Thus, the onus of reinvigorating and reawakening Nigeria's active and articulate role in sub-regional, regional and global system lies on the new administration. In his inaugural speech, PMB indicated his preparedness to regain Nigeria's lost glory in international politics by asserting that:

*Our neighbours in the sub-region and our African brethren should rest assure that Nigeria under our administration will be ready to play any leadership role that Africa expects of it... I also wish to assure the wider international community of our readiness to cooperate and help combat threats of cross-border terrorism, sea piracy, refugees and boat people, financial crime, cyber crime, climatic change, the spread of communicable diseases and other challenges of the 21st century (Vanguard, May 29, 2015).*

The salient point of this assurance is the urgent need to establish a strong domestic base, particularly as concerned defeating Boko Haram insurgents and revamping the economy. In his determined effort to tackle Boko Haram menace head on, the President relocated the Command and Control Centre of the operation against Boko Haram from Abuja to Maiduguri (Borno State capital) the stronghold of Boko Haram. Given the dispersed modis operandi of the insurgents across neighbouring states, the Presidency built on and strengthened the existing regional mechanism for fighting Boko Haram. In the first two months of his presidency, PMB visited Nigeria's neighbours - Niger, Chad, Cameroon and Benin - to strengthen sub-regional force against the insurgents. Being a retired General, the President was quick to recognize that regional coordination is the key to defeating the insurgents. In addition to trips to these countries, the President hosted Cameroonian Defence Minister and the Presidents of other three countries in Abuja to strategize against Boko Haram. As these countries are Francophone countries, he also paid a state visit to the former President of France, Francois Hollande who, as stated above, had already gotten involved in the fight against the terrorists, to further work out the modalities of defeating them. With these efforts Nigeria was able to get full support of these countries and AU and by coming together in the Multi-National Joint Task Force (MNJTF) under a central command in N'Djamena (Chad's capital) inflicted serious damage to the insurgents. Today, Boko Haram has been drastically incapacitated to hold and occupy territories. In addition, government has successfully 'negotiated' the release of most of the abducted Chibok girls. This indeed is a major accomplishment of the PMB-led administration in courting cooperation with neighbouring states.

It must be stressed that cooperation between Nigeria and her immediate neighbours has always occupied a central place in the consideration of Nigeria's national security and external relations. Thus, these countries had always tried to work together against security threat. For instance they had been working together in small Multi-National Joint Task Force (MNJTF) to fight criminality in the Lake Chad region since 1998. Though this force was, however, poorly organized and was quickly overrun by the Boko Haramists. In addition, cooperation between the five countries has been characterized by mistrust and suspicion. For instance, despite several bilateral initiatives for cooperation between Nigeria and Chad, serious hostilities were witnessed between both states in 1983 when the latter invaded part of Borno State (Adetula, 2014). Nigeria's relations with Cameroon have also been laden with suspicion and lack of trust. Both countries have a long accumulated distrust over numerous border crises and, most significantly, the disputed Bakassi Peninsula. This lack of trust undermined the collective fight against Boko Haram as both states refused to share intelligence on the terrorists. This is why the visit of PMB to Cameroon was significant in the success recorded by the MNJTF against Boko Haram. During the visit President Buhari laid to rest the Bakassi issue, reiterating the resolve of Nigeria to abide by the 2002 International Court of Justice ruling on the territory contradicting his electioneering promise of rejecting the ruling if elected. The President's regional approach is however commendable. Allowing the Boko Haram to exploit the porous borders and limited information exchange between these countries earlier made defeating it not only harder, but almost near impossible.

Just as President Obasanjo, after his inauguration, PMB immediately assumed the 'Chief Foreign Policy Officer' of his administration. Months before he appointed his ministers and ambassadors, he personally conducted his foreign policy using career diplomats as advisers. Within 18 months in office, President Buhari embarked on shuttle diplomacy and made 36 foreign trips (Adebowale, 2016) and allegedly spent ₦5.5 billion on foreign travels within 11 months of his presidency (Obaze, 2016). This has attracted a lot of criticisms. The critics objected to the frequent trips on a number of

reasons. Prominent among these reasons include: the conviction that the President needed to stay at home to address the mirage of domestic challenges ranging from socio-economic to security; the argument that the trips constitute a serious drain on Nigeria's lean purse given the cost associated with running the presidential aircrafts, retinue of presidential staff and other delegates; the need to quickly constitute and make use of diplomats in delegated capacity; and the failure to see the immediate and long-term gains of these trips, thereby creating the impression of a jamboree tourism (Abati, 2016; Emeozor, 2016). Contrarily these trips, according to government officials, were intended to harness international support for the actualization of the three cardinal programmes of PMB's administration which include the fight against terrorism; crusade against corruption and the repatriation of the country's stolen assets; and diversification of the economy (Akwaya, 2016; Fashola, 2016; Obaze, 2016).

While the reasons adduced by the critics against the President's trips may seem understandable most especially as concerned the need to cut costs, but this does not mean that the trips were of no benefit to Nigeria. For instance, the President's visit to the neighbouring countries (as stated above) led to the reinvigoration of the Multi-National Joint Task Force (MNJTF) that led to the near defeat of Boko Haram. The 2nd Regional Security Conference held in Nigeria in May 2016 was a direct fall out of his visit to France. His visit to US was used to secure commitments from President Barak Obama to help in tackling security problems faced by the country as well as the fight against corruption. His visit to China also brought about secured commitments for investments worth \$6 billion from Chinese government and private companies. His United Arab Emirate's visit was also significant as it led to the signing of bilateral agreements on elimination of double taxation, extradition of wanted persons and the seizure of stolen assets. However, the occasional faux pas displayed by the President during most of these trips, as demonstrated by his ignorance of Germany's Chancellor during the G-7 Summit and his response to former UK Prime Minister, David Cameron's allegation that Nigeria was "fantastically corrupt" during the UK Anti-corruption Summit, revealed that he has long been disconnected from international politics and his low level of mastery of international diplomacy. It was also observed that most intending domestic issues were often pronounced during these trips, leading to a situation whereby Nigerians heard more from their president when he travelled abroad than while at home. Ideally, foreign pronouncements should be a reminiscent of domestic decision as foreign policy is an offshoot of domestic policy.

It is pertinent to also note that the capability of these trips to bring short and long term benefits was threatened by the absence of minister of foreign affairs and substantive ambassadors to follow up most of the decisions taken and memoranda of understanding (MoU) signed. In July 2015, PMB sacked the country's political ambassadors from their diplomatic posts while his list of ambassadors was only approved by the Senate in March 2017 after series of rejections. The initial absence of foreign affairs minister and ambassadors, who should constantly interface with their hosting countries and explain the direction of government policies at home constituted a set-back to the ability of Nigeria to exploit the benefits inherent in these trips. Thus, PMB's delay in appointing minister of foreign affairs and diplomatic ambassadors set the scene to a President-led approach to foreign policy. From the onset, the President has been driving foreign policy personally. His current ill-health has, however, hindered his ability to travel and this may adversely affect the regime's ability to bring about the promised change in Nigeria's foreign policy. Most especially, given the fact that in the contemporary international system, personal diplomacy (face-to-face) with other presidents and heads of government is more effective than the traditional diplomacy of relying on diplomats.

Another major concern is that these trips do not in any way different from the ones made by PMB's predecessors since 1999. This paints a picture of every president embarking on the same trip to the same location for the same reasons accompanied by the same large retinue. This is a fall out of non-national-interest-inclined nature of Nigeria's foreign policy. While foreign policy objective talks about national interest, what constitutes that interest has been blurry and chameleonic since independence and usually determined by serving presidents. What is noticeable is that national interests has been replaced by personal interests thereby creating poverty and crisis of incrementalism in foreign relations framework, as every president wants to make his own mark in both domestic and foreign terrains. Having known this, states that are determined in the pursuit of their own interests do strive to meet a new Nigerian president; given the fact that the president can cancel or suspend existing agreements or contracts being executed by



their nationals. Thus, the uncertainty that prevails in Nigeria is so certain that any gains recorded by an administration (both locally and internationally) are not necessarily institutionalized.

President Buhari has also tried to rekindle Nigeria's active role in Africa. Nigeria's support to the general elections in Guinea Conakry, Burkina Faso, Benin Republic, Chad and Gambia indicates the country's struggle to take its rightful place in Africa. Of particular note was Nigeria's role in 2016 Gambian election. President Buhari was part of the ECOWAS / AU mediation delegation which tried to persuade President Yahya Jammeh to concede defeat and handover political power to Adama Barrow. After several meetings with Jammeh yielded no positive result, Nigeria contributed militarily to the ECOWAS's 'Operation Restore Democracy' in Gambia hosted by Senegal in January 2017. With this operation, President Jammeh was 'compelled' to accept defeat after 22 years in power and sought asylum in Equatorial Guinea. Meanwhile, the Nigerian House of Representatives had on January 12, 2017 voted to grant him political asylum if he concedes defeat. It must however be stated that the decisive action and leadership on Gambian election did not come from President Buhari; rather from Liberian President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf and Senegalese President Macky Sall. Though, Senegal's proximity to Gambia makes it a natural key player but the previous sites of Nigerian foreign policy triumphs - Sierra Leone, Liberia, Cote D'Ivoire and Mali - are not Nigeria's immediate neighbours. Like the situation during Nigeria's previous interventions, President Buhari could have diplomatically ensured that the Nigerian Justice who served as the Chief Justice of Gambia presided over a constitutional resolution of the crisis. It was also believed that a preemptive Nigerian diplomacy and pressure could have averted the eventual ECOWAS occupation and hastened the resolution of the crisis (Afolabi, 2017).

Nigeria's struggle for leadership in Africa also recorded a set-back with her loss at the 2017 AU Commission's election. AU is led by a Commission composed of commissioners that handle specific portfolios. Member states always strive to have their representatives serve in strategic commissions. Nigeria, since the creation of AU in 2002, has always produced the Commissioner for Political Affairs, a post that is considered strategic within the union. During the 2017 election, Nigeria neither returned the incumbent commissioner nor another candidate for the post. Instead, the country ran for and lost the position of Commissioner for Peace and Security. The implication of this is that, for the first time, since the AU was formed, there will be no Nigerian voice at the highest level of African diplomacy. This is a major set-back given the fact that whether or not Nigeria has a vibrant foreign policy depends on her ability to exert influence in Africa, particularly in diplomatic corridor in multilateral organizations.

At the global level, PMB's personality has gone to a large extent in renewing Nigeria's friendship with super powers, thereby taking the country to the centre stage in international politics. Within his first two years in office, the President attended and addressed the UN General Assembly, the AU Heads of States and Government, the ECOWAS Heads of States and Government, the Commonwealth Heads of Government, the COP 21 Climate Change Summit in France, the China-Africa Conference in South Africa, the Nuclear Security Summit in Washington, DC among others. Given his record of discipline and integrity, PMB earned the respect and trust of the international community. His invitation to attend the G-7 Summit in Germany by Chancellor Angela Merkel in June 2015 even before he was sworn in as president testified to the confidence that the group of the world's most powerful states have on the personality of the president. Indeed, the President was with the commodity of trust; a commodity that is in short supply in most African states. His election in 2015 attested to the trust that the overwhelming Nigerians have in him. This has resonated globally as affirmed by President Obama's remark during the G-7 Summit that "Nigeria has elected a president that brings a reputation of scrupulous integrity to the table" (Fashola, 2016). As such, PMB's international prowess, respect and acceptability have once again brought Nigeria to the lime-light of international politics.

It is however pertinent to state that this international prowess and acceptability was not effectively harnessed to strengthen Nigeria's domestic base, most especially as concerned the improvement of the inherited comatose economy. This is against the optimism of Nigerians that PBM's election would ignite the inherited fading economy by aggressive diversification as promised by the APC's manifesto. However, little success has been recorded in this regard. The President has been unable to capitalize on the massive domestic and international goodwill he enjoyed at the onset of his administration to push through decisive economic policies. His inability to quickly appoint ministers, until six months

after his inauguration, partly explains the current economic recession that the country is experiencing. By not setting up cabinet until 166 days in office, the President allowed the management of the economy to be put on hold for six months during which uncertainty prevailed, thereby accelerated capital flight and weakening confidence. Though, the President initially rejected the International Monetary Fund and World Bank's suggestion for the adoption of a market-based exchange rate vehemently, this was later tactically adopted. As such, the CBN's foreign exchange control policy, adopted with the tacit approval of the President, further weakened the naira and put increased strain on local and foreign businesses. In real sense, there is no difference between President Buhari's economic policies and the IMF / World Bank neoliberalism. Ideally, neoliberalism was designed as a mechanism that is predicated on competition and efficiency in the allocation of resources. However, the uncritical and wholesale acceptance of orthodox market reforms, in various guises and disguises, since the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) era has compounded the economic woes of average Nigerians. This has led to the diminished support being enjoyed by PMB's led administration.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

What is discernible from the foregoing analysis is that, under PMB's civilian administration, there has been an improvement in Nigeria's foreign policy (compared to the situation during his immediate predecessor), particularly in the areas of cooperation with neighbouring states that led to the near defeat of Boko Haram insurgency and earning the trust of the global community thereby putting the country at the centre stage of international politics. This is not unconnected with the fact that PMB came to power with a lot of goodwill within and outside Nigeria and a reputation for integrity which helped in changing the perception of the international community on Nigeria. However, the President's promise of change, in terms of ensuring that Nigeria reclaims her leadership position in Africa and links her foreign policy with domestic socio-economic development, is yet to be put on the road of actualization. Meanwhile, given his reputation, both local and international communities were of the belief that his election would actually 'change' Nigeria for better. With regard to foreign policy, most people were convinced (from the campaign promises of the APC) that the primary motivation for Nigeria's foreign policy would be the furtherance of domestic development. The experience within the two years of the President administration, however, tends one to say that the administration's change mantra only centres on the idea of change as an event, as opposed to the reality of change as a social process.

Consequently, the main conclusion from this assessment is that PMB's civilian administration has not fundamentally altered the conduct of Nigeria's foreign policy particularly as regard to its formulation, administration and delivery. It has indeed been a two-year foreign policy of change in continuity. The basic characters of Nigeria's foreign policy, as have been determined since independence in 1960, still, to a large extent, remain unchanged. What has changed is the style and manner of execution; while continuity has been the name of the game, regime idiosyncrasies have the regulating rule. Thus, the structural process of changing the course of Nigeria's foreign policy to reflect domestic realities and at the same time occupy a leadership position in African affairs seem very evasive in the current narratives of the happenings in the country. Given the fact that a country's foreign policy is a direct continuation of its domestic policy, Nigeria needs to step up effort to strike the right balance between the domestic scene, characterized by myriad of challenges, and an external environment that is competitive, dynamic, fluid and volatile at the same time. To achieve this, the country requires a disciplined, honest and firm leadership that will build a strong economy at home and a national interest propelled foreign policy. During his tenure as Head of State in the 1980s, President Buhari built a reputation for these qualities. It was on the basis of this antecedent that Nigerians believed in his professed change mantra. The experience within the last two years however revealed that the young energetic General Buhari of 1984 is not the same as today's PMB in his '70s. His ill-health and the need to comply with democratic rules and restraints have made it impossible for him to enforce order and discipline required for bringing about the needed change particularly in the area of foreign policy.

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