
NATIONAL ROLE CONCEPTION AND NIGERIA'S FOREIGN POLICY IN THE FOURTH REPUBLIC
BY

Ogah, Musa Ari Ph.D
07032122393

musaogahari@gmail.com

Department of Political Science, Federal University Lafia, Nasarawa State, Nigeria.

Aliyu, Tala Safiyanu
aliyutala@gmail.com
09035353854

Department of Political Science, Nasarawa State University, Keffi, Nasarawa State, Nigeria.

ABSTRACT

Role conception and assumption by Nigeria has been a function of the perceptions of the founding fathers from the eve of independence, and a product of certain geographical factors. Other factors included the civility, maturity, and political wisdom in struggling for and earning independence. This was considered to have served as a model for other nations under colonial rule. *The study examines national role conception and the Nigeria's Foreign Policy in the Fourth Republic. The study adopts mixed method (qualitative and quantitative) using secondary data and role theory to examine national role conception and Nigeria's foreign policy in the fourth republic. The study reveals that national roles are discernible in Nigeria's African policy. A study of the politics of national role conceptions in Nigeria has shown that a very small informal or semi-formal political group (the group within the group) conceives external roles of the country, take decisions, and formulate policies. The study recommends a policy shift from wasteful and unrewarding Afrocentrism to a "Nigeriacentrism". This Nigeriacentrism would not imply the abandonment of leadership in Africa; it would mean the use of African leadership/national roles to better the interest of Nigerians, and attending to national issues first which is a more honorable thing to do in the face of competing domestic and external pressures.*

Keywords: National interest, foreign policy, national roles, national roles conception.

Introduction

The opinion that states are like humans who occupy specific roles in a social group is a global one with a long history. The study of national role conception was popularized by Holsti in his texts published in 1967, 1970, and 1987, as well as Krotz in 2001. Their arguments is that, a state is just like an individual who cannot exist in isolation. Therefore, states just as individuals have particular set of roles to perform for the general upliftment of human society. Borrowed from Social Psychology, which recognizes the affinity of 'role' and 'man' in every social group that provides a platform for the full expression of man's potentials and social self (Krotz, 2001).

Role conception and assumption by Nigerians has been a function of the perceptions of the founding fathers from the eve of independence, and a product of certain geographical factors. The nationalists such as Nnamdi Azikiwe, Herbert Macaulay, Obafemi Awolowo, Anthony Enahoro, Aminu Kano, Ahmadu Bello, and Tafawa Balewa, to mention a few, viewed Nigeria as a nation naturally created to fill the roles of leadership in Africa and the world. Their foreign policy outlooks which had characterized their basis for independence movement in the first place were premised on the historical factors of the making of Nigeria itself. This factor was the merger of the great nations and empires of the Western Sudan and the Forest Region of the pre-colonial era, including Kanem Bornu, Benin, Oyo, Nupe, Kano, Kororofa, Sakwatto, Itsekiri, and Ijaw (Ikime, 1985).

Other factors included the civility, maturity, and political wisdom in struggling for and earning independence. This was considered to have served as a model for other nations under colonial rule. Other factors that informed the role conceptions by the founding fathers included Nigeria's huge population; its wealth; and its rich cultural heritage. The perceptions of the past have been strengthened by the increasing population making Nigeria the most populous black nation in the world, and its oil fortunes which place it as one of the rich countries of the world in revenue (Onyearu, 2008). The first instinct of Nigeria has therefore been to occupy the centre of African affairs: use its resources, influence, and power to reach great bargains and further its interests, assume leadership positions and become the voice of the continent, and assist needy nations of the entire black world (King, 1996). These three-prong roles have underlined the foreign policy towards Africa and earned for Nigeria the international tag of having an Afrocentric attitude.

Secondary literature have shown that writers in the field of political science in general and its subfield of international relations to be specific have tended to rely on the policy pretension and pronouncements of the political leadership with the tendency to uncritically accept such assertions as the basis for measuring Nigeria's African policy. Indeed, Nigerian policy makers do make loud statements on Africa-centred roles without keeping to most of them, and these policy statements are often not classified or

documented as national role conceptions (NRCs) in most Nigerian foreign policy (NFP) literature, whereas national role conception (NRC) has for some time now become an acceptable parameters to examine or evaluate foreign policy actions and behaviour in foreign policy analysis.

However, in most analysis of Nigerian foreign policy, NRCs have either not been clearly identified or have not been adequately looked at. This is either because there is unclear conception by successive political leaderships about what role Nigeria should occupy in Africa, or the leaders have not been careful enough to differentiate between articulation of national interests and the actualization of national interests, which requires clearly defined means-national roles to occupy to make this happen. Thus, national roles within the period under investigation have not been well articulated and outlined by the political leadership. As earlier mentioned, there have been mere fantastic statements made by the Political Executive without taking into cognizance the other decision units and publics' expectations. Such statements end up being wholly opposed to action. It is such rhetoric or political statements that foreign policy analysts have worked with. This has influenced the manner of certain methodological and theoretical approaches to the study of Nigerian foreign policy.

Again, the period under study (1999-2015) was eventful because of the changing nature of Nigeria's international stature as a result of differentials in foreign policy style and disposition. It encompasses three different political administrations to include Obasanjo, 1999-2007; Yar'Adua, 2007-2010 and Jonathan, 2010-2015. Examining the politics of role conception and foreign policy making of each administration provide useful basis for analysis. This period is thus very critical in the annals of Nigeria's foreign policy that cannot be ignored in a study of this nature.

It attempts to identify the role conceptions, actors in the politics of role conceptions, and how Nigeria performed these roles from 1999 to 2015.

Statement of the Problem

This study investigate Nigeria's foreign policy (NFP) 'national role conception' (NRC). In Nigeria, role conception remains vague and unclear. This is because it is prone to series interpretations by various governments, political institutions and influential individuals and groups.

Also, is that the role conceptions have often been blurred and uncertain as far as strategies or instruments of policy were concerned. In terms of the politics of role conceptions and foreign policy making, the Nigerian leadership has exhibited a high degree of despotism, making foreign policy a class, clique, and secret thing between the President and his chosen small cabinet.

Other agents of foreign policymaking, such as; ministries, the parliament, judiciary, media, research groups, think-tanks, academic community, and pressure/ interest groups are side-lined, while a very small informal or semi-formal political group, conceives external roles of the country, takes decisions, and formulates policies. Thus, foreign policy making is often blanketed in secrecy and clique inclination. This no doubt has impacted on the problem of definition of Nigeria's African roles in its policy towards Africa. The politicization, secrecy and resultant confusion create a problem of clarity culminating in the unpopularity of role conceptions as a term in Nigerian foreign policy analysis, because it is often difficult for analysts to underline or identify Nigeria's conceived roles. These have constituted major gap in Nigeria's foreign policy analysis. It is this major hole that this scholarship attempt to fill: to identify the roles, critique them, and examine how they are conceived and eventually assumed by Nigeria in Africa.

Research Questions

Sequel to the foregoing background and the problem therein as discovered, the study will be guided by the following questions:

- i. What is national role conception in Nigeria's African policy?
- ii. Who conceives national roles and how are they conceived and assumed in Nigeria's African Policy?
- iii. Have there been differences between the role conceptions and role performance of each administration within the period under investigation?
- iv. What accounts for these differences?

Methodology

The research design for this study is based on historical and descriptive research design. Given the nature of the topic, it becomes imperative to embark upon a descriptive and historical design. An historical design is meant to analyze the link between national role conception and Nigeria's foreign policy to have a full knowledge on both variables. Similarly, a descriptive mode of analysis is needed to understanding the various avenue and forms in which both variables meet and further explains the nexus between them.

Institutions such as National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies (NIPSS); Nigeria Institute for International Affairs (NIIA); Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the executive, the legislative and the judicial arms of government, academic community such as, Universities and other higher institutions of learning as well as the business community which is made up of local and international businesses all constitute the population for the this study.

The above formal and informal institutions are not only traditional bodies that constitute the Foreign Policy elites of any nation because of their level of enlightenment influence, and stakes in public affairs, but that they are also constitutionally recognized as central to policymaking. *The study adopts mixed method* (qualitative and quantitative) using *secondary data* to examine national role conception and Nigeria's foreign policy. The qualitative secondary source of data utilized include a review of the National Role Conception and Nigeria's Foreign Policy from various publications and literature on the subject matter obtained from the relevant Foreign Policy and international relations authored books and journals of same inclinations, academic articles relevant to the topic of discussion, internet/websites publications, government documents and other relevant legislations on National Role Conception and Nigeria's Foreign Policy, administrative rules, policies and procedures on subject matters of National Role Conception and Nigeria's Foreign Policy.

The quantitative source of secondary data that was collected includes data on the Foreign Policy thrusts of the three administrations under investigation by the Nigeria's political leaders (presidents) in the Fourth Republic from 1999-2015. To this end, substantial materials/paper presented by top government functionaries on the theme of National Role Conception and Nigeria's Foreign Policy obtained from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) being the custodian of Foreign Relation in Nigeria was relied upon in justifying National Role Conception and Nigeria's Foreign Policy thrusts in the Fourth Republic. By this, the study gained an insight into how Nigeria's political leadership impacted on Foreign Policy making of the Nigerian state within the period under discourse. The technique for data analysis for this study is contextual historical analysis.

Furthermore, the contextual historical method that is adopted for analysing the topic under review involves investigation, analysis and interpretation of facts leading to the reconstruction of the past. In this regard, the study examined three administrations in a chronological order (i.e, Obasanjo 1999-2007, Yar'Adua 2007-2010 and Jonathan, 2010-2015). The historical method aid in the interpretation of records in such a way that conclusions that is reached amount to an interpretation or re-interpretation of the past events and consequently the reform of the Nigeria Role Conception in Nigeria's Foreign Policy history.

Conceptual discourse

Concepts of National Interest

It is apt to begin the conceptualization of national interest with the understanding of the word 'interest'. This is because, understanding national interest is key to understanding foreign policy.

According to Gordon (1994) a Sociologist, in his concise Oxford Dictionary of Sociology published in 1994 by the Oxford University Press in New York, page 254. For him, interest refers to whatever contributes to the general well-being or the fulfillment of purpose of an individual. By this, anything you are interested in actually draws your attention, affects you, or concerns your well-being. In other words, what concerns a state means what affects its well-being and the purpose of which that state or nation exist.

Firstly, the point Gordon (1994) is making is that, originally, the word "interest" is apply to individuals and also applies to the nation, but, ordinarily, interest is apply to an individual. As society evolves and develops, within the 19th century, they now began to apply it to not just individuals but also group of individuals and extended to nation and nation-states.

The second point we must note about interest according to Gordon (1994) is that, the word "interest" was originally developed from a materialistic perspective. One of the earliest writers of interest was Thomas Hobbes. Thomas Hobbes in his political philosophy defined interest from a materialistic perspective to mean "self-preservation". Other philosophers or political analysts also define interest in a similar manner as self interest. While Thomas Hobbes was concern with power, the political economists were concern with wealth because interest in its original sense means acquiring power and acquiring wealth.

So, this is the philosophical basis on the concept of interest (Gordon, 1994).

Therefore, relating the concept of interest to international relations by adding the word “National”, national interest could be define as the interest of a state. It is the domestic aspiration which a state seek to achieve, thereby incorporating it to her foreign policy. Therefore, it is national interest that constitute a state's foreign policy.

How to Arrive at National Interest

- i. Manifesto of Political Parties
- ii. Conferences of the People
- iii. Constitution

Emphasis would be laid on the constitution. Here, there are two constitutions that are outstanding. i.e those that are implemented as containing foreign policy objectives of Nigeria which can be said to mean Nigeria national interest. These are those of 1979 and 1999. But, there are many more conference which includes; the 1995 conference and a draft constitution that came out of it. There was the political reform conference of the civilian administration of Olusegun Obasanjo and the 2014 National Conference of Goodluck Ebelle Jonathan. However, the one that is been use in analysis which is been implemented today, is the 1999 constitution and in section 19 and beyond.

However, national interest is not necessarily define by the people. Like the history of Nigeria, her national interest was completely design by the executive, only occasional consulted by the people. It is generally, a country's goals and ambitions in global politics whether economic, military, or cultural (Gvosdev, 2004; Byrd, 1996; Church, 1973). The interests are multifaceted: primary, secondary, or long-range. Primary interests are central to a nation's immediate survival and security, a nation's wealth, economic growth, preservation of national culture or heritage, and power. The external attitude (Foreign Policy) of a nation is therefore expected to be shaped by its national interest.

Flowing from the foregoing, it is arguable whether Nigeria has a set of clearly articulated national roles that would aid the actualization of her national interests. For a nation that has played many leadership roles in Africa and global politics, a set of national interests should have been documented, from which reference could be made to actions of the government whether they are in the interest of the nation.

What is relied on as Nigeria's national interests are the outline of national leaders which change from time to time, and what the 1999 Constitution sets out as the Foreign Policy of the state? Both the leaders' and the constitutional outlines appear more like a set of roles to occupy than what the interests of the nation should be. The weak outlines or lack of documented set of well-articulated national interests could have also been responsible for the inconsistencies and ambiguities in Nigeria's foreign relations.

Generally, when we speak of national interest, we mean what benefits a nation. There are two broad perspectives to national interest: the Liberal and the Marxist perspectives. The liberal approach is a state centric approach to the study of national interest. It analyses the concept of national interest from the perspective of the decision makers within the system and expect that the orientation of such critical actors must be derived from the perceptions of the “general will” (Taylor, 2010).

On the other hand, Marxist analysis and argument is that the interests propagated and promoted by class government are the interests of only the dominant and ruling class. Thus, such interests cannot be presented as national interest. What summarizes the true concept of national interest is given priority when in economic terms, just as Julian Papp has suggested: Any policy that enhances a state's economic position should be seen to be in the national interest. Improving a country's industrial base or guaranteeing a country's access to oil, natural gas or other energy or non-fuel mineral resources may all be considered to be in a country's national interest. Accordingly, the economic condition of nation should take a prime position when considering what a nation holds as national interest (Taylor, 2010).

National interest as a concept is used in both political analysis and political action. As an analytical tool, it is employed to describe, explain or evaluate the sources of the adequacy of the nation's foreign policy. It serves as means of justifying, denouncing, or proposing policies. However, Rosenau (1961) argues that the concept of national interest is rooted in values and is difficult to employ as a tool of rigorous analysis. Politicians therefore discuss their goals in terms of national interest and are inclined to claim that their goals are the national interest Rosenau, (1980). In essence, goals and interests are value laden since they involve subjective preferences. Thus culmination of national interest into a single complex of values is bound to have problems as observers use different value frameworks. Largely values are not Susceptible

to scientific proof; hence it is difficult to demonstrate the validity of such assessments that foreign policy actions reflect national interest (Omede, 2003).

In most cases, the definition of national interest is vague and it is often defined to suit rulers, decision-makers or countries in their own way. The dispute of defining national interest either as an art or science remains at the center stage of international relations discipline. Olusanya and Akindele (1986) believes that there is difficulty in identifying the concept and vies this as unfortunate and on the whole unhelpful. He argues that national interest should relate to the real interest of the people and these interests are not to be seen as being necessarily contained within the state context, *state decision makers who claim to be acting in the national interest* mislead the nation. They cannot have the perfect information necessary to validate their claims and so other people's eyes and possibly theirs (Olusanya and Akindele, 1986).

Largely, the actual content of national interest depends on the perception and interpretation by the decision-making elite. In fact, No statesman, no publicist, no scholar would seriously argue that foreign policy ought to be conducted in opposition to, or in disregard of the national interest.

Saliu and Aremu (2006), the concept of national interest, though loaded with values, cannot be disregarded as tool for analysis. Though the question of values is important, to disregard the concept because of this problem is equally misleading. There is no nation that is founded and organized outside precepts of values. Akindele (2004) divided interests according to whether they are of primary importance, specific, general, secondary or identical. Primary interests include protection of a nation's physical, political and cultural identity and survival against encroachment from outside. These can never be traded and must be defended at all costs.

Secondary interests are those that do not fall under primary interest but are contributory to it such as the protection of the citizens abroad. On the other hand permanent interests are those that are relatively constant over a period of time and general interests are those applied to a large geographical spectrum.

According to Morgenthau, (1989) the connection between interest and the nation state is a product of history and as long as the world is politically organized into nations, the national interest is indeed the last word in international politics. Morgenthau (1989) defines national interest in terms of power. The power at a nation's command is at any moment in time, an objective reality of that nation and thus serves to determine what its true interest should be. It has to be noted that the nation's aspirations are obviously determined by the decision makers. They are only people capable of thinking about the whole aggregate of national interest at the operational level and are the only ones with the authority to make appropriate official declarations and statements (Ghosh, 2009).

Foreign Policy

Foreign policy is the manifestation of national interest while national interest is the domestic aspiration of a country. To put it simple, foreign policy refers to the goals, principles, strategy and tactics in which an actor pursue in the international community (Aliyu, Adoga and Mukthar, 2019).

Holsti (1967) defines foreign policy as the actions of a state toward the external environment and the conditions-usually domestic- under which such actions are formulated. This seems to agree with Kissinger's (1994) often quoted submission that in foreign policy analysis, the domestic structure is taken as given; foreign policy begins where domestic policy ends. Simply, foreign policy could mean external attitude of a state. The ultimate goal is to maximize greater advantage for the country.

The Concept of National Roles

National role as a concept ascribes to the state an organic and social nature, which national interests may not do. National role establishes the basis for the social functionality of states, and provides platform for the comprehension of state behaviour. It allows foreign policy analysis to be more robust when talking about state behaviour or functionality of nations in the international arena. National interests as discussed are a set of objectives. These may have been rationalized, articulated and outlined by policy makers. They may remain non-actualized until the state acts (or plays certain roles). The policy makers have more "roles" to play than articulating national objectives. They also may have to conceive roles for the nation. Such roles may be conceived within the frameworks of national interest and objectives (Krotz, 2001).

Roles a state wishes to fill or which it has assumed in international politics often represent steps by which it hopes to realize or carry out its national objectives. Thus, national roles can be described as identified positions a state wishes to assume or play, and a set of tasks by which a state realizes its objectives or interest in international politics. It may not be enough for a state to articulate on paper its interests in

world politics. It also needs to define its roles so as to effectively carry out its objectives.

The interests are theoretical, the roles are practical. All states may have national interests, but not all states may conceive or play any external roles. However, all states require national roles if they want to fulfill their national aspiration (Krotz, 2001). National interest is therefore not the same thing as national roles. However, both complement each other and represent stages of national aspiration fulfilment on the international scene. The national role thus helps in a state's foreign policy formulation and implementation.

Thus, it becomes apparent that national interest defines the national roles to occupy. For instance, if it is the long-range interest of Nigeria to be a global power, it befits of it to define roles to play to attain that objective or interest.

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

Overview of the National Role Conceptions Debate

The slogan "National Role Conceptions" (NRCs) is popular in American and European literature of foreign policy. It is understood within the context of roles nation-states occupy or play in either regional or global politics. The works of Holsti (1967, 1970 and 1987 and Wish 1980) fully argue that states have roles they fill in international politics.

Holsti (1970) particularly posits that stronger states either play the role of a super, balancer or defender of other states, region or the universe; or fill certain self-imposed or universally expected roles in the international system. Advancing two typologies, Holsti (1970) claims that all nations (weaker or stronger) fill some roles in the community of states. Krotz (2001) examines the changing national role conceptions of France and Germany-two political archrivals from 1870- in their quest to outdo each other in Europe.

Bilcik (2004) cited in (Akindele, 2005) investigates Slovakia's shifting role conceptions against the background of a changing European system. Both reinforce the perspective that national roles are the national attitude or behaviour of states in the international society.

There are no universal yardsticks for what a nation's external roles must be. National roles are generally the products of the value judgments of leaders who conceive and implement them, and the normative perception of the policy analyst which may arise from ideological and historical experience, or social backgrounds and ideals of persons conceiving or analyzing. National roles may also be rationalized as what are in the best interest of the nation, and yet, the political leadership and the writers or commentators are still the ones involved here. The national roles of one nation can also not be used as the yardstick for another nation, because national capacity, national needs and external environments vary (Johnson, 2006).

The first problem noticeable in literature therefore, is that roles expected for Nigeria in Africa by individual scholars based on hindsight have often been the yardsticks to determine Nigeria's commitment to its Africa policy across various administrations. However, literature shows that the standard practices in many analyses are the use of the role conceptions of the nation's founding fathers, the foreign policy objectives as spelt out in the constitution, and laid down principles of Nigeria's foreign policy as measures of whether Nigerian leaders are doing it right or wrong (Adigbuo, 2007).

Ultimately, the idiom "national role conceptions" is not common in the dictionary and literature of Nigerian foreign policy. The absence of such a crucial term has a fundamental implication for a nation that prides itself as the leader of Africa and that has played so many positive roles in the continent. This suggests lack of ideological and philosophical focus in the articulation of Nigeria's national interests by successive leaders long after independence. National role conception should thus be a follow-up to national interest (Adigbuo, 2007).

Hence, national roles should be conceived for a nation after the articulation of national interests. This thus implies that national roles need be conceived in as much as national interests are articulated and

outlined. The poverty of this conceptualization is the focus of Gambari (1986), who argues that the Nigerian foreign policy landscape suffers this conceptual analysis.

Gambari (1986) regrets the simplicity and unscientific approach to foreign policy making by the political class and government of Nigeria. Gambari (1986) stresses the need for clear outlining and clarification of concepts and strategies, which is implied the articulation of national roles before a state proceeds to its external environment. In other words, Gambari (1986) is suggesting that the Nigerian state should conceive, evaluate, and rank its priorities before acting or assuming roles. Gambari (1986) however does not make any reference to 'national roles', even if that is what he implies.

For Nigeria, national role conceptions vary over time and across borders. Each administration comes up with its own 'kind of roles' Nigeria would play and occupy in Africa. This does not exclude the fact that such administration end up having role conception or role assumption problems. The seeming elusiveness of the conception or ambiguity of strategies of realization of Nigeria's African roles, or the revise of old conceptions, rather demonstrate any or a combination of these role conception strands in the development of Nigeria's African policy: vaguely or unclearly conceived roles; absence of role conceptions; assumption of national roles not conceived; clearly conceived roles that are partially or never filled; lack of a dynamic role conception, and clearly conceived roles that were also effectively occupied. Specifically, the study seeks to identify the gap and establish which of the observable scenarios underlined Nigeria's African policy from 1999 to 2015.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the role theory. Role theory is derived from the concept of role as used first by psychologists and anthropologists in distinguishing individual or group role perceptions and actual performance in any social gathering. This could be family, peer group, religious group, workplace, community, market, and in this case, the political group. Among social psychologists that pioneered the role theory include Cooley, Linton (1936), Parsons (1937), Newcomb (1950), Sarbin (1966), Ackerman (1958), and Biddle (1979). Originally, the role theory is a perspective in social psychology that considers most of everyday activity to be living up to the roles, or expectations, of others. It posits the following propositions about social behaviour:

1. People spend much of their lives in groups.
2. Within these groups, people often take distinct positions.
3. Each of these positions can be called a role, with a whole set of functions that are molded by the expectations of others.
4. Formalized expectations become norms when enough people feel comfortable in providing punishments and rewards for the expected behaviour.
5. Individuals are generally *conformists*, and in so far as that is true, they conform to group roles.
6. The anticipation of rewards and punishments inspire this conformity.

Role theory also holds that behaviour may only be changed if roles are changed (Potash, 1990; Davis, 1984; Jackson, 1972; Biddle & Thomas, 1966; Bates, 1968; Moreno, 1946). This is because roles correspond to behaviours and vice versa. In addition to heavily influencing behaviour, roles influence beliefs and attitudes; individuals will change their beliefs and attitudes to correspond with their roles.

Nevertheless, the adoption of the Role Theory to this study is justifiable in that it has deliberately chosen the Role Theory (which it has adapted to the National Role theory), because of the political relevance of role theory in policy decision making and in international politics. Policy makers have constitutional and expected roles to play in the policy process, which have various serious implications on the quality of governance. Examining the underlying politics of policymaking is thus central for the study.

National Role Conception in Nigeria's African Policy

Nigeria's attitude in the African continent and the world from independence has suggested a number of role conceptions following Holsti's typology. Using the prism of the first typology, which is the Mediator role type, it loosely describes Nigeria's regional and global policies. The Mediator role stresses the interposition of bloc conflicts and policy of integration of the system. The sources of such role include location and traditional policy. Nigeria's "traditional policy" has been the uncompromising placement of Africa at the centre of its foreign policy and one of its objectives is the strengthening of African ties through policies aimed at regional and continental integration. It has done this by its position in the 1960s to form an African organization, through a gradualist and cautious process in view of the diversities of the

continent, which would unify the peoples and states and help them fight the common standing blocks to their nationhood; by the initiative to establish a functional regional body, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in 1975; and the contribution to the formation of the African Union (AU) in 2001/2 (Omede, 2003).

On who conceives national roles, Umar, (2009) argues that it should be a joint decision by the presidency, national assembly, ministries, government parastatals, the media should set the agenda, public opinion should count, you scholars from the ivory towers should set the intellectual, philosophical, and research base, et cetera. However, national role conceptions: who conceives it in Nigeria? If at all it is conceived, the President does. The Head of State does. If they can't do so because of their lack of exposure, they have very enlightened persons in their group who do the conceiving. The small group does it again. Role conceptions are elitist, and I mean the power or political elite (the executive). It does not take into consideration what others want for Nigeria. The kitchen cabinet decides. My friend, the kitchen cabinet does it all. We (National Assembly) try to do our bit, but the executive hijacks and manipulates it, with some of the lawmakers being their friends in the cabinet.

The point is that there are several government agencies that ordinarily appear passive or unrelated to foreign policy terrains, but which in actual fact have specific operations either central or tangential to foreign policy making. These institutions included the Ministries of Finance, Defence, Internal Affairs, Agriculture, institutions such as the armed forces and police, and other parastatals and agencies such as the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), the National Agency for Food, Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC), the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC), The Nigerian Institute of International Affairs (NIIA).

Second typology poses a serious problem of choosing the most appropriate role conception type for Nigeria. This is the Regional Leader role type. Nigeria tends to assume different roles at some points and in some ways that are explicable by the role types. It does not have a definite or specific role type. For instance, Nigeria perfectly assumes the role of Regional Leader, championing great causes, offering cutting edge initiatives for West African progress. As a Regional Protector, it has been a key player in the security, well-being and progress of other regions in Africa, including Central Africa (DR Congo, Rwanda), East Africa (Uganda, Eritrea, Somalia and Sudan), and Southern Africa (Angola, Namibia, South Africa, Mozambique, Botswana, and Zimbabwe) (Onyearu, 2008).

Its numerous peace and security initiatives, conflict resolution, dispute settlement landmarks and initiatives for economic and political integration in West Africa in particular and Africa in general, confer on it the position of a Mediator-Integrator. The New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD), African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), and economic initiatives towards African development, impose on Nigeria the burden of Developer (Akindele, 2005).

However, these four role conception types (Mediator, Regional Leader/Protector, Mediator-Integrator, and Developer) seem to have a central thread running through them. Hence, it will not be out of place to make an adaptation of Holsti's taxonomy in such a way that the Regional Leader, Regional Protector and Developer role types are subsumed in Regional Protector role conception type because of the outreach of the roles which include other regions. The other role conception that best fits Nigeria's role conception type from 1960 is the Mediator-Integrator role conception type.

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

Furthermore, all the three administrations had similarity of perspectives of what Nigeria should be in the region and continent. From Obasanjo to Goodluck, the role conceptions were clear, and the perception of Nigeria as a "power" and a "hegemon" is a common thread, except for the Yar'adua era which couldn't completed his administration as a result of his illness and resultant death. The perception of 'regional power' and "hegemon" was a clear departure from the past when Nigerian leaders rather perceived their nation as a "leader". The new perception of power and motivational orientation as hegemon sounded more like an imperialist with a new agenda to foist a Pax Nigeriana on the continent. This may explain the new suspicion and apprehension of Nigeria's intentions when being "nice" in the continent.

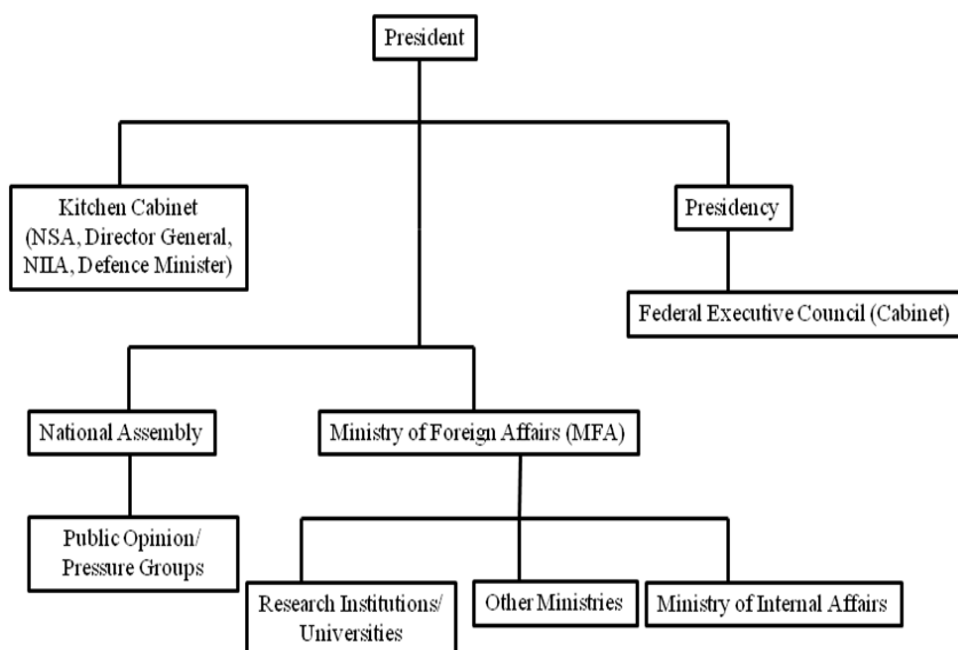
Also, the role conceptions of all the leaders may be clear; however many of them tended to be

repetitious of old national roles conceived by predecessors, except for the case of Yar'adua, his policy was focused on "Citizen Diplomacy" while that of Jonathan is "Transformation Agenda". Another problem was that the roadmap or instrument for performing the role was vague in many cases. Obasanjo's instruments of shuttle and personal diplomacy; while that of Yar'adua and Jonathan are diplomacy, summit and some time vague. At some points, Jonathan provided military aid to stop the war in Mali and crisis in Burkina Faso; however both instruments were mere happenstance and not clearly the roadmaps to actualize their role conceptions.

Among three administrations from 1999 to 2015, the Obasanjo's administration stood out in terms of concrete African roles and foreign policy dynamism. The Jonathan regime followed but later had challenges of its many internal problems while the Yar'adua regime, despite its clear role conceptions, comes last because of his health problem.

In essence, national role conception of Nigeria African policy include seeking peace, stability, trade, to alleviate poverty, and also to put pressure on repressive government, to create good governance. These have been Nigeria's African roles conceived by its leadership at various times.

Table 1: Political Actors in both the Conception and Assumption of Nigeria's Role in Africa



Source: Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, National Assembly, Abuja, 2009

The chart above shows that the president is the primary actor in foreign policy conception.

The Obasanjo administration inherited foreign policy structures and institutions that had been battered and weakened by military misrule, particularly during the latter years of the Abacha administration. Indeed, one of the unfortunate consequences of military rule in the area of foreign relations is the legacy of personalization of policy making by the maximum rulers. This was due to the absence of effective mechanisms for policymaking, the arrogation of excessive powers to the military ruler, the deliberate subversion or marginalization of existing foreign policy making institutions and structures such as the Foreign Service, the Federal Executive Council, research institutes, and policy think-tanks (Fawole, 2004).

The 1999 Constitution was however going to alter this trend by the creation of certain new structures and institutions that would occupy some roles in the foreign policy environment. According to Fawole (2004) the institutions included the Presidency, the National Assembly, the Federal Ministries and Parastatals, and other agencies whose schedules of duties and functions have foreign policy implications. Corroborating this, Senator Ajibola observes that: The Presidency had the day-to-day responsibility for policymaking; the National Assembly is empowered to make laws for governing the country, while the federal ministries and parastatals that constituted the executive branch is to aid the Presidency in

foreign policy making. However, this is what the constitution says, what happens outside it is another matter entirely (Ajibola, 2009).

While Obasanjo's administration was concerned in regaining Nigeria international and national pride and emphasis on national role conception, Yar'adua's administration shifted to citizen diplomacy while that of Jonathan is transformation.

Discussion of Research Findings

1. In the course of the investigation and analysis of the findings, it was found that national roles are discernible in Nigeria's African policy. A study of the politics of national role conceptions in Nigeria has shown that a very small informal or semi-formal political group (the group within the group) conceives external roles of the country, take decisions, and formulate policies. The Federal Cabinet, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, National Assembly, think-tanks, and research-based institutions that are supposed to be decision units in foreign policy formulation have rather been most times, consigned to the waste-bin of policymaking, or manipulated, coaxed, off-loaded, or simply used to rubber-stamp what are purely the ideals of an executive and his kitchen cabinet.

In terms of role conception, all administrations were not different in who does the conception. The foreign policy terrain was very undemocratic as the chief executive and their political group (kitchen cabinet) called the shots and most times circumvented constitutionally recognized institutions and individuals decision units.

2. In terms of the roles conceived and assumed, the study revealed that it has always been premised on the fact that Nigeria would always have a leadership role to play in Africa because whatever is in Africa's interest is invariably in Nigeria's interest. Under various Nigerian administrations, efforts have been made to toe such guidelines and policy constructs, sometimes more faithfully, at other times not. However, the nation has been at a discordant inflection point in its foreign policy. Nigeria's Africa-centred policy has mostly been borne out of sympathy for the African situation, which it believes it could tackle with its enormous human and material resources, wealth and strong military. The implication of these would be that Nigeria's role-driven approach in Africa is prompted by a genuine moral suasion.
3. The third and fourth questions were also answered: there were differences between conception and assumption in most cases as there were limiting factors in occupying conceived roles, such as the Obasanjo's multiple socio-political problems at home, Yar'adua illness as well as the Niger/Delta crisis and the Boko Haram dreaded acts in undermining Jonathan's policy. Other factors in the disparity between conception and performance of roles were international reactions such as the apprehension of Nigeria's real intents in regional helps, like when Ivory Coast initially rejected the Obasanjo offer to assist in arresting the civil crisis in that country in 2001.
4. The study also made tentative statements with a deliberate negative denotation, in an attempt to rigorously investigate and establish the actual situation in regard to Nigeria's role conception and performance towards the African continent. Clarity of national roles seemed to be evident in all the regimes' African policies; but there were weakening factors in the strategies or instruments of policy. All administrations had hierarchy in which orders and government functions flowed, and the chief executive and their cabal controlled the foreign policy process, and sometimes abused such powers. There were differences in conception and performance informed by problems at home and external reactions to certain Nigerian role assumption.

Conclusion

The preoccupation of this study has been to examine national role conceptions and Nigeria's foreign policy from 1999-2015. One pertinent denominator of Nigeria's role conceptions and assumptions in Africa is role strain. Nigeria has constituted itself into a bellwether of African troubles, scaling up its roles all the time and struggling hard in the 1999 up to 2015 to stay relevant in the face of challenges for African leadership by other emerging African politico-economic powers as South Africa, Egypt, Libya, and Ghana. These have led to strains and stresses that the nation has not overcome. These have also overstretched its resources, which partly account for economic disincentives at home and agitations in places like the Niger Delta for what is regarded as government's insensitivity to the problems of the home-front.

In the foreign policy history of Nigeria, an American style and aspirations are discernible: regional

protection, regional hegemony, global influence, active humanitarian policy, interventionism, conflict resolution: all self imposed burden of international leadership that costs fortunes and could be to the detriment of internal politics and economy. For America, the cases of Vietnam, Korea, and Iraq come to mind. For Nigeria, the cases of Liberia, Sierra Leone and Namibia are readily remembered. The use of hard power was apparent in the case of America in those three places mentioned. But for Nigeria, it is difficult to place.

Recommendations

This study recommends a policy shift from wasteful and unrewarding Afrocentrism to a "Nigeriacentrism". This Nigeriacentrism would not imply the abandonment of leadership in Africa; it would mean the use of African leadership/national roles to better the interest of Nigerians, and attending to national issues first which is a more honourable thing to do in the face of competing domestic and external pressures.

Thus, Nigeriacentrism would complement Nigeria's traditional leadership in Africa and the principle of good neighbourliness, which in fact, implies that Nigeria is good to African neighbours only in so far as it serves the purpose of national (citizens') interest.

The problem of Afrocentric policy is that it has been at a very huge cost, and at the expense of Nigerians' happiness. Nigeriacentrism would imply a citizen-friendly foreign policy, more encompassing than the prototype "citizen-based diplomacy" of the Yaradua-Jonathan administration.

The reason why many Nigerians become victims of assault abroad is because they flee to other countries for greener pastures and become susceptible to the intimidation and molestation of their hosts who see them as competing with their limited or abundant national resources and opportunities. Therefore, for the advocates of the policy change, charity must begin at home.

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