

NIGERIA'S ROLE AND NATIONAL INTEREST IN THE SEARCH FOR AFRICAN UNION
INTEGRATION (1963-2020).

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Abstract:

This study interrogates the involvement of Nigeria's role in the quest for the continent's integration towards greater unity, cohesion, and consolidation in the past and present African affairs through the prism of her leadership and determination as demonstrated and as it has made Africa the center-piece of her foreign policy since independence. The study x-rays the support Nigeria has rendered and provided in various ways like anti-colonialism, anti-apartheid regimes, financial and logistics assistance to liberation movements across the continent, formation of Organization of African Unity(OAU) and its transformation to the African Union (AU), Regional Economic Communities(REC), New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD), African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) and African Continental Free Trade Area Agreement (AfCFTA). However, the role being played has not been acknowledged, appreciated, and compensated within Africa as it faces its own domestic challenges such as insurgency, insecurity, banditry, kidnapping inflation, joblessness, and many more. The study moreover revealed that Nigeria is still expected to provide leadership, focus, direction, and support for Africa in all its policies and programs due to her grandstanding principle and mentality about Africa. The study makes use of secondary data to collect and analyze data, while it adopts role theory as its theoretical framework to midwife the investigation and validate the nexus between the role of Nigeria towards Africa Union continental integration for economic and political actualization.

Keywords: Continental Integration, Diplomacy, Domestic Politics, Foreign Policy, National Interest, Sovereignty.

Introduction

Noted and observed that countries design and execute foreign policies in order to guide their external relations as well as promote and protect their fundamental national interests, which include the defense of territorial integrity, promotion of economic, military, and diplomatic strategic interests and all that a country considers as critical to its national interests. This is either to validate or deny the nation's action or inaction in the international arena which has promotes and protects the economic well-being of the people (Ajayi, Njoaguani & Olorunyomi, 2015:70).

Historically, the definition of Nigeria's national interest has primarily reflected realist perspectives. It has occasionally mirrored behavioural and Marxist political economy paradigms. In the early 1960s under the first civilian administration of Prime Minister Tafawa Balewa, Nigeria oscillated between realism and idealism, with the following four principal foreign policy goals:

- i. Decolonization
- ii. Pan-Africanism or African solidarity
- iii. National Economic development
- iv. World peace (Definition of National Interest, Part 2)

Overtime, these cardinal principles have been changing with respect to the dynamics of international relations and politics, decolonization and integration. Nigeria's formal foreign policy principles, as outline in the 1999 Constitution, chapter II section 19 (a-e), consider the promotion of its national interest as vital to an active role within its immediate West African sub-region and continental affairs (Africa practice, nd:4).

Nigeria will not divorced its national interest from its role within the continent. It will often be understood that both are interlinked and are mutually reinforcing (Shinkaye, 2005:298).

The nation's foreign policy makers have consistently worked to ensure that the forces of irredentism and secession in the continent were contained within the existing territorial units of post-independence Africa. This suggests preference for alliances which would protect the territorial integrity of those African states that are fragile in nature and provide at least a diplomatic weapon against any attempts from within or outside the continent to alter the status quo by means of wars of aggression or subversion (Stremlau, 1981:46).

Regional and even global security has become central elements of Nigeria's national interest among its neighbors and the continent at large. Though the core elements of its national interest are articulated, the future direction of its foreign policy recognizes the need to pay attention on its political, economic, security and social dimensions (Eze, 2010:85; Aje-Oitu & Enoma, 2015:119).

The overall target of vision 2020 is based on the principles of Nigeria's foreign policy which are expected to be supportive in advancing the national interest. According to Nigeria's Vision 2020 National Technical Workshop on Foreign Policy Draft Report (2009), as cited in Eze (2010), to achieve that objective, foreign policy will play vital role in the following ways:

- (a) Project a better image for Nigeria and improve the country's relationship with the outside world by cultivating goodwill for the country;
- (b) Project closer and better relations with major powers;
- (c) Pursue the acquisition and transfer of technology, the promotion of trade, investment and cultural relations to boost the ailing industries and manufacturing sector;
- (d) Facilitate rapid and sustained economic growth and development;
- (e) Assist the nation attain political equilibrium peace and stability to reign and be safeguarded;
- (f) Ensure that the nation's leading role in Africa and ECOWAS is sustained and safeguarded;
- (g) Deploy diplomacy to persuade Nigerians in diaspora to be part of nation-building efforts;
- (h) Assist Nigeria to secure a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council
- (i) Ensure the nation's strategic role and military strength as a means of deterrence;
- (j) Seek and encourage high-level visits by government officials and private-sector players to countries abroad that have strategic relevance to Nigeria's interest and vice-versa, for the achievement of Vision 2020 goals;
- (k) Employ success stories elsewhere and domesticate these for the national interest; and
- (l) Ensure Nigeria's ratification and domestication of, and compliance with, international and bilateral obligations and treaties (Eze, 2010:86-87).

It can therefore be deduced that the foreign policy challenge is how Nigeria will achieve the following objectives:

- Nigeria's participation in international institutions;
- Nigeria's participation in global trade and commerce/investment;
- Nigeria's leadership on the African continent;
- Nigeria's position as the foremost black nation in the world; and
- Nigeria's participation and advancement in bilateral relations (Eze, 2010:89).

Therefore, the ideas that shape the foreign policy and national interest of Nigeria, its relations with other countries, the African continent and the world are both domestic and external. These concepts of foreign policy and national interest shape the foreign policies of states (nations) as they strive to promote vital interests abroad (Daniel, 2014:6). The nation's approach to sub-regional security has been largely influenced by the national role conceived for it in international relations and the AU by its leaders with the defining paradigm that ties its national interest to other countries' affairs (Sanusi & Gado, 2018:2).

Nigeria's foreign policy in the contemporary context has been premised solely on its national interest with emphasis on national security and welfare, regional, continental and global peace, integration as well as robust bilateral and multilateral diplomacy that is tailored towards strong strategic partnership with the AU and friendly states in the global arena (Akinboye, 2013:58).

According to Folarin (2010):

Roles in Africa and the world have in more recent times come under criticism for lacking basic strategy that characterizes most ambitious foreign policies whose principal goal is to secure and further national interest... The national interest are multifaceted: primary, secondary or long-range. Primary interests are central to a nation's immediate survival and security of a nation's wealth, economic growth, preservation of national culture of heritage, and power. The external attitude of foreign policy and national roles of a nation is to be shaped by its national interest (Folarin, 2010:2).

In their own comments, Vanheukelom, Byiers, Bilal & Woolfrey (2016) are of the view that:

Many of the gains or losses of regional processes rests on the national interests of regional hegemon. The effects of regional hegemon on regional integration processes can be beneficial with lead countries taking the ideas to help overcome coordination problems or unlock statements. South Africa, Ethiopia, Kenya and Nigeria do so far, a number of reasons in their own regional institutions. But, while hegemon can help maneuver regional agendas, they can also prevent regional agendas or instrumentalized regional institutions to serve their own interests at the expense of general regional objectives (Vanheukelom, Byiers, Bilal & Woolfrey, 2016:20).

Furthermore, there is a general belief in Nigeria that Africa is Nigeria and Nigeria is Africa. It has a perception which navigates its position in the maintenance of regional security in Africa. This is not only to ensure regional security in Africa, but also to avoid a situation where African states would become staging posts for external powers to maintain their global interests. The foreign policy objectives of Nigeria place Africa as a critical and fundamental factor in its strategic national interest. The responsibility of Nigeria to ensure economic, social, technological and environmental security that will raise the quality of life and create freedom for the people to gravitate towards regional economic and political integration on the continental platform of the AU rests on its shoulder (Yoroms, 2005:234).

It is in Nigeria's overall national interest to make Africa more united, stronger and secure. The hope of the AU certainly depends on the commitment of all the member-states to the continental unity project, but at the same time, it demands that all members work together to overcome the contradictions and challenges carried over by all from the OAU (Wapmuk, 2013:123).

buttressing the assertion, Eminue (2013) submits that:

Nigeria's national interest can be identified as predicated on the nation's military, economic political and social security. Anything that will enhance the capacity of Nigerians to define their national security must be seen as being in their national interest. Anything that will promote Nigeria's economic growth and development is in the national interest, anything that will make Nigeria politically stable is also in the national interest (Eminue, 2013:76).

The foregoing analysis indicates that an idea of national interest is national security which entails the possession of the capacity to maintain, protect or preserve legitimate national interests in war or in peace. This includes securing a nation's borders and maintaining its independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity. Thus, Nigeria's security agenda have given detailed below:

- Defense of the nation's land, air and sea boundaries and the preservation of its territorial integrity;
- The creation of a credible defense and security capacity for the purpose of deterring aggressors;
- The encouragement of non-violent settlement of all interstate disputes through conciliation, mediation and arbitration;
- Protection of lives and property of Nigerians both within the country and in other parts of the world;

- The projection of domestic political stability and world peace, including stability in the West African sub-region, especially among Nigeria's immediate neighbors, other regions in Africa and the continent at large; and
- The protection of the human, mineral, animal and other resources within the country's land and maritime boundaries as recognized under international law (Eminue, 2013:78).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Role Theory

Role theory first drawn concern in foreign policy literature after the information of Holsti's (1970) study of national role conceptions. Walker (1987) sets the steps for further works in foreign policy and international relations' use of this theory which has seeking, institutional and analysing values for the study of foreign policy. Descriptively, role theory provides a rich concept for starting the beliefs, images and identities that individuals and groups develop for themselves and others, as well as types of processes and structures that govern governments in particular situations. Institutionally, role theory allows the analyst to focus on any level of analysis generally used in the study of foreign policy in addition to bringing those stages through a peace background that joins agents and structures. The analysing value of role theory may derive from its own middle-range theories as well as connecting its concept to other theoretical views (Theis, 2009:3).

It is derived from the concept of role as used by sociologists, psychologists and anthropologists in distinguishing individuals or groups, role perceptions and actual performance in any social setting. This could be family, peer group or religions group, workplace community, market and political groups are also applicable (Folarin, 2010:89). It is a perspective in sociology and social psychology that considers most of everyday activities to be the acting out of socially-defined categories. Each role is a set of rights, duties, expectations, norms and behaviours that a person has to face and fulfil (Role theory, 2017:3).

It refers to the explanation of what happens when people are acting out in a social process and the consequences of doing so. The essence is to provide a model of behaviour in a specific situation like the principal function of role-playing in conflict resolution and discovering details of a manifested behaviour which helps elucidate social positions in education, the economy, science and government, among many categories (Role theory leadership, 2016). Various scholars are credited to have been the founders and proponents of role theory, and these include Margaret Mead, Talcott Parson, Robert K. Merton (1957), B.F Skinner, Mintzberg (1978), Ivan Nye (1976), Linton (1945), Goffman (1959), Turner (1956), Lopata(1991) and Stryker (1968). The theory assumed formalized discussion in the 1920s (Role Theory, 2017:5).

Role theory is concerned with part of the crucial elements of social features attitude ways and functions. It narrates role by assuming that people are part of social s formations and hold beliefs for their self-manners well as for other people. Recent developments suggest both centrifugal and integrative forces within the role field. The former reflects differing perspectives of commitment by scholars, confusions and disagreements on the use of role concepts, and the fact that role theory is used to analyse various forms of social system. The latter reflects the shared basic concerns of the field and efforts by role theorists to seek a broad version of the field that will accommodate a wide range of interests (Biddle, 1986:68).

The linkage and relevance of role theory to this study lies in the attempt to interpret and examine the foreign policy behaviours of the Nigerian state as projected by different actors with varying ideological and political orientations. It x-rays the role of each player in the conception,' formulation and implementation of the country's foreign policy objectives and principles in the context of its Afrocentric posture and its role in the AU regional integration process.

Furthermore, Nigeria's role expectations at different concentric circles of its foreign policy have generated multiple role perceptions, thus leading to unintended role conflict. The direct implication of this is confusion and dissonance in the domestic institutional mechanisms that impel foreign policy formulation and implementation (Fayomi, Chidozie & Ajayi, 2015:180).

Like all theories, role theory has its own shortcomings, as argued by scholars. The shortcomings include the following: (i) the central weakness of role theory is in describing and explaining deviant behaviour; (ii) does not and cannot explain how role expectations came to be what they are; (iii) does not explain when and how role expectations change; (iv) it has hard time explaining social deviance when it does not correspond to a pre-specified role; (v) it is only a snapshot of activity performed by an individual and may not be representative of everyone and for all time (Role Theory Leadership, 2016:3).

Nigeria's Role in the African Union

It is noted that the AU is a continuation of the major discourse that started during colonial rule in the African continent, centering on the nature, character and dynamics of further relations among the newly independent countries in the context of the prevailing international system at that time. It centered majorly on finding appropriate and effective approaches to the lingering security and developmental dilemma then confronting the newly independent countries which were deeply rooted in wider pan-African movements and moderated by developments in the dominant Cold War international system at that time between the West and the East (Sesay, 2008:10; Ogunsanwo, 2010:44).

Nigeria sees the AU as a new instrument for the economic emancipation and political integration in Africa and contemplates utilizing foreign policy to promote and sustain the union in a manner to build African capacity to respond to emerging challenges of globalization, insecurity, governance, corruption, civil wars, refugees, migration and climate change. Nigeria has until now, been very instrumental in the maintenance of peace and security in Africa and managed to positively impact the decolonization of the continent. Africa's place in Nigeria's foreign policy formulation and thrusts can be explained in terms of the notion that the nation is Africa and vice versa, with a high premium put on the country's relations with other countries in the continent. Africa has also been the center-piece and strong tool in Nigeria's foreign policy since 1960. Also noteworthy in this connection is Nigeria's adoption of the idea of non-interference in the domestic politics of another country with the exception of Apartheid South Africa and cases of political assassination of leaders (Akinterinwa, 2005:12).

Nigeria's role in the AU is best understood within the wider context of the country's overall orientation and commitment to Africa in its foreign and defense policies. The orientation which has largely been noted as Afrocentrism dates back to its independence in 1960, with Nigeria's political leadership determined to pursue foreign policy options designed to promote the interests of Africa. The policy is driven by the belief in *pax Nigeriana*, which stresses that Nigeria should play the big-brother role to other African countries. Its role in the AU is motivated by its commitment to the unity, peace and development of the continent. Its beliefs, that unity in Africa should be a gradual process in contrast to the radical approach of Late Libyan leader, Muammar Ghadaffi, who favoured immediate unification of African states under a single government (Nna-Emeka Okereke, 2012:6). As such, the nation has been playing a significant role in Africa since its independence in 1960 including the struggle for the eradication of colonialism and racism in the continent (Ashaver, 2014:3). Hence, the continent of Africa has been designated as Nigeria's primary sphere of diplomatic interest. Nations with large power capabilities measured in terms of military strength, economic profile, favourable demographic matrix and internal political stability are in the habit of maintaining spheres of international influence (Saliu & Oshewolo, 2018:10). This underscores Nigeria's commitment to world peace as a foreign policy objective and an element of national interest and cherished domestic values.

Its impacts to the various international peace-keeping and peace-enforcement missions around the world are a great attestation of her commitment to world peace and security. In this vein, very few African states and third world countries have posted comparable records of such commitment (Afinotan, 2010:303).

Key elements of Nigeria's role in the AU are as stated below:

1. Monetary Assistance

Nigeria's commitment to the AU is noted in its financial contributions to the organization. The AU inherited some of the financial problems that handicapped the OAU, and such funding challenges have since expanded budgetary allocations to about five times higher than that of the OAU. Nigeria remains one of the five major financiers of the AU operational budget which gives it full voting rights and the union's support for its nationals sponsored for key/strategic positions in various international organizations. By 1987, Nigeria initiated a concert of medium powers, more widely known as the Lagos Forum, to facilitate multilateral cooperation and to enable member-states to exert greater collective influence on world affairs (US. Library of Congress, nd:3; Adigbua, 2017:162; Ogunmubi, 2016:10).

2. Promotion of Peace in Africa

In the area of peace and security in Africa, Nigeria has consistently played a prominent role following: the ratification of the protocol the Peace and Security Council (PSC) in December, 2002. The PSC became fully operational in 2004, and Nigeria chaired the council in mediating in the Darfur crisis in Western Sudan, Cote d'Ivoire and other crisis spots. Nigeria's significant contributions to Africa's idea to end Colonialism and anti-racism were greatly supported with the formation of the AU. In the same vein of African brotherhood, it engaged in peace-keeping missions in states affected by crises (Nne-Emeka Okereke, 2012:8). The efforts that Nigeria has played in various international organizations over the years have been proactive, articulate and consistently defending African concerns and interests (Okunnu, 2010:2; Ojekwe, 2010:30).

3. Africa Peace and Security Architecture

Nigeria's commitment to the AU is further demonstrated by its role in the implementation of Africa's Peace and Security Architecture (APSA). It participates in AU capacity-building exercises for the military, police and civilian components of the African Standby Force (ASF) which is an integral part of APSA and in ECOMOG activities. It engages in the progress and consolidation of democracy, good governance and human rights in the continent by approving the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance. It has remained committed to Article 3(9) of the AU Constitutive Act, which seeks to promote democratic principles and institutions, popular participation and good governance in Africa, especially in countries like Guinea, Mali, Senegal, Liberia, Ghana, Niger etc. It reformed its own process in 2002, 2006 and 2010, with the aim of restoring integrity to its electoral system (Sarkin, 2009:3; Nna-Emeka Okereke, 2012:10).

4. Nigeria's role as a security actor has also been noted, so that it resonates beyond West Africa.

Haastrup & Lucia (2014) posited that:

. . . While West Africa provides the space to exercise its security prowess, there is arguably a keenly constructed narrative that places Nigeria as a leader within the whole continent. The emphasis on a transnational outlook, in part, explains Nigeria's robust engagement in African security affairs especially since the creation of the AU (Haastrup & Lucia, 2014:7-8).

5. Nigeria's role in the entrenchment of democracy in African countries has also been remarkable.

Its role in democratization has been effective in West Africa and beyond within the African continent, that has emerged as one of the hotspots of political instability and protracted civil wars in the post-Cold War era. It assumed responsibility for democratization and the strengthening of conflict resolution and intervention. It originally such interventions, having noted that no matter how effective the interventions were, it was difficult to establish peace and stability without democratic therapy (Osaghae, 2010:55).

According to Osaghae (2010):

The lessons and benefits of Nigeria's role in democratization are fairly obvious: first, it strengthened the appreciation of the recursive relationship between democracy and conflict resolution, which necessitated the building of capacity in this area both for peacekeeping forces and the foreign policy establishment. But this did not apply to Nigeria alone, ECOWAS also entrenched democratization and good governance as instruments of conflict resolution and peace-building. Second, the interventions showed Nigeria as a promoter and defender of democratization, including peaceful co-existence, free and fair elections, constitutional rule; and conflict resolution. Third, it restored and enhanced Nigeria's status as a credible regional power which increased its influence within regional and international organizations. Finally, the role served as a surety for Nigeria's own continued democratization as, increasingly, the strength of its voice and ability to influence events in other countries depended on the extent to which it remains a thriving and stable democracy (Osaghae, 2010:74).

6. Nigeria has been promoting the integration of the ECOWAS security apparatus into the continental APSA which performs on the logic that the sub-regional groupings like ECOWAS constitute the building blocks of African security more generally and Nigeria's broader role in Africa will to a larger extent be measured by its engagement in West Africa among an evolving mindset, just as its role in Africa will be measured within the rubric of assurance, prevention and protection mostly tied to ECOWAS. It has been instrumental in creating these dimensions within APSA. Its role within APSA has helped to prioritize some of its own security threat perceptions, including piracy, trafficking, terrorism, and recently, banditry and kidnapping (Haastrup & Lucia, 2014:8; Dauda, Ahmad & Keling, 2019:7; Odigbo, Udaw & Igwe, 2014:8).

7. Nigeria has continued to safeguard its own interests and those of the union. It involves, among others, standing up against anyone or countries that try to, through both subtle and not-so-subtle means, to hijack the union for their use. It guarantees an increased role for civil society in the affairs of the continent to promote good governance (Shinkaiye, 2005:94).

8. Nigeria's role in the AU has grown wider since the Arab Spring.

Nna-Emeka Okereke (2014) opined that:

In the spring of 2011, the Arab world was engulfed by popular demonstrations and rebellion, generally referred to as the Arab spring. These events erupted in Tunisia and also engulfed Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Libya, Syria and Yemen, as well as leading to an escalation of insecurity in Africa. Central to the protesters' demands were greater political freedom, economic opportunity and an end to systemic corruption in affected states. Other demands were for greater political pluralism, transparency and political accountability. These events brought about regime change in Egypt, Libya, Tunisia and Yemen while Morocco, Algeria and other Arab countries embarked on basic socio-economic and political reforms without regime change. The effects of the Arab Spring were felt in Africa as AU was compelled to intervene in the peace process in Libya. In West Africa, the influx of weapons stolen from Libya heightened the sub-region's vulnerability to terrorism and rebellion as Nigeria has not been spared of the insecurities emanating from the Arab spring (Nna-Emeka Okereke, 2014:16).

9. The foregoing underscores Nigeria's commitment to the ECOWAS peace process in Mali and the implementation of United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolution 2071 which allows for military and other intervention and assistance intended to check the spread of insurgency and terrorism from having a huge impact in Nigeria and elsewhere. Its contributions in AU matters included the formation of NEPAD, on which her and South Africa worked together seriously with other countries to develop the initiative and ensure its adoption in the OAU summit held in Lusaka, Zambia in July, 2002.

2001. It should be noted that Nigeria suggested name NEPAD, in addition to its role in the establishment of the APRM, which encouraged both vigour and great direction for the adoption of the peace and security commission in the new AU Commission (Umezurike, Iwu, Asuelime & Umezurike, 2017:21; Olagunju, 2014:267).

10. Related perspective through which one can understand and appreciate the role of Nigeria to the AU is through the Lagos Plan of Action (LPA), which remains the boldest step taken by African leaders to save the continent from the malaise of economic underdevelopment, political instability and insecurity (Gusau, 2013:178). Again, his great impact was felt in the notion about what should be the method or modalities for realizing the African integration agenda. While there was a strong agreement on the need for integration, there were conflicting views on what should be the real technical framework or organization setup to be used (Oshewole, 2019:2; Okunnu, 2010:2).

11. Nigeria Technical Aid Corps (TAC)

It was established in 1987 by Decree No. 27 as a foreign policy tool to promote goodwill, foster social and economic development in partner-countries. It is structured to provide human capital assistance in all fields of social and economic development (Mailafia, 2010:193). It revived the old tradition of Nigeria's technical assistance to other African states (Asobie, 2002:91). It functions as a channel through which collaboration is enhanced through streamlined programmes of assistance to other developing countries, especially in Africa. It shows an enormous amount of local ownership and knowledge transfer from Nigerian experts to participating personnel of the recipient countries.

According to Boalji Akinyemi as cited by Akinterinwa (2012), the Technical Aid Corps (TAC) scheme was given a four-point original objective which included:

- To share Nigeria's know-how and expertise with other ACP countries;
- To give assistance on the basis of the assessed and perceived needs of the recipient countries;
- To promote cooperation and understanding between Nigeria and the recipient countries; and
- To facilitate meaningful contacts between the youths of Nigeria and those of the recipient countries (Akinterinwa, 2012:29)

TAC has played a cardinal role in cementing existing relations between Nigeria and beneficiary-countries. It has given a positive boost to the conduct of the nation's foreign policy through its efforts to enhance both sub-regional and regional cooperation (Ogbonna & Ogunnubi, 2018:2; Nigeria-Technical Aid corps/Lend CD).

To the late Prime Minister of Ethiopia, Meles Zenawi, cited by the Directorate of Technical Aid Corps (2019) in a report of the APRM:

Commendations for Nigerian Technical Aid Corps scheme as one of Nigeria's contributions to the socio-economic development among the African, Caribbean and the Pacific countries. It is the only volunteer programmes/services of this kind currently operated by an African country and therefore worthy of emulation as it challenges the commonly held perception that Africa is only a recipient of aid (DTAC, 2019:5).

12. Nigeria as the champion of the reparation drive in Africa.

Its role extended to the drive for reparation for African losses to the colonial masters. The drive demanded acknowledgement of the damage done to Africa; atonement for such damage; and redress, to halt the continuing implications of such damage. Conservative estimates claimed that the slave trade cost black Africa some hundred million people. It is the quest to redress the negative impact that necessitated the initiation of the reparation drive by Nigeria on behalf of other African countries/people (Okafor, 2009:118). According to Nwosu (1993), as cited in Okafor (2019):

We are now demanding from a world that pretends to have forgotten to take a second look at Africa, and to see in every African tragedy or disaster, the foot prints of our erstwhile alien predators...The inescapable truth is that they are where they are only because we are where they placed us (Okafor, 2009:118).

13. Nigeria seeks to readdress the critical relationship between Europe/developed nations and Africa with a view to determining whether the developments are new measures to appease continent for the centuries of plunder and cement Euro-African relationship or just another set of strategies to further create a stranglehold on the region economically and make it perpetually dependent (Folarin, 2007:14). Ambassador Sanders (USA) (2011), as cited in Huffpost (2011), said that:

Leadership by far is Nigeria's first role on the continent as it is a key political, security and trading partner in the sub-region and with other world nations. Nigeria's development role is next, particularly, as Nigeria and the rest of Africa should next be emerging frontiers for economic growth, markets and trade... (Sanders, 2011:3).

14. As a great promoter of African affairs and spokesman, Nigeria has used its relative material endowment and oil to enter into joint economic ventures with some countries in the continent without necessarily pinning its eyes on any returns (Saliu, 2005:293). In its afro-centric foreign policy, the West African sub-region remains the first line of implementations, given its vast size, natural, economic and human resources, and large market. It perceives itself as having an historic mission to exercise hegemonic influence in the West African sub-region and the continent at large (Okunnu, 2010:2; Springer, 2011:6).

15. Nigeria played a pivotal role in the establishment of NEPAD. The merger of the Millennium Partnership for Africa's Recovery Programme (MAP) and the OMEGA plan for Africa influenced by the plan for African development which was initiated by President Olusegun Obasanjo led to the emergence of NEPAD (Kolawole, 2004:250). Moreover, the adoption of NEPAD spearheaded by it exemplified how the country re-directs its interest in the new world order (Owa, 2012:64). At the global level, Nigeria has been calling for the democratization of the UNSC by increasing the number of the permanent members with veto power to include deserving African member-states like Nigeria, South Africa and Egypt (Okafor, 2009:117).

16. Furthermore, Nigeria played a leading role in coordinating a 22-country African boycott of the Olympic Games in Montreal, Canada, to protest New Zealand's sporting links with apartheid South Africa (Ordu, 2019:2).

17. During 1973-1974 Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) oil crisis, Nigeria sold petroleum products at reduced prices to African states (Aluko, 1966:429). Its view in African on diaspora predisposed it to settle the salaries of protesting workers in the West Indies (Adigbuo, 2012: 19). It severed diplomatic relations with France it tested its atomic bomb in the Sahara Desert in the 1970s, expelling the French ambassador and his staff and closing Nigeria's ports and airports to French ships and planes (BBC News).. In the recent past, the Federal Government of Nigeria under the leadership of President Muhammadu Buhari donated \$500,000, about 350 electoral kits and seven vehicles to the government of Guinea Bissau to facilitate the successful conduct of its 2018 legislative election.

However, big gap exists between Nigeria's role in the AU and the socio-economic development of the country. For example, Nigeria's political system remains fragile; yet its role in the AU signify it as a nation of strength and might. The lack of stability in the Nigerian polity is manifested in the numerous socio-economic problems in the country, including the civil war of 1967-1970, religious and sectarian crises, Niger Delta militant activities, military rule, Boko Haram insurgency, the current Fulani/herdsman-farmer crisis, kidnapping and armed banditry. Other problems are mass poverty, corruption, and the lack of purposeful leadership. Essentially, the country has thus not been able to effectively and adequately leverage its role in the AU to gain national benefits (Umezurike, Iwu, Asueline & Umezurike, 2017:24). Also observed is the notion held by many that Nigeria refuses to take opportunity of its strong involvement in various peacekeeping operations around the world by not

having equal economic, military and political rewards for its participation (Sule, 2013:20; Adetula, 2012:65)

On policy confusion, Ogunsanwo (2010) noted that:

Scholars interested in Nigeria's external relations have often observed that lapses in our foreign policy over the years arguing that undue idealism or under radicalism rather than considerations of real politic, more often than not, influenced our actions in the past and calling for a change in the future where decisions are made at the headquarters going through the normal bureaucratic processes, it is possible to have these considerations taken into account. No two situations are however, the same and in some cases, decisions are taken at post based on local conditions and within the parameters already agreed before-hand. On some other occasions, even decisions at headquarters may exclude the ministry and its political head (Ogunsanwo, 2010:53).

Other challenges arising from Nigeria's foreign policy projections in regard to regional integration include:

1. Accusations of hegemonic aspirations: Nigeria has been so accused concerning ECOMOG which has been perceived as no more than an instrument of her strong influence in Africa and West Africa. It is perceived as pursuing a policy of arrogant unilateralism (Kolapo, 2013:200; Nuamah, 2003:17).

2. Declining capacity for funding peace-keeping missions abroad and weak support for new foreign policy adventures (Kolapo, 2013:198-200)

3. Non-protection of Nigerians abroad where they are often subjected to inhuman treatment and denied certain entitlements even when they meet the specified requirements in their receiving states outside Nigeria. For example, visa requirements for Nigerians travelling abroad have been extra-stringent in some countries (Adeniji, 2005:45; Saliu, 2013:14)

4. Non-democratization of the policy-making process for the public to participate in the formulation of foreign policy (Adeniji, 2005:47).

5. The evident disconnect between diplomatic and political activities.

6. The lack of strategic planning in the pursuit of identified objectives.

7. Social order mismanagement which has given rise to intergroup and anti-state violence (Adeniyi, 2015:48; Mann, 2013:13).

8. The nature and character of Nigeria's colonial history and the associated legacies of colonialism, and the nature of the nation's federal system and its impact on foreign policy (Kolapo, 2013:201).

According to Omole & Omotosho (2010):

Nigeria's the lack-luster foreign policy has narrowed down the plethora of policy choices at the domestic level. Nigeria is characterized by mass poverty, grave insecurity, dilapidated economic and social infrastructure, which has triggered the forces of corruption, marginalization, ethnicity and militancy as distinguishing features of polity. A nation cannot play a superpower role outside her territory when her citizens are plagued by insecurity, spiraling inflation, high unemployment index, macro-economic instability and recurrent fears of national disintegration (Omole & Omotosho, 2010:288).

CONCLUSION

It is noted that Nigeria is a giant country with large population, huge natural resources and enormous manpower to navigate the ship of Africa toward a united continent as it has been able to exhibit those roles in the past, while it is encouraged and have the moral courage to continue to provide leadership and support for greater African continental integrative.

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