

## THE OPTION OF ECONOMIC DIPLOMACY IN NIGERIA'S FOREIGN POLICY

**C.N. Ajaebili, PhD**

Department of History and International Studies  
Kogi State University, Anyigba  
Nigeria.

### **Abstract**

*Every vibrant foreign policy derives its strength from the domestic angle, that is, from the needs of the country and the populace. For several years past, Africa was the centerpiece of Nigeria's foreign policy and, therefore, spent heavily pursuing foreign policies of decolonization and apartheid. This policy emphasized aggressive championing of the freedom of African countries such as Congo, Angola and Mozambique then reeling under the yoke of colonialism and those under minority racist regimes such as Zimbabwe and South Africa. Nigeria did not waver to commit moral, financial and diplomatic support in pursuit of this policy. This paper advocates a change in focus and highlights the imperatives of economic diplomacy in Nigeria's foreign policy. It suggests that Nigeria's pressing economic problems should be holistically examined and tackled first, which will then form the basis of a vibrant foreign policy. It is believed that when the living standards of citizens are enhanced, the approach will earn Nigeria and our leaders respect not only at home but also in the comity of nations.*

### **Introduction**

Foreign policy refers to actions chosen by the national government to maximize its strategic goals and objectives in the international arena. Every state will have established goals, a set of options, and an algorithm for deciding which option is most appropriate in meeting its goals<sup>1</sup>. Thus, foreign policies are the strategies that guide the actions of governments in the international system as they spell out the objectives state leaders pursue in a given situation or relationship<sup>2</sup>. For Funso Adesola, "foreign policy could be seen as the totality of all actions, decisions, overtures, and /or interactions between and among states in the international system"<sup>3</sup>. Put differently, foreign policy could be based on economics, politics, culture or the creating of co-operation or understanding among nations of the world. It is the sum total of the interactions between and among domestic economies and policies of world nations. Since independence, Africa had been the corner stone of Nigeria's foreign policy.

Issues that concerned the continent were the primary focus of the Nigerian government. Nigeria played unmatched role in restoring peace to conflict-ridden African countries such as Congo, Sudan, Liberia and Sierra-Leone. In these endeavours, Nigeria committed huge human and material resources. Although Nigeria played the role of a big brother, despite its sustained assistance, it has not been accorded the appropriate recognition for its leadership role in the continent. Instead, Nigeria has been the butt of derision by several African states. For instance, some Francophone African countries brazenly disdain Nigeria and exhibit hostility by subjecting Nigerians living in their midst to varying degrees of torture and humiliation. The poor perception of Nigeria in the international community is attributed to ineptitude in political leadership and economic comatose into which the country has been steeped for several years<sup>4</sup>. This paper, therefore, argues that economic diplomacy should be the main thrust of Nigeria's foreign policy in the new political dispensation as it will go a long way in solving several of the pressing economic problems that have bedeviled the country.

### **Background to Nigeria's Foreign Policy**

The historical antecedents of Nigeria's foreign policy owes much to the vision of Alhaji Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, Nigeria's first Prime Minister and Head of Government, October 1960 to January 1966, and can be located in his famous speeches during the immediate pre and post independence periods. These speeches include his statement in the House of Representatives on August 20, 1960; his Independence Day Address on October 1, 1960 and his Acceptance Speech on the occasion of Nigeria's admission into the membership of the United Nations in New York on October 8, 1960. From the late 1950s especially from 1958 when he became head of the Self-government and when Nigeria's Independence was slated for October 1, 1960, Balewa articulated in these speeches the fundamental principles that would guide Nigeria's external relations after independence and the basis upon which the country would relate with other countries of the world, as well as what its posture would be towards international organizations.

Although a critical look on the speeches show the paramount importance that the government placed on continental and global issues, it can not be doubted that an overwhelming and significant emphasis was placed on African issues and problems. Thus, during his UN acceptance speech, Balewa stated that:

So far I have concentrated on the problems of Africa. Please do not think that we are not interested in the problems of the rest of the world; we are intensely interested in them and hope to be allowed to assist in finding solutions to them through this organization, but being human we are naturally concerned first with what affects our immediate neighborhoods<sup>5</sup>.

Beyond these, Balewa ensured the effective realization of the newly independent country's foreign policy after independence and was not quick in appointing a minister for the Ministry of External Affairs. It was not until 1961 that he appointed Hon. Jaja Nwachukwu as minister of foreign affairs and still ensured that his views of Nigeria's foreign policy were upheld<sup>6</sup>. Nigeria's foreign policy objectives are a reflection of the country's national interest. And every foreign policy is a dynamic process that is determined by the domestic needs and aspirations of the country coupled with certain practical economic, political and socio-cultural forces in the international environment<sup>7</sup>. Therefore, the major goal of Nigeria's foreign policy is to protect and to promote the country's national interest. The objectives of Nigeria's foreign policy are enshrined in Chapter 2, Section 19 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria under the rubric of Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy, thus : promotion and protection of the national interest; promotion of African integration and support for African unity; promotion of international co-operation for the consolidation of universal peace and mutual respect among all nations and elimination of discrimination in all its manifestations; respect for international law and treaty obligations as well as the seeking of settlement of international disputes by negotiation, mediation, conciliation, arbitration and adjudication; and promotion of a just world economic order<sup>8</sup>.

### ***Principles of Nigeria's Foreign Policy***

It was at the UN on October 8, 1960 during his speech that Abubakar Tafawa Balewa dwelt upon the cardinal principles that would underpin Nigeria's foreign policy, and scholars have generally agreed that the basic principles of the pronouncements are as follows:

- i. The Principle of Non-Alignment: The policy of non-alignment rejects formal alliance with the existing ideological and military power blocs of the Capitalist West led by the United States and the Communist East led by the Soviet Union in the post World War II international system. This policy was adopted by Nigeria and other newly independent states of Africa and Asia to help promote international peace and security in view of the Cold War conflict between the two super power blocs of NATO and the Warsaw Pact.
- ii. Legal Equality of States: Nigeria adopted the principle of respect for the legal equality, sovereignty and territorial integrity of all states designed to protect the small and newly independent states from the domineering influence of the developed nations. Moreover, the principle of legal equality underscores the assumption that all states are equal in the comity of nations with equal opportunity to advance their views and interests through the media of International Organizations.
- iii. Non-Interference in the Domestic Affairs of all other States: Nigeria upheld the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries. During the Nigeria Civil War of 1967 – 1970, the then General Gowon's regime maintained that the war was an internal affair and therefore vigorously discouraged other countries from encouraging the secession of Biafra<sup>9</sup>.
- iv. The Principle of Multilateralism: This implies the freedom to seek membership of both continental and global multilateral organizations. Membership of these International Organizations will enable Nigeria pursue its interests and contribute to the common goals of the organizations.
- v. Africa as the Cornerstone of Nigeria's External Relations: As stated above, Africa has been the centerpiece of Nigeria's foreign policy since Independence. And in the pursuit of this Afro-centric foreign policy it has assisted liberation movements in various parts of the continent thereby dismantling the last vestiges of colonialism. Besides, Nigeria has shown commitment in the implementation of this policy through efforts at peaceful resolution of conflicts in the continent "and the championing of the struggle to uplift the socio-economic wellbeing of the Africans through continental programmes such as the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD), and African development Bank (ADB) assisted sustainable economic development programmes"<sup>10</sup>.

It is important to note that every foreign policy is the reflection of the personal idiosyncrasies and aspirations of the leadership of the country. Nigeria's foreign policy during the First Republic was conservative and pro-British.

The conservative posture of Nigeria's foreign policy in the Balewa years was evident in his words: "we are grateful to the British officers whom we have known first as masters, and then as leaders, and finally as partners, but always as friends"<sup>11</sup>. But the economy of a country should be a determinant factor in the direction of its foreign policies. A nation that is economically dependent cannot lay positive claim to political independence. This is against the backdrop of the fact that a strong economic foundation will provide a sound basis for effective pursuit of foreign policy.

### ***Economic Diplomacy: Conceptual Clarifications***

At this point, it is imperative to make some clarifications of the concept of economic diplomacy. This brand of diplomacy involves the decision-making, policy-making, and advocating of the sending state's business interests, and requires the application of technical expertise that analyze the effects of a country's (receiving state) economic situation on its political climate and on the sending state's economic interests. The sending state and host state, foreign business leaders as well as government decision-makers work in synergy on some important issues in foreign policy, such as technology, the environment and HIV/AIDS as well as in the traditional areas of trade and finance. Qualities needed for proper execution of economic diplomacy are versatility, sound judgment and strong business skills<sup>12</sup>. The scope of economic diplomacy comprises international and domestic economic issues including the "rules for economic relations between states". Due to increased globalization and the resultant interdependence among states, economic diplomacy has gone deeper into domestic decision making to cover policies relating to production, exchange of goods, services and instruments (official development assistance). Economic diplomacy is therefore, defined as:

The process through which countries tackle the outside world, to maximize their national gain in all the fields of activity including trade, investment and other forms of economically beneficial exchanges, where they enjoy comparative advantage; it has bilateral, regional and multilateral dimensions, each of which is important<sup>13</sup>.

Thus, economic diplomacy encourages and promotes investment, protects deals from inception to signing of contracts and in fact markets an entire nation as if it is a business outfit itself. The diplomats would conduct trade events and seminars, attend trade shows, visit potential investors and be proactive in marketing the attributes of their country. Success in this endeavour requires knowledge of the business process, of the home country's economy, and of salesmanship. In this wise, and with proper training, diplomats become essential link in the strengthening of their economies by private investors, with governments facilitating the process<sup>14</sup>.

### ***Prospects for Nigeria's Economic Diplomacy***

By 1963 Nigeria has shown commitment to use diplomacy as an important tool for the economic development of the African continent. Thus, in a speech at the African Summit Conference in May, 1963, Balewa maintained that Nigeria's position was that "African unity could be achieved by taking practical steps in economic, educational, scientific and cultural cooperation". In addition, although Nigeria endorsed the ideas of an African Common Market, it was of the view that for it to be practicable it must be based on certain groupings such as a North African grouping, a West African grouping, and an East African grouping. Thus, Nigeria was one of the advocates of practical approach to economic cooperation and integration in Africa, and this became the *modus operandi* of the Organization of African Unity, now African Union (AU), on economic matters. This was born out of the increasing realization that the newly won independence by African states was meaningless without concomitant economic development<sup>15</sup>.

Nigeria's foreign policy has been geared towards improving the well being of Nigerians. This is essential for protecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Nigerian state. It was in 1987 that the Babangida administration used economic diplomacy as a major policy thrust of that regime. This novel idea was propagated by Major General Ike Nwachudwu, then, Minister of Foreign Affairs. The thrust of this policy was to make Nigeria's foreign policy serve the purpose of economic development at home given that the regime inherited a prostrate economy from its predecessors<sup>16</sup>. Seeking and securing the goodwill and support of friendly nations that have had a long history of good relations with Nigeria will help achieve a thriving economic diplomacy. But it is of paramount importance to improve the weak infrastructure back home, as a country with poor infrastructural facilities can not command the respect of other nations in the international system. The current approach by President Goodluck E. Jonathan of appointing career diplomats as ambassadors to Nigeria's foreign missions is a welcome development. Our foreign missions should therefore use their expertise to achieve Nigeria's intention of realizing its domestic policy of economic diplomacy.

The missions should be well funded to achieve better leadership and results. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs should monitor and assess the work of each mission to ensure that our policy of economic diplomacy is thoroughly understood and implemented to the letter. The Nigerians in Diaspora Organization (NIDO), through its efforts and contributions, can serve as a dependable ally in the realization of this objective. No doubt Nigerian professionals abound in the Diaspora. Nigerians in the USA alone is estimated at 1.1 million and these specialize in such fields as health, education, research and development, engineering, information technology among others<sup>17</sup>. Evidence abound that crime and corruption are the banes of Nigeria's development. The current *Boko Haram* insurgency in the northeastern portion of the country speaks volumes. These social malaises, no doubt, have bartered the country's image. Many foreign companies have had to withdraw their operations from Nigeria because of crime, corruption and insecurity. For those that managed to stay, doing business in the country has become very expensive. Therefore, there is urgent need for a holistic effort by the government, corporate bodies and individuals to stamp out the evils of insecurity, crime and corruption so that the country is relatively safe for both Nigerians and foreigners to feel at home. The benefits of economic diplomacy if effectively pursued can not be overestimated. A robust and viable economy would mean a reduction in crime by Nigerians as many will be gainfully engaged in legitimate endeavors. It would also deal a severe blow to the current brain-drain which has sapped and continues to sap the unquantifiable manpower of the country. In addition to improving the living conditions and standard of the citizenry, a better-managed economy would ensure that Nigeria's respectability and clout on the global stage are regained<sup>18</sup>.

### **Conclusion**

Trends in this modern age of globalization demands that we think globally but first act locally. In the same vein, the formulation and implementation of Nigeria's foreign policy should reflect its domestic economic realities in view of the several economic problems that have besieged the country since our phony Independence. We have in the foregoing shown that the effective use of the tool of economic diplomacy will contribute immensely in making a turnaround in our otherwise prostrate economy. It is therefore strongly advocated that this approach be vigorously pursued by the present and successive governments.

### **Endnotes**

1. K. Mingst, *Essentials of International Relations*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999, p.131.
2. J.S. Goldstein and J.C. Pevehouse, *International Relations*. Ninth Edition. New York: Longman, 2010, p.103.
3. Funso Adesola, *International Relations: An Introductory Text*. Ibadan. College Press and Publishers, 2004, p.9.
4. M.Ogunbayo, "Our Best Foreign Policy Option". *Newswatch*. June 6, 2011, p. 28.
5. A.T. Balewa and S. Epelle, *Nigeria Speaks*. Lagos: Longmans, 1964, pp. 57-70.
6. W.A. Fawole, *Nigeria's External Relations and Foreign Policy under Military Rule, 1966 – 1999*. Ile – Ife : O.A.U. Press, 2003, p.39.
7. A.O. Njoku and P.I. Nwafor, *Nigeria's External Relations*. Enugu: Redeemed Printing and Publishing Company, 2005, p.35.
8. *The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria*. Lagos: Federal Government Press.
9. A.O. Njoku and P.I. Nwafor, *Nigeria's External Relations*, pp. 36-38.
10. A.O. Njoku and P.I. Nwafor, *Nigeria's External Relations*, p. 39.
11. E.E. Onyeneho, *The Web of World Politics:Analysing International Relations*. Onitsha: Chambers Books, 2006, p.174.
12. Wikipedia Encyclopedia, *Economic Diplomacy*. "[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economic\\_diplomacy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economic_diplomacy)", 2011, p.1.
13. Wikipedia Encyclopedia, *Economic Diplomacy*, p.2.
14. Wikipedia Encyclopedia, *Economic Diplomacy*, p.3.
15. O.E. Uya, "Economic Dimensions of Nigeria's Foreign Policy". O.E. Uya (Ed.) *Contemporary Nigeria*. Buenos Aires: EDIPUBLI S.A., 1992, p.109.
16. W.A. Fawole, *Nigeria's External Relations*, p. 178.
17. O.E. Uya, "African Diaspora Question and Human Capital Abroad", *Foreign Policy in Nigeria's Democratic Transition*, Abuja: Printserve, 2005.
18. M.Ogunbayo, "Our Best Foreign Policy Option", p. 29.

### **Guide to Further Reading**

- Balewa, A.T. and Epelle, S. *Nigeria Speaks*. Lagos: Longmans, 1964.
- Fawole, W.A. *Nigeria's External Relations and Foreign Policy under Military Rule, 1966 – 1999*. Ile – Ife : O.A.U. Press, 2003.
- Njoku, A.O. and Nwafor, P.I. *Nigeria's External Relations*. Enugu: Redeemed Printing and Publishing Company, 2005.
- Ogunsanya, G.O. and Akindele, R.A. (Eds.). *Nigeria's External Relations: The First Twenty Five Years*. Ibadan: University Press, 1986.
- Uya, O.E. "African Diaspora Question and Human Capital Abroad", *Foreign Policy in Nigeria's Democratic Transition*, Abuja: Printserve, 2005. "Economic Dimensions of Nigeria's Foreign Policy". O.E. Uya (Ed.). *Contemporary Nigeria*. Buenos Aires: EDIPUBLI S.A., 1992.