

Nigeria's Afro-Centric Foreign Policy and Regional Stability in West Africa Region, 1999-2018**Akie Opuene Hart, (Ph.D.)**School of Public Health, Department of Environmental Health, University of Port Harcourt,
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Abstract: The study examined Nigeria's Afro-centric foreign policy and regional stability in West Africa from 1999–2018. West Africa in the recent past has been embroiled in unprecedented conflicts that threaten the peace and stability of the region. Thus, the manner and complexities of these crises call for a robust regional actor, such as Nigeria, to mediate in the resolution to ensure regional stability. To achieve the purpose of this study, research questions were advanced to determine the study's primary aim, which is to evaluate the impact of Nigeria's Afro-centric foreign policy on regional stability in West Africa. Power theory is the theoretical framework used. The study is anchored on qualitative, descriptive and historical research design methods of secondary data collection. The findings showed that Nigeria's foreign policy has largely contributed to regional stability. Conscious of the fact that the pursuits of economic development can only be realized in a peaceful and stable region, Nigeria has shown an unwavering commitment to peace and stability, as seen in Liberia, Cote D'Ivoire, Sierra Leone, and recently in the Gambia, where potentially destructive conflicts were successfully mediated and resolved. The study also found that Nigeria also stands to gain if her foreign policy is well-articulated and grounded in economic considerations, as economic benefits of regional integration will flow into Nigeria, which is undoubtedly the region's financial hub. The study recommends improving and continuing its Afro-centric foreign policy, especially prioritizing the welfare of the Nigerian citizenry, amongst other National interests through idealism.

Keywords: Foreign Policy, Regional Stability, West Africa, Idealism.

INTRODUCTION

West Africa, in the recent past, has been embroiled in unprecedented conflicts that threatened the peace and stability of the sub-region. Some analysts described sub-Saharan Africa as a theatre for several large-scale conflicts, and civil wars, as well as festering low-intensity uprisings. One of the main tasks Nigeria faces as a leading country in the sub-continent is how to settle the plethora of conflicts raging in the area through idealist policy.

In addition, the increase in violent conflicts in West Africa since 2010 has prompted concerns that rising risks may disrupt hard-won economic achievements and impede future development (Balasuriya, 2012). Countries such as Liberia, Sierra Leone, Togo, Ivory Coast, Mali, Guinea Bissau, Sao Tome, Principe, and the Gambia endured protracted conflicts that threatened their well-being and stability, as well as that of the entire sub-region, if not for Nigeria's timely interventions. According to Jacques Klein, the United Nations Secretary General's Special Representative to Liberia, Nigeria has contributed significant human, material, political, and diplomatic resources to resolving the crises in the subregion, particularly in Liberia and Sierra Leone (News Watch October 2005).

Looking at the nature of these crises shows that they are mostly rooted in their internal democratic processes and violent religious extremism, and ethnic rivalry accentuated by selfish leaders' intent to cling to political power. This position is supported by H.E. Bassole, Foreign Affairs Minister of Burkina Faso. He said, "it is in his landlocked country's best interest to promote good neighbourly relations, peace, and stability through dialogue." The Minister said, in West Africa the hostilities in the area are often caused by people not being happy with their access to power and problems with democracy and government. He thought that many of the current conflicts in West Africa were caused by leaders who didn't want to give up power and were willing to use any means, like manipulating ethnic and regional identities, to stay in power. This left people feeling like they weren't a part of the political process and like they were left out.

The manner and complexities of this crisis call for a powerful regional actor, such as Nigeria, to mediate in the management and resolution of these crises to ensure stability in the region. It is against this backdrop that this study has been undertaken to shed light on Nigeria's Afrocentric Foreign Policy as a key determinant of regional stability in West Africa using ECOWAS as the platform to address regional challenges. Generally, the actions of nations in the pursuit of their foreign policies are often influenced by some factors which link external situations to domestic considerations, thereby giving rise to series of policies. These actions and policies towards other nations are what are interpreted as the national foreign policy.

From a geopolitical standpoint, seeing Nigeria as the centrepiece of Nigeria's foreign policy should be seen from a viewpoint that Nigeria is well-positioned as the most influential country in the region. With a strong army, a large population, and vast petroleum resources, Nigeria is undeniably the strongest country in the region. It is also in Nigeria's national interest to have a peaceful and stable region given its cultural, geographical, and historical ties with other countries within the sub-region. Due to transnational security concerns, Nigeria's security will be affected by what happens in its neighbouring countries. This is very true considering the trend in other parts of the world. The Middle East, Asia, and Africa have witnessed the scourge of conflicts and their destabilising effects on the economies and stability of nations, and most times, spillovers across the regions.

Given this consideration, Nigeria has repeatedly mediated and promoted peace in many conflict areas in West Africa through the setting up of national and sub-regional early warning response mechanisms to avert conflicts. However, this undertaking has been of great cost in human and material resources to Nigeria, making some people within the Nigerian foreign policy making community to call for policy redirection from African affairs. Oppo (1999, p.3), averred that "our national interests have to be re-defined. Does Africa still represent the cornerstone of our foreign policy when we have more respect from other countries than we get from African nations despite our whole-hearted commitment to them? If yes, what are the benefits we get from the choice". He argued that in facing enormous domestic economic difficulties, Nigeria should draw back into its shell and face its problems squarely. Corroborating this view, Pine (2011, p.10) observes that "the foreign policy elite and political leadership of successive governments seem to be carried away by its philosophical allure (Afrocentricity) rather than its rational idea." In this sense, economic benefits, continental political leadership, national interest, military partnerships, and strategic engagements are sacrificed on the altar of good neighbourliness and psychological gratification." Similarly, Zabadi, cited in Alli (2001), corroborates this opinion that; "even though the world treats Nigeria as a regional and sub-regional leader and listens to her opinion on African affairs and even world issues, there is a contradiction because Nigeria is an underperformer in domestic affairs" (p.21).

This study, thus, brings to the fore an understanding of Nigeria's foreign policy as the basis for its mediatory efforts. Noting that we live in an interconnected world where conflicts in some countries affect others in many ways, as seen in the recent Greek economic crisis that challenged Western European countries and their banking systems and the humanitarian concern in Iraq and Syria, Spillovers from these crises, due to the migrant issue, have birthed serious security concerns in Turkey and far away from Germany. Due to the nature and the broader impact of regional instability; the United Nations Organization attached so much importance to regional efforts and cooperation designed to bring about peace in the different regions of the world.

Statement of the Problem

Whereas Nigeria's Afro-centric foreign policy can guarantee regional stability, the recurring decimal of conflicts in the West African region is a challenge to Nigeria's foreign policy. It is also incontrovertible that a conflict-prone region is inimical to development and investment prospects. West Africa has severally been described as a conflict zone due to the plethora of crises bedevilling the sub-region. From independence struggles in the 1960s and post-independence crises due to power struggles and internecine strife accentuated by greed and mismanagement of public resources, countries such as Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Guinea Bissau, Ivory Coast have experienced civil wars and political crises in recent times. The Gambia recently experienced a constitutional crisis. Togo is also in political turmoil between the incumbent President (Faure Gnassingbe) and the opposition political parties, pushing for term limits to the constitution. There is also the Tuareg rebellion in Northern Mali and the ongoing insurgency in the Maghreb. All of these point to the fact that West African countries are so disposed to crises with all their attendant consequences of underdevelopment and poverty in a region that accounts for the majority of the twenty poorest countries in the world, following UNDP 2005 human development and human security indices.

If crises in West African countries are allowed to fester, especially in neighbouring countries bordering Nigeria, it will surely affect her in several ways, such as the influx of refugees into the country, a hindrance to trade activities, and the free movement of people and goods, etc. These were the views advanced by President Muhamadu Buhari of Nigeria to Alassane Ouattara of Ivory Coast during a meeting between the two leaders. He said, "There will be regional consequences for instability in Togo and this will surely come at a development cost" (Leadership Newspaper, August 2, 2018). He further reiterates that Nigeria will continue to support efforts directed toward peace-building, security, and stability, as well as the fight against terrorism and violent extremism. Therefore, regional stability is key if the region is to make any meaningful development.

This conception in her foreign policy has earned her praise within the international community as well as some local condemnation for the ways and manner in which it has performed. This study will have its thrust on Nigeria's ability to manage internecine conflicts within the sub-region using her leadership role and regional organisations such as ECOWAS to bring about peace, development, and stability to this crisis-prone region.

This study aims to evaluate Nigeria's Afro-centric foreign policy and its impact on regional stability in West Africa. Specifically, this study will aim at the following research objectives: to show the positive contributions of Nigeria's Afro-centric foreign policy on regional stability in West Africa; and examine the impediments to the efficacious implementation of the idealist Afro-centric foreign policy of Nigeria.

Research Questions

- 1) What are the positive contributions of Nigeria's Afrocentric foreign policy to regional stability in West Africa?
- 2) What are the challenges to the successful implementation of Nigeria's African centered Idealist foreign policy in the maintenance of peace and security in the Subregion?

LITERATURE REVIEW**Foreign Policy**

According to Merriam-Webster (2017), a policy is a clear plan of action chosen from different options and based on current conditions to guide and decide what to do now and in the future. Note (2016) defined policy as a broad spectrum of planned activities or step-by-step procedures geared towards achieving formulated goals. The policy also entails what to do and what not to do. It involves a careful plan of action geared towards achieving set objectives.

Therefore, the foreign policy of every nation consists of decisions and acts that significantly affect ties between one nation and another (Frankel, 1975, p.9). Foreign policy, according to Ayah (1999), is a state's government's plan of action regarding its ties with other sovereign nations and non-state actors. It is also stated to refer to the set of laws, regulations, and guiding principles by which a sovereign state develops ties with other nations. States design their foreign policy through high-level decision-making procedures. In international politics, only national interests are permanent, not friendships or enemies. The principles are often adjusted to changing circumstances while retaining some key elements of major importance. Foreign policy is formulated domestically and projected externally to achieve some desired objectives by other state actors in the international system.

Therefore, any strategy that a government intentionally implements to attain certain aims and objectives in the international system might be referred to as foreign policy. A state's foreign policy consists of three specified basic components: the guiding principles, the desired outcomes, and the available tools to attain the desired outcomes. These objectives represent the national interest and serve as the basis for political activity (Ogwu, 1986). On a seminal note, foreign policy simply entails the actions and interactions of State actors in the international system. This activity is viewed from the domestic and external environment. Furthermore, Rourke (2008) in his analysis opined thus;

Foreign policy is the goal sought, values, set decisions made, and actions that were taken by states and national societies and it constitutes an attempt to design, manage and control the foreign relations of national societies.

The preceding suggests that foreign policy is a mechanism through which nations affect their interactions with other states and attain their goals within the global system. These policymakers' primary responsibility is to arbitrate between these two realms (Evans & Newnham, 1999). Morgenthau (1951), the renowned power theorist, more often recognised as the founder of post-World War II realist theory in international relations, defines foreign policy within the context of national interest, where he is of the view that it is concerned with the pursuit of national interests by states. Holsti (1970) in his paper "National Role Conception in the study of Foreign Policy" defines "foreign policy as the actions of states towards the external environment and the conditions—usually domestic—under which those actions are formulated."

States often seek social, cultural, political, and economic objectives in the international system that cannot be realised within the borders of the national state. Occasionally, nations require the active participation or even aid of other system states in order to accomplish their national objectives. Consequently, a state must unavoidably interact with the external world. This communication is generally referred to as foreign policy in its entirety (Ojo & Sesay, 2002, p.113). Foreign policy assumes, fundamentally, a separation between within and outside, or the internal and external environments. This sort of political interaction occurs between these two parties.

As an analytical instrument, foreign policy acts as a conceptual guide by offering the objectives frequently evaluated by a state when considering a proposed foreign policy decision. As an instrument for political activity, it serves to defend or reject a state's foreign policy options and international activities. This demonstrates the relationship between national interests and foreign policy. Furthermore, (Rosenau, 1969 in Ofoegbu, 1980, p.4) has this to say about foreign policy;

Foreign policy is the category, which deals with defense, security, international political relations, and internationaleconomic relations. It deals with the relations between oneactor in the international system and other actors in the international system. These other actors, as we said earlier, maybe states international organizations, some types of individuals, or the environment of the system irrespective of whether the elements involved are social, cultural, orstructural (Rosenau, 1969 in Ofoegbu, 1980, p.4).

However, like other concepts in international relations, universal The definition of foreign policy still lacks legitimacy. And scepticism is raised on the likelihood of any definition of the field gaining general approval. Intriguingly, prominent and preeminent researchers in the field of international affairs have offered useful and applicable elucidation of the notion in their writings. According to Adeniji (1968, p.15), it is a projection of the country's national interest into the trans-national arena and the interaction between one and the other as a result.

Nigeria's Afrocentric Foreign Policy

Afrocentric policy, or Africa-centeredness in Nigeria's foreign policy, is a key principle in Nigeria's foreign relations doctrine. The underlying principle governing the policy gives primacy and priority attention to African issues in Nigeria's foreign relations. According to Gambari's (1985) "Concentric Circle theory", West African affairs came second on the priority list of Nigeria's national interests. Writing on the concept, Professor Akinyemi (former Nigerian Foreign Affairs Minister), has this to say: "If we imply by Africa being the focal point of our foreign policy that Nigeria should identify with and defend Africa's legitimate interests, it also means that African governments should collectively identify with and protect Nigeria's interests" (cited in Iganga, 2010, p.125).

Generally speaking, Nigeria's Afrocentric foreign policy simply means doctrine or practise whereby Nigeria gives African-related matters have the topmost attention, especially as compared to other matters and issues. Scholars such as Olusanya and Akindele (1990, p.4) have tried to describe the motivation for Nigeria's Afrocentric foreign policy principle. They succinctly stated that,

Nigeria is geo-politically located on the continent of Africa and because she is undeniably Africa's and Black race's most populous country with abundant resources, Nigeria carried the burden of history.

Africa as the centerpiece of Nigeria's foreign policy is based and influenced by the fact that Nigeria over the years has sought to place African issues at the top of her priorities better than any other country in Africa (Iganga 2010). Interestingly, studies reveal that virtually all of Nigeria's leaders' pre-and post-independence era have ensured that Nigeria's foreign policy is hinged on the promotion of the national interest of the federation and the promotion of Africa-centered foreign policy. The recognition of the historical and socio-geographical position of Nigeria vis-a-vis her foreign policy orientation before independence in 1960, most likely influenced the Afro-centric conception and direction of Nigerian foreign policy immediately after independence (Chazan et al., 1988; Fawole, 2000). Therefore, before independence, eminent Nigerians, such as Ayo Rosiji, Jaja Nwachukwu, Chief Femi Fani-Kayode, and Nnamdi Azikiwe, had expressly voiced their opinion that Nigeria was destined to play an important and leading role within the context of African politics. For example, while making his contribution to the January 1960 Parliamentary motion, he went ahead to argue that Nigeria's independence was necessary and essential as "the whole Black continent is looking to this country (Nigeria) to liberate it; the whole Negroid race is looking to Nigeria to be free from slavery" (House of Representatives Debates (Independence Motion, 4 January, 1960, p.89).

Fawole (2003, p.106) further argued that a similar sentiment had earlier been expressed by Chief Hon. Nnamdi Azikiwe, who was Nigeria's first ceremonial President when he opined that:

It should be the manifest destiny of Nigeria to join hands with other progressive forces in the world to emancipate the people of Africa and other people of African descent from the scourge of colonialism. Nigeria should be the vanguard of the struggle to liberate Africans from the yoke of colonialism (Azikiwe, 1961).

Thus, it is pertinent to note that the very first Prime Minister of Nigeria; Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa gave a submission to the position of the country's foreign policy plans which he laid before the parliament on August 30, 1960. In that policy speech, Balewa noted that;

Very particular attention will be devoted to adopting clear and practical policies about Africa. We shall make every effort to find a way to unite our efforts and prevent Africa from becoming an area of crisis and world tension.

This position was further explained by the Prime Minister in his keynote address to the United Nations General Assembly in New York on the 7th of October 1960 and which later formed the major principles of Nigeria's Afro-centric foreign policy.

Accordingly, section 19 sub-sections (1) of Nigeria's 1999 constitution as amended, listed the five-major foreign policy concerns of Nigeria to include;

1. Strong commitment to the principles of non-alignment;
2. Increased respect for the legal equality, political, independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of all states;
3. Principle of non-interference in the affairs of other Nation-States;
4. To seek the membership of international organizations as a means of promoting functional cooperation and importantly;
5. Africa to become the centerpiece of Nigeria's foreign policy.

The aforementioned clauses represent a reaffirmation of Nigeria's foreign policy emphasis from 1960 to the present. Nigeria's efforts to securing unity, prosperity, peace, and security on the

African continent must be properly acknowledged in light of this strategic objective (Ashiru & George, 2013). However, it should be noted that the realities of African politics at the time of Nigeria's independence prevented the country from gaining a broader perspective on African affairs.

Concept of Regional Stability

Brauer and Dunne (2016) define a region as a territorial sub-system of the global system whose basis might be geological (based on earth formations such as plains or coastline), geographical, political, cultural, or geo-climatic.

At the 1945 meeting in San Francisco, the Egyptian delegation proposed an amendment to the draught language of the United Nations Charter that restricts the term 'region' or 'region arrangement' to the following:

organizations of a permanent nature grouping in a given geographical area, several countries using their proximity, community of interests, or cultural-linguistic, historical, or spiritual affinities, make themselves jointly responsible for the peaceful settlement of any disputes which may arise between them and for the maintenance of peace and security in their region, as well as for the safeguarding of their interests (Palmer and Perkins, 2004).

Furthermore, a region within the context of International Relations could be said to mean a geographical area embracing the territories of three or more states which are bound together by ties and shared interests. Stability in the assertion of Hedley Bull (1977), "seems most applicable in broad systemic terms – i.e., the non-existence of major war; avoidance of too much concentration of power in any one state; and upholding the political independence and territorial confines of extant actors in the system".

Stability often presupposes adherence to agreed-upon laws and norms within a specific international system or subsystem, which presupposes moderation in the unilateral use of force. Inimical to regional integration and stability, the antithesis of stability is conflict. According to Coser (1956), conflict arises when two or more parties engage in a fight over ideals and claims to status, power, and resources in which they seek to neutralize, harm, or eliminate their opponents. Conflicts in West Africa have consequently grown and escalated to various levels of full-scale violence, with all the concomitant repercussions of damage, stoppage of economic activity, refugee issues, and environmental catastrophe. According to research conducted by Conflict Resolution Stakeholders Network (CRESENT) in 2001, the term "conflict" conjures up images of war, fighting, misunderstandings, disagreements, anarchy, stress, crisis, and aggressiveness.

According to Elliot's "A Case Study in Conflict Study" (1989), the true causes of many of the world's most severe conflicts are the denial of fundamental rights to food, employment, shelter, and cultural life, as well as large-scale prejudice and exclusion from society's decision-making processes. Therefore, peace, security, stability, and good governance are prerequisites for attaining sustainable economic development. Challenges and challenges to stability, security, peace, and robust institutions of government are consequently varied. Regional cooperation has historically been advantageous in many regions of the world in terms of reducing armed and non-armed conflicts and maintaining regional stability (Asiwaju, 1990). As part of various international agreements, African Union member states are obligated to promote good governance and democratisation processes in their respective nations.

Consequently, stability denotes the absence of significant conflict, the avoidance of an excessive concentration of power in any one state, and, most crucially, the maintenance of the political independence and sovereignty of state players within the system. Intriguingly, stability is seen as conformity with agreed-upon laws and norms inside a separate international system or sub-system, which presupposes restraint in the unilateral use of force. It is evident from the preceding that order and stability are key and essential components of every nation's foreign strategy. Therefore, governments and foreign officials explain their ambitions, objectives, etc. based on regional stability.

Theoretical Frameworks

Power theory

Hobbes (1588-1679) argued that humans had a natural desire to dominate. He defined power as a man's current means to achieve some apparent future good (Leviathan Ch:10). He argued convincingly that if two individuals sought the same thing, they could not both have it; they would use every possible method to either conquer or entirely kill themselves (Rourke and Boyer, 2004:15). The reckless use of power to achieve national interests by states is not new. Power according to realists, is the central theme in international relations and, as such, synonymous with realism. Realism is a philosophical worldview that regards the power struggle among States as a constant feature of international politics. Proponents of power theory include Morgenthau (1962), Dahl (1961), Waltz (1986), Spykman (1942), and Carr (1946).

The core argument of power theory is that states in international relations are "occupied" by their "national interest," and that in order to achieve this, nations must enhance the aspects of their national power in comparison to those of other states. States conduct their internal and foreign agendas through the use of some form of power (Palmer and Perkins, 2004:31).

Scholarly works by Waltz (1979) and Mearsheimer (1995) exemplified the prevalent notion that power relations decide who fights whom and when. According to Waltz (2000, p.52), "the most significant international political events are explained by variations in state capacity." According to Appadurai (2004, p.229), Niccolò Machiavelli emphasised mathematical variables that may aid in addressing political issues based on interest, prudence, and expedience in his work *The Prince*. Notably, states in the international system do not always pursue complimentary interests, and again, the extent to which a state may obtain from the system or other states is mainly determined by its power disposition. This is possibly why Morgenthau (1948, p.39) asserts that the primary concern of states in the international system is the acquisition of power, defining the term as the control of the minds and actions of other men, and that states strive to increase their power in order to pursue and protect their national interests. To this purpose, power theory or realism transfers the emphasis from conventional diplomacy, international law, and morality to power as the primary explanation for why nations act as they do within the system. He summed up by asserting that:

While the individual has a moral right to sacrifice himself in defense of a moral principle, the State has no right to let its moral disapprobation ... get in the way of successful political action, itself inspired by the moral principle of national survival (Morgenthau, 1948, p.39).

According to Zakaria (1998:9), foreign policy is determined by the government and not the nation as a whole. Therefore, state power counts more than national power. State power is the part of national authority that the government may extract for its own purposes; it indicates the ease with which central decision-makers can achieve their objectives.

Waltz (1979) asserts that the international system is comprised of structures and units (states). States are always confronted with insecurity due to the anarchic structure of the international system and the absence of a central authority (Jervis, 1979, p.169). States tend to grow their power, the primary variable in realist theory, to secure their existence.

This study considers power theory useful despite the fact that it places too much focus on force and conflict, overlooking collaboration in some areas of mutual interest between nations, as idealist philosopher's advocate. Nigeria's Afrocentric Foreign Policy demonstrates the use of power as a foreign policy tool in contemporary world politics. This position is rightly captured by Alli (2012):

Nigeria's approach to sub-regional security and conflict resolution is often seen as inextricably tied to its international role conception by its leaders. This role conception has become the defining paradigm for the country's foreign policy engagement and has conferred on it the role of a natural leader with manifest destiny and theresponsibility to promote and protect the interest of Africa.

From the power perspective, Nigeria's mediatory role in West Africa could be viewed from the power perspective as a regional hegemony or continental leader in Africa. Nigeria played this role using all elements of her national power, which included a strong military, population, abundant petroleum resources, and buoyant economy compared to other countries in the region. This position is captured succinctly by Magnowski (2014).

The choice of Africa as the focal point of Nigerian foreign policy is influenced by a number of other factors, including Nigeria's strategic location within the West African sub-region, its status as the most populous black nation in the world with an estimated population of over 170 million, and its contribution to more than 51% of the entire West African gross domestic product (GDP) with an estimated GDP of \$1.1 trillion. Power theory is relevant in the analysis of this study considering the way and manner Nigeria deployed its Alpha jets and newly acquired naval ship (NNS) Unity to The Gambia in (Operation Restore Democracy), a show of force in the political stalemate between former President Yaya Jammeh and Adama Barrow that won the disputed election of December 1, 2016. This was purely from a hegemonic/stability standpoint that sees Nigeria as a regional force in the sub-continent with a responsibility to lead in the promotion of peace, political stability, and the entrenchment of democracy. It is equally the quest to exert power that led to the motive behind Nigeria's self-acclaimed, Giant of Africa, which, of course, must be demonstrated in terms of relative power (Osuji, 2013). Hence, Nigeria, as an actor in the international system, without exception, portrays itself as a state that aspires to dominate others in Africa.

This domineering posture is quite evident in the fear, uncompromising and uncooperative attitude of Francophone West African countries. For instance, in ECOWAS vis-à-vis ECOMOG and their respective peacekeeping operations in the sub-region. However, proponents of the economic diplomacy/hegemonic stability school of thought view the assumption of such a role as capable of meaningfully contributing to the resolution of the multitude of intra-state and inter-state crises that have become the defining characteristics of the majority of states in the West African sub-region and Africa (Ploch, 2013, p.1).

As a result, Nigeria has upheld the principles of sovereignty and nationalism as central to its Afrocentric foreign policy since its political independence in 1960. Therefore, it can be logically asserted that the country's foreign policy is wholly consistent with this paradigm because all its actions are predicated on the preservation of dominance in West Africa specifically and the African continent in general. Thus, according to Akinboye (2002, p.75):

The pursuit of power, no doubt is the guiding philosophy of realism that statesmen must vigorously pursue, conserve, consolidate and demonstrate at all times. This is the only condition for ensuring national security, order, and peace in any political system such as Nigeria.

Because the essence of politics is a power struggle, Nigeria, in all its ramifications, has the moral justification to defend its perceived national interest with all available means—military, economic, and so on. In the course of this research endeavor, therefore, an attempt shall be made to unravel the reasons why Balewa, the first Prime Minister of successive political leaders, has consistently made Afro-centric foreign policy a cornerstone of Nigeria's foreign policy.

The Role Approach

The "role approach" is another theory that helps to explain the Afrocentric nature of Nigeria's foreign policy. The Role Approach is a framework for the study of behavior based on the concept of roles (Sekhri, 2009). In the realm of foreign policy, decision-makers envision and assume that governments should embrace and fulfill a variety of responsibilities, obligations, and commitments within the international or subordinate regional system. Holsti pioneered the application of the role method to the study of foreign policy and international relations in 1970. He analyzed the relationships between national role ideas and participation models in international political affairs (Holsti, 1987). In his essay titled "National Role Conceptions in the Study of Foreign Policy," Holsti identified many notions applicable to foreign policy analysis. "Role Performance" comprises the government's attitude, choices, and actions to implement their self-defined national role conceptions or the role prescription resulting from various conditions. Holsti (1987) finds, then, that "activities always occur inside a position that is a system of role prescriptions." Other advocates for the role approach include Walker (1979), Johnson & Westerlund (1982), and Campbell & Aggestam (1999).

The Role Approach is a functional theoretical paradigm in which states are viewed as fulfilling a range of functions. Of them, the most well-known are liberation supporters, regional leaders, regional guardians, active independents, anti-imperialist agents, mediators, peacemakers, and anti-terrorism agents (Sekhri, 2009). Both Holsti and Walker believe that policymakers' role conceptions are the primary source of foreign policy choices and actions. Factors such as domestic needs and demands, critical events or trends in the external environment, the expectations of other governments, legal norms, and general usage (and) treaties shape "foreign policy orientation," create role perceptions, and place the state in a position where certain role performances are expected of the government (Holsti, 1987).

Goldstein and Keohane (1993) characterized role conceptions as a collection of rules that indicate anticipated foreign policy behavior and action orientation. It may be viewed as a road map that foreign policymakers use to simplify and facilitate their comprehension of a complicated political reality. Culture, history, domestic laws and institutions, national values, personality, the political needs of policymakers, capabilities, resources, location, traditional roles, ideology, domestic needs, and demand, or external circumstances and resources conducted with the international maker, such as treaty commitments, the structure of the international system, or a sense of danger from enemies and neighbours, can serve as sources and circumstances. According to the Role Approach (Sekhri, 2009), these circumstances and sources influence a policymaker's perception of a country's orientations and responsibilities within the international system or subordinate regional systems. This leads to specific state positions, which are called role perceptions or role conceptions.

The Power Approach

It is either the scramble by the ruling elites to hold on to power at the national and regional level or the ambition for territorial expansion because of the location of strategic natural resources that leads to conflict in the African sub-region.

Mareike (2013) said that conflict is when different groups want different things. West Africa has 16 countries, according to the United Nations: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Ivory Coast, Gambia, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo (United Nation statistics division, 2012). The post-cold-war era, from the end of the 1980s until now, is called the "post-generation." He went further to say:

The causes for West Africa's tendency to conflict are diverse and highly interlinked. Jackson talks about the accumulation of political, economic, structural, historical, and cultural factors (2006:22) and Williams emphasizes that there is no single element to blame (2011, p.5).

This article argues that West African governments have been so prone to violence after the end of the cold war as a result of weak state institutions and the politics of the governing elites to maintain power, which has caused discontent among the public.

I will add that in addition to all these expansionist desires and the attempt to grab the natural resources in neighboring towns, states, and nations, there is also another factor and to confront these challenges, there is a need for a strong power in the sub-region and region to promote peace. Nigeria by its population, Natural Resources endowments, and military power added to the cultural links to its neighbors, is in a vantage position to encourage peace and it has been doing that through shuttle diplomacy and peace missions. It provides economic assistance to some of its neighbors and power supply at a reduced rate. All these are done to guarantee its security as any armed conflict in neighboring countries is bound to affect Nigeria in the uncontrollable and unmanageable refugee crisis and also in the bringing in of arms through its porous border, thereby increasing criminality in Nigeria.

Nigeria, therefore, cannot profit from conflict in West Africa and it is in its national interest to be involved in covert and overt operations to protect its territorial integrity.

Born in the decades after independence, Sierra Leoneans and Liberians have never known anything except conflict. Thus, the civil wars of the post-cold war era were only more violent and murderous than those of the preceding decades, as a result of poor administration, autocratic authority, and the exploitation of the populace (Adebajo, 2002:15). The Liberian civil war lasted from 1989 until 2003, including a period of relative calm between 1996 and 1999. I must add that this was not isolation from the sufferings that the people went through that led them to go to neighbouring countries as refugees, which created security challenges in the countries. In the same vein, other scholars also talked about the spillover effect of conflict in West Africa. The Sierra Leonean civil war spilled over from its warring neighbour in 1991 and ended in 2002 (Ken, 2005, p.267).

Methodology

The study adopted qualitative method of data analysis. Secondary sources such as include books, journals, newspapers, internet sources, etc. are the major sources of data collections.

Study Area

The history of West Africans begins approximately 4,000 BCE with the earliest human settlements. West Africa was first settled by humans approximately 12,000 BCE. As the ancestors of current

West Africans entered the region in the fifth millennium, sedentary agriculture began to evolve in West Africa. Iron industries, including smelting and forging for tools and weapons, appeared in Sub-Saharan Africa by 1200 BCE. By 400 BCE, contact with the Mediterranean civilizations had been established, and a regular trade included the export of gold, cotton, metal, and leather in exchange for copper, horses, salt, textiles, and beads. The Nok civilization (1000 BCE to 200 or 300 BCE), the ancient history of the Serer people, and the creation of the Sene-Gambian stone circles (between the third and sixteenth centuries C.E.) all contributed to the development of culture (World Bank, 2011).



Source: theenergycollective.com

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Nigeria's mediatory role in West African conflicts

This section will analyse how Nigeria's Afrocentric foreign policy has affected regional stability in West Africa. The crucial question is whether or not Nigeria's Afrocentric Foreign Policy has contributed to regional stability. Yes, Nigeria's Afro-centric foreign policy has significantly helped to regional stability in the West African sub region, hence the question posed above may be answered in the affirmative. Peace and stability in the area are the consequence of Nigeria's mediation efforts, which are backed by her foreign policy. Indeed, Nigeria has contributed positively to regional security via mediation, which has been a true weapon of its diplomacy to date.

The Use of the Role Approach in Liberia.

Nigeria played the critical and crucial roles of a big brother, mediator, peace builder, and peace enforcer, and these are key visible roles played by it, which goes to show that it was actively involved as an agent of stability, a platform for peace in its participation in multiple peace missions in the under listed countries and the success it recorded.

Nigeria played a key role as a visible player by offering Asylum to Charles Taylor when his presence in Liberia was a threat to the peace process. Nigeria's use of role approach did not end with providing Asylum to Charles Taylor in Calabar-Nigeria, Nigeria handed him over to the International Court of Justice when he attempted to illegally flee Nigeria, which found him guilty of eleven charges of war crimes, grievous crimes against humanity, and other serious violations of

international law, including murder, slavery, forced labour that resulted in child's soldiers, and rape. If he had escaped, he would have threatened the government in Liberia.

This trial took place in the special court for Sierra Leone, which was established in 2002 in response to a 2000 request by the government of Sierra Leone to the United Nations that Charles Taylor be brought to justice for serious crimes against civilians and United Nations peacekeepers he committed during the country's decade-long civil war, which lasted from 1991 to 2000. This court is authorised to try war crimes, crimes against humanity, and violations of Sierra Leonean law perpetrated in Sierra Leone as far back as November 30, 1996. This court sat from 2009 till 2017. This demonstrates Nigeria's stabilising influence in the subregion of West Africa, since it was able to consolidate and stabilise Sierra's democracy.

According to Akinterinwa (2010), the personal diplomatic efforts of Nigeria's military Heads of State have been highly substantial, notably those of General Yakubu Gowon, Olusegun Obasanjo, Ibrahim Babangida, Sani Abacha, and Abubakar Abudusalam. As President of the United States from 1999 to 2007, Obasanjo was also an advocate for conflict settlement. Through shuttle diplomacy, President Obasanjo was able to end the Liberian conflict in 2003. He mediated a compromise between rebel troops and President Taylor that led to the formation of the Government of National Unity in Liberia and Charles Taylor's refuge in Nigeria (Sanda, 2004, p.276).

Mr. Jaques Klein, United Nations (Ambassador to Liberia, and the then-United Nations Secretary-General, Mr. Koffi Annan) thanked Nigeria for sending soldiers to Liberia prior to the establishment of the United Nations Mission in acknowledgment of Nigeria's contribution to regional stability. Mr. Klein praised the Nigerian leadership in Liberia, stating, "President Obasanjo has performed miracles in Liberia, both in advancing the peace process and in contributing troops." In affirming Nigeria's contribution to regional stability, former U.S. President George W. Bush said, "Every time I see the President, he brings a fresh perspective on politics and the situation on the African continent, and I want to thank you" (<http://www.whitehouse.gov>).

The Use of Role Approach in Cote D'Ivoire

Nigeria also played a significant role in restoring peace in Cote d'Ivoire between then-president Laurent Gbagbo and his associates, on the one hand, and Alassane Qattara, on the other, following the 2000 election, which was bitterly fought. Obasanjo launched many missions around West Africa in 2003 to establish a cohesive response to the Ivorian issue.

Role Approach in Togo and the Republic of Benin

During the tense and volatile conflict between Togo and the Republic of Benin in 1975, which was alleged to be based on ideological cleavages and personality clashes between President Kerekou and President Eyadema, the possibility that the conflict could spill over into Nigeria, at least in economic terms, stimulated Nigeria's interest in a peaceful resolution. The incessant border closures by the belligerents posed a serious threat to Nigeria's economy. At the peak of Nigeria's port closure in 1975, scores of trucks bound for Togo loaded with cement bound from Nigeria were washed away by rain as they waited for the belligerents to reopen their boundaries. Thus, faced with a serious threat of economic loss, Nigeria waded into the crisis and used her good offices to obtain a peaceful settlement (Ogwu, 1986).

Successes of Nigeria's Mediatory Role in West Africa's Regional Economic Integration

In accordance with the ECOWAS Protocol, Nigeria has prioritized economic integration by promoting free trade, establishing a regional currency, and promoting and expanding infrastructure

development such as road, railway, telecommunication, power, and gas pipelines, which has resulted in increased agricultural and industrial production. Nigeria, being the most prosperous country in the sub-region, has played a significant role in maintaining the pace of targeted economic support such as technical assistance, selling oil at concessionary prices, and giving humanitarian help to other countries.

During President Obasanjo's administration, Nigeria also established a second monetary zone, which is planned to join with the francophone CFA to form a single monetary zone for the area. Nigeria has also encouraged the free movement of people, goods, and services, as well as the development of sub-regional infrastructures such as roads (the Lagos/Accra line, with plans to connect Abidjan and Dakar in the future), shipping (the ECO MARINE project), airlines (the ECO AIR project), power (the West African power grid project), and gas pipelines (the Lagos-Accra gas pipeline project) (Alli, 2012).

Promotion of Good Governance and Democracy

As previously stated, the biggest wars in West Africa, such as those observed in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Cote D'Ivoire, Mali, and the Gambia, were caused by the political elite's reign of impunity, marginalization, violation of human rights, and anti-democratic behavior. These leaders' proclivity for individualized autocratic governance generated bloodshed and ethnic warfare. Furthermore, the adoption of elections as the benchmark for legal power transfers has encouraged political opponents to regard the process as a zero-sum game. To avert these conflicts, Nigeria recognized that strong devotion to democratic culture was the key to sub-regional stability. The relationship between democracy and regional stability is widely documented. Nigeria is still battling with her democratic process and must aid her West African neighbors in solidifying democracy by electoral assistance and rigorous commitment to democratic precepts to attain this aim of a democratic West Africa.

Peace and Stability through the Fight against Criminal Activities

Her counter-terrorism efforts and battle against cross-border criminal operations have resulted in relative calm and stability. Trans-border crimes and criminal activities in Nigeria are reflections and ramifications of the sub-years regions of civil conflicts, famine, and economic degradation (Alli, 2011, p.146). Nigeria is aiding Sahelian nations in combating the smuggling of small arms and light weapons (SALW), drug smuggling, and human trafficking through the ECOWAS Small Arms Control Programme (ECOSAP). The persistent banditry on innocent residents in northern Nigeria prompted the formation of a Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) to counter the operations of the Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lida'awati wal Jihad, also known as the Boko Haram group. The Nigerian National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), the National Agency for the Prohibition of Human Trafficking (NAPTIP), and the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) have all been involved in cross-border operations throughout West Africa. Nigeria has also played a significant role in curbing marine piracy in the Gulf of Guinea, which has long posed a danger to the region's internal economy, trade, and the flow of foreign direct investment.

Challenges to Nigeria's Mediatory Role in West Africa

It is undeniable that Nigeria has achieved greater heights in her mediatory efforts in West Africa, but certainly not without some domestic and regional challenges. These challenges include:

Hegemonic perception from the Francophone member of the community

Despite Nigeria's unreserved commitment to resolving the plethora of crises in West Africa, her efforts have been viewed with contempt by the Francophone countries, who still maintain strong economic and political ties with France, their former colonial master. Nigeria's genuine efforts are therefore viewed with the cynicism of competition with France's interest in the region. This has led to several States not recognising Nigeria's efforts in the way they should be. Sierra Leone, which has benefitted so much from Nigeria, was the country that prevented ECOWAS from taking a united stand.

in support of Nigeria's candidacy for a United Nations Security Council (UNSC) permanent seat (Ogunsanwo, 2010, p.45). Sometimes Nigerian soldiers and civilians are killed out of envy and hatred. Also, the recent xenophobic attacks on Nigerians in South Africa and the arbitrary deportation of Nigerians from Libya and some West African countries smack of great hatred.

Therefore, Nigeria does not deserve this unpleasant treatment considering her commitment to peace and security in the region and Africa in general. However, she has continued to invest in the ECOWAS project and regional security concerns because Nigeria's security is tied together with the sub-region. Furthermore, the Nigerian government's apparent failure to respond to alleged xenophobic attacks on Nigerians in South Africa in 2008 throws into doubt the country's claim and commitment to a citizen diplomacy-driven foreign policy strategy if it cannot utilise it to defend its people's interests.

Internal Economic Challenges

The internal economic challenges in Nigeria have been a bane to an effective foreign policy drive. The country is confronted with massive unemployment, poverty, a shrinking economy, corruption, and poor infrastructure. Given the plethora of problems facing the country, scholars such as Okpokpo and Zabadi do not consider Nigeria's financial commitment to ECOWAS and the pursuit of an Afro-centric foreign policy worthwhile. Of course, indeed, the right balance between the domestic scene and a fluid external environment has not been achieved, which in itself is a contradiction to Nigeria's foreign policy priorities. This assertion is also supported by (1997), p.12), that "where a country's foreign vision and assumed roles impact negatively on its domestic affairs, its objectives must be re-examined and refocused." The Jonathan administration attempted to refocus Nigeria's National Security Strategy under the leadership of the late General Owoye Azazi as National Security Adviser, with the sole goal of developing a comprehensive approach for more coordinated and effective response to crises and emergencies in the region (The Nation, January 17, 2010).

Unemployment

Unemployment is one of Nigeria's most critical challenges. Many people are dissatisfied as a result of widespread unemployment. Because of the current economic downturn, unemployment has surged. Official Nigerian figures show that 38% of people under the age of 24 are jobless. According to the World Bank, this figure is closer to 80%. Nigeria's unemployment rate rose to 18.80 percent in the third quarter of 2017 from 16.20% in the second quarter. From 2006 to 2017, Nigeria's unemployment rate averaged 10.63%, hitting an all-time high of 19.70%. (National Bureau of Statistics). In March 2014, 16 individuals were killed at a stampede when 500,000 job hopefuls rushed to register for around 5,000 positions in the Nigeria Immigration Service. High unemployment is the blame for widespread poverty. According to estimates, 54.7% of Nigeria's population lives in poverty.

Shrinking Economy

The country's economy has been deteriorating over the years. This is due to pervasive corruption and inconsistency in government policies. According to Soludo (2004), the lack of consistency and greed of politicians are some of the causes of the haemorrhage in the economy. The policies of Obasanjo's government were not followed through. The NEEDS programme was replaced by President Yar'Adua's government with Vision 2020. This was also the situation when President Buhari's government came on board. Almost all the economic policies of President Jonathan were reversed.

Contributions of Member-States of ECOWAS

S/N	MEMBER COUNTRY	FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTIONS FOR ECOWAS SUSTENANCE
1	Benin	3.9%
2	Burkina Faso	2.6%
3	Cape Verde	1.5%
4	Cote D 'Ivoire	13%
5	The Gambia	6%
6	Ghana	12.9%
7	Guinea Bissau	1.5%
8	Liberia	6.7%
9	Mali	1.9%
10	Mauritania	2.6%
11	Niger	2.1%
12	Nigeria	32.8%
13	Senegal	5.4 %
14	Sierra Leone	4.4%
15	Togo	3.6%

Source: ECOWAS Secretariat Lagos, Library Document on Members' Contribution, 2013.

Summary

Nigeria is indeed considered a crucial player in regional security policy and peace initiatives which she pursues within the framework of the ECOWAS Mediation and Security Council. Nigeria's role thus includes conflict resolution through peacekeeping, peace support operations, and mediation of political crises in the region. The technical aid corps programme, where Nigerian professionals render free technical assistance to West African countries to grow their capacity, has been of great assistance. Nigeria's role in global peace is quite commendable. Since its independence in 1960, Nigeria has participated in peacekeeping operations in the Congo, Lebanon, Mozambique, Angola, Namibia, Yugoslavia, Sudan, Darfur, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Cote d'Ivoire, and so on.

Conclusion

This study has painstakingly mirrored Nigeria's Afrocentric Foreign Policy and therefore concludes that despite its challenges and the huge financial costs to Nigeria, it has positively contributed immensely to regional stability in West Africa through peacekeeping/peace support operations, mediation of political crises, counter-terrorism efforts, and the fight against transnational criminal activities as seen in countries hitherto enmeshed in crises. Nigeria is regionally and internationally

adjudged the promoter and driver of sub-regional peace and security initiatives in West Africa and continental Africa by the United Nations Organisation, EU and the United States of America.

The study has also shown that due to the inter-connectedness of countries in West Africa, Nigeria cannot afford to run an isolationist foreign policy where she is concerned with herself alone. This position is well backed by the theory of conflict systems, which posits that conflict can spill across borders and is shaped and sustained by the strong transnational connections between countries (Buhaug and Gleditsch, 2008). It, therefore, means that even though Nigeria would have redirected her foreign policy focus towards West Africa, she stands to be affected by any crisis within her immediate borders due to the trans-national links that exist with neighbouring countries.

The studies found out that Nigeria played key roles in resolving conflicts and maintaining peace which means that it utilized the Role approach theoretical framework of behaviours in the active roles played by Nigeria's leaders in personally galvanizing the sub-region to maintain relative peace in the midst of the flash points and actual outbreak of hostilities. Nigeria's leaders embarked upon on diplomatic shuttles and financial commitments in peace activities. The Role performance prescription of Holsti (1987) was shown to be utilized by Nigerian leaders.

The paper is arguing that Nigeria should continue and strengthen its policy of having Africa as the centre piece as the centre piece of its foreign policy with the sub-region- West Africa as one of the concentric circles of its sovereign policy and in the pursuit of these, it has vigorously pursued. There is scramble for power in Nigeria by the ruling elites using one excuse or the other and in the process, there is violence and the same thing happened in Nigeria's neighbouring countries. The civil war in Liberia was started by the struggle between the natives and the settlers and that in Cote D'Ivoire was because of sit tight leadership and the same in Sierra Lone. It is also the control for more territories that led to cross border versus countries components are all caused by the urge to control and dominate. Nigeria realising that conflicts among its neighbours affect her directly and indirectly. Therefore, it has to play an active roles in maintaining peace in order to guarantee development in West Africa and the whole continent.

Recommendations

From the above summary and conclusion, this study makesthe following recommendations:

1. Nigeria and other Africa countries should continue with the Afro-centric ForeignPolicy thrust. However, the governments should prioritise the welfare of the their citizens amongst other things. This will help Africa countries to project power externally from a position of their national pride and strength.T
2. While supporting the sustenance of Afro-centric Foreign Policy which makes Nigeria a substantive leader in West Africa, attention should be concentrated on achieving vital national interest such as socio-economic growth and improve the standard of living in Nigeria. Other African countries should also strive in using foreign policy thrust to improve the standard of living of their people.
3. There is the an urgent need to convene a Foreign Policy Summit to re-define our national interest, refocus ourforeign policy in such a way that minimise losses and optimise the benefits inherent in Nigeria's mediatory efforts as opined by Ogwu (2001), that with the economic integration scheme in ECOWAS; the entire region serves as our common market where our products can flourish ifthe right framework and bilateral trade policies are workedout.
4. Sub-regional conflicts management mechanism in sub- Saharan Africa should be reformed in line with current realities. These will enhance information sharing and jointeffort in dealing with internal conflicts.

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