

Liberalism, the Element of Diplomacy in Nigerian Foreign Policy

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Abstract

This paper aims at exploring the notion of liberalism and how the element of diplomacy plays out in Nigerian foreign. Specifically, it will examine the tools of diplomacy use by Nigeria to promote national interests. Liberal idea of global politics connotes cooperation, mutual respect and gaining, organization and seeking for knowledge. Liberalism is also determined by soft means of interaction at the international level. Nigeria, since independence tries to pursue her national objectives in sole means of reciprocity and identity where members of a group try building mutual cooperation in their interconnection, and care about the interests of other members of the group to the extent of sacrifice their interests to help others. This study concludes that the moral approach applies by Nigeria in her foreign policy with other states, especially at the international stage galvanizes and paves the way for other countries – in her partnership – to take the country for granted. However, the elements of idealism are not always more optimistic than other approaches such as realism, for the prospect of peace.

Keywords: *Nigerian Foreign Policy, Liberalism, Diplomacy, International Politics*

Introduction

From the beginning of the 1950s, Political Scientists have engaged in developing theories and traditional approaches that could shape the behaviour of individual state at the international stage. Arguably, humans are naturally selfish and egocentric as noted by Thomas Hobbes. This nature of humankind sets a very profound effect on the world affairs. Self-help as theorize by many scholars in the realism approach of international relations, remains the only way for survival as the world system has parenthetically become a chaotic anarchism. This – with the absence of central authority to maintain law and order – furthers synthetic development of realists as live in isolation is no longer possible in modern day international affairs. On this ground, each nation places its policies based on the interpretation of its national objectives defined in terms of power. However, the

international system is designed in accordance with the balance of power among states (Karen and Ivan, 2017).

The inkling of the liberal theories of the global politics as adduced by Immanuel Kant is explained in two ways: reciprocity and identity. Reciprocity advocates how nations cooperate and build international institutions based on mutual respect so to achieve their individual interests that are not necessarily common. The second is identity principle, which proposes that there should be some types of government that could decide not to act to one another in an aggressive way that should minimize the number of wars to a zero count (Goldestein and Pevehouse, 2017).

Liberal ideological afterthought has been trying to accommodate itself since the early twentieth century, immediately after the first global war. It faces with troublesome simply because the hypothesized assumptions of its proponents fail to visualize the symptoms of wickedness in human nature. The belief that human – as how in general phenomena – is good by nature; needs to be an enterprise that should be attracting, ideally. This is clearly laid out by John Locke. The post-First World War catastrophic incidences including the Second World War hamper any eminent contribution that is expected from an ideological tenet especially the one that tries to prove the innocence of humankind nature.

However, the liberal afterthought about how individual states need to behave at the global level is not realistic. Rather, it is an ideal view of what ought to be regardless of whether it is in the place or not. Some empirical evidences become a point of reference that the liberal internationalism seen very much popular during the time when the conflicts and international aggressions were not heavily parts of the process of international diplomacy. Diplomatic exchange often can't be realized between the two potentially hostile states. Therefore, power can't be centralized on a state so to be interpreted based on the military means of acquiring, but also to be decentralized to influence and adopt tolerance to promote peace through different ways of interactions.

Nigeria is the populous and the largest economy in Africa. Both economy and population require large size of interconnections with the outside world (states and non-state actors) so as to pave a way in order to meet the needs of the risen

demands. Liberal idealism as the school of thought seemed to be Nigeria's element in formulating foreign policy. The recent diplomatic imbalance between Nigeria and countries such as Ghana and South Africa in Africa, or Nigeria and the United Arab Emirates, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the United Kingdom, and Canada in the West Asia, Europe and North America respectively left behind an empirical evidence that, the national interest overtakes a connection in history or any other link as it may. However, the mode of policy response (initiated by individual state) against Nigeria is because of the soft policy combination used by Nigeria to ensure mutual interests and these are realized through cooperation and international organization.

Till late twentieth century, conflicts were not that a major concern in international politics as, increasingly, cooperation in pursuit of mutual interests was a prominent feature of world politics. Terms much in vogue in contemporary International Relations literature (and in the media), such as 'globalisation' or 'multiculturalism', while not intrinsically liberal, have liberal adherents or interpretations and have received growing attention from liberal scholars. In more recent years liberals have made important contributions to the study of international relations in the areas including international order, institutions and processes of governance, human rights, democratisation, peace and economic integration (Sinclair, 1983).

More or so, the profound effect and change of power shift in the modern day international order influenced by the end of Cold War and the fall of Berlin Wall, the 9/11 attacks on American soil, the risen of China and India that gradually continue to nudge higher than ever before, are among collection of events that overwrite the old version of the global affairs to a new horizon of economy and diplomacy.

This new setting style of diplomacy appears to have other capabilities such as post-colonialism that was not in the old version of foreign policy leadership. With major flux in East Asia, Europe, South Asia, and, of course, the Middle East, virtually every country around the world is facing a new set of political, economic, and social pressures. Yet there seems to be a global deficit in strategic responses to these challenges at the very time that such action is most urgently needed.

Stalemate hinders even incremental progress in global negotiations over climate change, the Doha trade round, nuclear arms reductions, a global energy forum, and almost every other major issue (Hutchings and Suri, 2015)

Nigerian Foreign Policy: A Historical Overview

The perpetual interactions between global governments and non-governmental actors from across different continents and regions have made foreign policy so much valid and relevant. International context as well as domestic pressures of individual state makes decision making processes both difficult task though meaningful, however.

Different sort of relations range from trade negotiations, diplomacy, cultural exchanges and intelligence help decision makers arrive at the heart of the process followed by decisions and expected outcomes of these decisions (Alden and Aran, 2017). In this regard Nigerian is not exceptional. Like any other sovereign state, Nigeria formulated foreign policy equips her achieving the expected outcomes so to feed national objectives based on circumstantiality of the time.

Besides, Nigeria tries not to breach the ratified covenants and agreements with other international actors. Ostensibly, all of these agreements paid attention to centralize their contextual concerns in maintaining peace in the world with less aggression in interactions amongst global governments. More or so, to fulfil the demanded requirements, Nigeria emphasizes liberal view side in her foreign policy far deeper than the opposite approach, the *realism*. Realists accentuate *powerpolitik* in persuing a national interest.

However, in an occasion Nigeria turned down the act of irredentism over Bakassi Peninsula, and thus decided to forsake the oil rich area to Cameroon, that helped both Nigeria and Cameroon to settle down and avoid potential border dispute between the two neighbouring sovereign states. And “because of their association with the integrity of states, territories are valued far beyond any inherent economic or strategic value they hold including territories and border demarcations” (Goldestein and Pevehouse, 2017).

Nigeria, like many African countries won her political independence in 1960. Nigeria was colonized by the British Empire in the late nineteenth century as two

regions: South and North protectorates that are equally divided along religious and tribal lines. The political independence was achieved on 1st October, 1960. These two dominantly disparate regions were ideally in need with different strategies before it become possible to proceed in controlling them as single entity known later on, as Nigeria. Dissimilarities were never limited to historical background, but also extended to orientation, tradition and culture, and to physical appearance as well. Consequently, in the aftermath of the independence, the feeling of belonging and patriotism was not so popular among Nigerians (Carland, 1985).

Upon amalgamation, several important factors were not being taken into consideration, and perhaps, that could have relation with the future difficulties of the country. Prior to the plan that brought about the united Nigeria popularly known as amalgamation; cultural adherences, history and background were not being put into consideration. Above all, the two Abrahamic faiths namely: Islam and Christianity (Hughes, 2012) predominantly remain symbols for Northerners and Southerners respectively and are artificially neutralized from their cultures and traditions overnight to satisfy the ostensible unity and conglomeration.

Notwithstanding all accomplished by the British colonial imperialists to ensure a concrete bridge that could permanently cement north and south, the regional intermarriage according to Momah (2013), inculcates stagnation and severe economic condition, especially the one of 1980s. This interconnectivity between the two asymmetrical sides has been able to realize independent Nigeria by 1960. In 1966, six years after the independence, the first bloodbath was witnessed in the history of modern Nigeria. That strife has been in the position to play a defeatist role in galvanizing political and socio-tribal crises in the country over the course of assassination of very important personalities including the Prime Minister, Sir, Abubakar Balewa and the Premier of Northern region, Sir, Ahmad Bello (Momah, 2013).

Obviously, mixture of variety of issues gives a wonderful combination. This is what was evasively expected by North-South amalgamation process too. Instead, division, rivalry and unnecessarily antagonism on the basis of ethnicity or tribe soon overtook the newly innocent independent state amidst nation-building process. By the time of compiling this study, it is exactly one hundred and eight

years (108 [1914-2022]) past on this historic (supposed) togetherness. But the atrocious detail is that, throughout this span of time, Nigeria as one country, so far fails to prove any competitive progress. Thus, regional sense of belonging instead of patriotism takes advantage to bolster corruption, mismanagement and other malfeasances. Alternatively, good governance, rule of law and social development are overtaken by regional sentimentalism (Olaniyan, 2003).

This heterogeneous combination and cultural differences between south and northern Nigeria guide the Nigerian foreign policy, which was, according to some scholars like Aniche, anchored during the post-independence in 1960 to realize many important agendas including centralizing the foreign policy on Africa; African solidarity by underpinning Pan-Africanism; decolonization; putting an end to racial exploitation, discrimination and marginalization; the sentiment of good neighbourhood; non-intervention in the internal affairs of other countries; and non-alignment (Aniche, 2009).

However, the Afro-centric philosophy is said to be the one translates Nigerian foreign policy. Hence, to ensure that this strategy is being realized, the country spends enormous resources in assisting other African countries in a move which has been conned by many Nigerians as a misplace-priority move. Countries like Namibia, Angola, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, etc., are part of categorical beneficiaries. Apart from deploying troops to maintain peacekeeping in Africa's crises areas, it also played a vital role in deactivating apartheid in South Africa (Aniche, 2009).

Liberal Ideology And The Nigerian Foreign Policy

The ideological tenet of *liberal idealism* is rooted in the moral debate that ensures the right of an individual to life, liberty and property and this should be the top goal of a government existence. Consequently, liberals emphasise the wellbeing of the individual as the fundamental building block of a just political system (Meiser, 2018). The contradictive implication as per the Nigeria's domestic policies are the rule of law, civil liberty, right of the persons, and even political freedom that ought to carry apolitical heavy and they are always misconstrue. A political system characterised by extravagant use of power, such as that of a tyrant, cannot be in a position to provide protection of the life, property and liberty of its

citizens. Even if it tries shepherding the international governments in the contact that aggression is not always the only way forward.

So forth, to the issues of domestic politics, the central concern of liberal ideology centralizes on constructing institutions that can protect individual freedom in different dimensions including limiting and checking political power itself. While the realm of International Relations is also important to liberals because a state's activities abroad can have a strong influence on freedom at home. Liberals are particularly troubled by militaristic foreign policies. The primary concern is that war requires states to build up military power. This power can be used for fighting foreign states, but it can also be used to oppress its own citizens. For this reason, political systems rooted in liberalism often limit military power by such means as ensuring civilian control over the military (Meiser, 2018).

It has become an axiomatic truth that the Foreign Policy of a country is, some large extent determined by its domestic structure. Many scholars and diplomats have accepted this view. They have attempted to demonstrate that the various constituent elements in the political system- the government, the political parties, pressure groups, the civil service, the political and bureaucratic elites, public opinion, and the press- operating within the democratic process provided by the constitution, exert direct or indirect influence in shaping a country's foreign policy (Okolo, 1988). It is in line with this assertion that Akokpari (1999) has argued that Sub-Saharan African countries have to constantly reorient their foreign policies to reflect or accommodate domestic and external vicissitudes. Such orientation shifts have rendered these countries' foreign policies innately malleable and pliable, deprived of coherence or consistence.

Regarding her attitudes, Nigeria seems to maintain dual stances that are equally shared between foreign and domestic policies, which are also never balanced. As her idealism is virtually invested in dealing with foreign nations in Africa, Asia Europe and Pacific, and therefore not for the citizens. Number of different scenarios remain vivid paradigms. Somewhere in 2020, the country lost apartments belong to its High Commission in Accra, Ghana, to the hands of Ghanaians under a baseless claim of ownership of the land, after some "armed men reportedly stormed the compound last week and destroyed buildings under

construction” (BBC, 2020). In yet another similar incidence kicked off in South Africa, when large number of merchant Nigerians experienced ignominy at the hands of their African brothers by destroying properties including shops and business stuffs belong to Nigerian peoples.

In different occasions, since 2008, Nigerians have been the immediate target of South Africans. The last one was of the recent past, when Nigerian shop-keepers were attacked violently. This unfortunate alternative of South Africans galvanized a rewind of series of similar cases that managed to happen over decades. In 2008 alone, over 60 Nigerians were killed in those xenophobic attacks. It happened again in April 2016 as at least six people lost their lives. During the last fortnight of the same month of April in the same year, too, anti-foreigner violence erupted once again with protesters accusing non-South Africans of stealing scarce jobs and bringing crime. The dominant violent attacks seem to be of strong emphasis on Nigerians, however (Unah, 2017).

Xenophobic attacks have become affair of the day not only on Nigerian nationals abroad as many other foreigners face similar fearful occurrences, but among other important issues is that what the likely responses of the Nigerian authorities are against any bogey that causes fear among a large number of both individual and group of Nigerians? This answer is captured somewhere in the *liberal ideal* approach or the Nigerian national interests are nothing but lines on the pages that have been faded by decades of years.

The Nigerian state is not forthcoming at catering for the welfare and well-being of its citizens in Nigeria, and this has forced many Nigerians to seek greener pastures abroad or to put more aptly, economic refuge abroad. As a result, many of them are engaged in many illegal activities to survive harsh treatment abroad where they are not likely to get decent jobs. This explains why the corruption perception index (CPI) of the Transparency International (TI) has not ranked Nigeria favourably since its inception.

In an instance, it was noted that with several corrupt former Governors still parading themselves imperiously on the streets of Abuja, still on the beck and call of the president, and appeared seemingly untouchable; it is hard to convince the world that we are still waging war against corruption in earnest and with sincerity

of purpose. Successive Nigerian governments have nothing to be proud of in terms of promoting a positive image of Nigeria or tackling corruption. In fact, whatever little policy was made had only been there to benefit those in the government and not the Nigerian masses (Unah, 2017).

In more or so, diplomacy – in the first instance – must be backed up with the sincere of purpose and approach to a nation’s entire problem at home. After sixty years of independence, and with resources in abandon both human and material ones, Nigerians are still wallowing in an abject poverty and desperation, while the men in control are madly busy looting the treasures all over the country and living unimaginable expensive lifestyles and depositing the loots in countries where Nigeria citizens are relatively incidental compared to other citizens of African descent (Adejumo, 2011).

Conclusion

The untimely foreign policy misplaces Nigeria’s priorities at the international political arena. The anarchic nature of the global system of modern day international affairs forces and reshapes diplomacy to concentrate heavily on self-help tactic, and to some extent, to tit-for-tat affair. Let’s reconsider Russia-Ukraine ongoing strife at one hand, and NATO-EU-US at the other. Moscow maintains tit-for-tat attitude which may relevantly remain the only option as far as the Russian national interests are concerned. However, in the last two decades, both NATO and U.S. have commonly been attacking and invading foreign lands including Iraq, Afghanistan, and Libya. But never launch an attack against Iran and North Korea. Even though these two countries seem to serve a security threat against U.S. and the West. Some countries, such as Libya and Ukraine play – at their own risk – similar game to that of contemporary Nigerian one, and the result is so costly. Libyan citizens are not, at all happy neither are Ukrainian peoples.

Nigerian policy in relation with foreign governments, is likely to be responsible for dehumanization of Nigerians by those governments, especially in the West and U.S., Asia and Africa. Clear absence of the rule of law in Nigeria tempts large size of citizenry to go out of control in and out of the country. The popularized ‘Citizen First’ – ‘Country First’ emblem is a subject of several attacks and undermined by a well-active *rule of the man* notion.

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