A Critical Review of Nigeria’s Regional Hegemonic Aspirations through Afrocentric Engagements from 1999 - 2019: Call for a National Rethink

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Nigeria has over the years projected an esteemed image of the ‘giant of Africa’ for itself through the prism of its Afrocentric policies in Africa. In spite of the increasing internal socio-political and economic challenges on one hand, and external (regional) competition, criticisms and rivalry on the other, successive regime in Nigeria places more emphasis on African interest even at the expense of its national interest in most instances. However, as much as such foreign policy posture has undoubtedly earned Nigeria a subtle hegemonic status and influence since independence, the approach of the Afrocentric engagements is partly responsible for Nigeria’s declining regional influence today. This paper assessed the Nigeria’s pro-African foreign policy approach with regards to its regional leadership in the past twenty years of uninterrupted democratic experience (1999-2019). The methodology relied on secondary data and employed a qualitative research design. From the findings, the paper discovered the Nigeria’s huge engagements in Africa have not been strategic in any way to advance its regional hegemonic aspirations, and thus recommended rational and beneficial regional engagements that can be positively felt at home, and aimed at enhancing its national power, specifically economic capability.

Keywords: Nigeria, Regional Hegemony, Foreign Policy, Afrocentric Engagements, Africa

INTRODUCTION

International relations, either at global or regional level occurs within an anarchic structure where ‘fights’ for power or quest for dominance is a defining norm. Within the system, power remains sole criteria for defining, explaining and categorizing the actors and players. In realists’ term, power is both means and the end of the international relations. State actors approach the arena of interaction through the means of power with the sole aim of increasing their power base amidst the scarce values that characterize the system. The degree of power a state wields (within such system) is directly proportional to its hierarchical role and status per time. The Political hierarchies and the anarchic nature of the international system often create atmosphere through which states are able to traverse their power capabilities (hard, soft and smart power) in order to advance their hegemonic dominance either regionally or globally. To put it in perspective, the concept of hegemony is not a geopolitical discourse. It means political leadership which implies supremacy of one sort or another (Thomas, 1975). Hegemonic influence can be wielded at regional or global level. The major theoretical indices of hegemonic power are willingness and ability. That is, a state must be willing and possess the wherewithal to provide leadership to assume the status of hegemony either regionally or globally.

In his analysis, Flemes (2007) measures regional hegemony by using four vital indices: claim to leadership; power capabilities; employment of foreign policy tools; and legitimacy of leadership stance. Ogunnubi and Uzodike (2016) put this in perspective by describing regional hegemony as a state with supremacy and capabilities relative to its region, which has considerable influence on its regional geopolitics through a defined foreign policy, and which enjoys a degree of acceptance, legitimacy and recognition based on its perceived leadership stance. On her part, Prys (2010) presents three ‘P’s that define hegemonic structure: provision, projection and perception. That is, the provision of goodwill; the projection of the
regional power's preferences and interests; and the domestic and external perception of the regional power as a state with ability to influence the behavior of other states in a desired direction. She stated further that, these three P's must inevitably be combined with a fourth variable (economic or material capabilities) for a regional hegemon to gain legitimacy. Regional hegemonic status is thus a function of leadership influence and preponderance of power capabilities.

In the case of Africa, Nigeria has over the years through the employment of foreign policy instrument of Afrocentrism been providing leadership in the continent, which to great extent has projected its image as an Africa regional giant. In his words, Onwunwa (1988) argues expressively that Nigeria has been consistently committed to its Afrocentric foreign policy thrust which underpins its coordinated diplomacy for maintaining African stability and development. This foreign policy posture has been codified with the phrase: ‘Africa as the center-piece’ (cornerstone) of Nigeria foreign policy which becomes a distinctive slogan indicating Nigeria’s involvement in African affairs. Africa as the center-piece of Nigeria’s foreign policy is a foreign policy thrust which gives consistent primacy and attention to Africa affairs before the global affairs. This is what has been described as Afrocentrism, and such regional diplomacy and consistent commitment are what is referred to as Afrocentric engagements in the context of this paper.

In the early decade of independence in Africa, Nigeria has projected esteem image of the ‘giant of Africa’ for itself through the prism of its Afrocentric policies (diplomatic engagements) in Africa (Adebayo & Landsberg, 2003). It is worth noting, however, that this Afrocentric foreign policy thrust predate the Fourth Republic (1999-till date). The continental leadership perception being held by Nigerian leaders like Herbert Macaulay, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Anthony Enahoro, Pa Imoudu, Obafemi Awolowo, Aminu Kano, Ladipo Solanke, among others gained currency during the colonial period and fully expressed through Afrocentric steps and engagements in the post-independent years (Ubaku, Emeh & Anyikwa, 2014:60) ; Folarin, 2010:219). In the post-independent era, Nigeria realized the problem in which most African states found themselves and the urgent needs of a regional hegemon capable of positively addressing the political, economic and security issues confronting the continent and restore the dignity of Africa as a continent in the global sphere, it pursues a concentric foreign policy objectives with Africa at the epicenter. According to Adebajo & Mustapha (2008), Nigeria aspiration for regional hegemonic leadership has been consistently expressed and vigorously pursued through Afrocentric foreign policy since independence. The continental impacts of such Afrocentric engagements undeniably earned Nigeria a subtle hegemonic influence in Africa.

However, foreign policy can be described as action plans of a state towards external environment which are usually conditioned by both domestic and external realities and configurations per time. The foreign policy of any country is a function of interplay between internal and external environments. In the case of Nigeria, its foreign policy formulation is encapsulated in what is described as Four-Concentric-Circles of national interest. Gambari (1989) notes that the first circle entails the need for Nigeria to maintain a spirit of good neighborliness with its immediate neighbors: Benin, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger. The second borders on Nigeria’s relations with its West African neighbors; the third emphasizes the country’s commitment to continental issues relating to peaceful co-existence, development, and democratization; while the fourth circle spells out Nigeria’s bilateral and multilateral relations outside the coast of Africa. In essence, Nigeria’s foreign policy is Afrocentric. That is, it gives premium to Africa problems and issues According to Aluko (1977), factors which include, but not limited to: the colonial inheritance, the leadership idiosyncrasies of successive governments, Nigeria’s foreign policy resources, its post-civil war experience, and the primacy of its national and economic interests are the determinants of Nigeria’s behaviors towards its neighbors in West Africa sub-region, Africa and the rest of the world.

A nation’s foreign policy is the instrument through which a nation pursues its national interest. In realists’ opinion, what defines inter-state relations is power which is interpreted to mean national interest of a state. Every nation relates with the outside world with the primary motive of advancing its national interest and seeks to protect it at whatever cause or cost. While upholding this view, Morgenthau (1973) avers that no nation can have a true guide as what it needs to do in foreign policy without accepting national interest as a guide. For Nigeria, its national interest has been overwhelmed by its regional interests. Nigeria has over the years overwhelmingly and persistently burdened its successive foreign policy on the cause of Africa’s endless issues and problems. Nigeria has been overstraining its domestic economic structures to advance its interest in Africa. This is in tandem with the theoretical argument that once a hegemon is established in a state of equilibrium, the costs of maintaining its position tend to grow overwhelmingly than its resource (Gilpin 1981).

As commendable as the pro-African engagements appear, it is not devoid of internal and external (regional) controversies and criticisms. Internally, it is seen as a sheer waste of Nigeria resources to parade itself as African giant at detriment of its own citizens, and externally, fellow African states are usually wary of the ‘big brother’ claim of Nigeria in the continent. The continental responses to the expulsion of about three million West-African immigrants between 1983 and 1985 are good instances. Similarly, the regional criticisms and ‘noise’ that greeted the closure of
Nigeria borders in August, 2019 against the neighboring states as part of its economic diplomacy aimed at rejuvenating its dwindling economy are apt (Adebajo, 2010; Awosusi and Fatoyinbo, 2019).

Thus, this study argues that the current foreign policy posture has undoubtedly earned Nigeria a subtle hegemonic leadership influence since independence, but such regionally perceived hegemonic stance has come under scrutiny and threat in the wake of the daunting realities of African regional politics, especially in the period under review. An evidence of Nigeria dwindling regional influence can be seen in the case of the African Union elections in 2017. Neither Nigeria nor the candidates it supported won any elective positions in the entire elections. Regardless of any acclaimed responsible factor(s), it is an obvious regional blow on Nigeria, which points to its declining supremacy in the continent. Ogbonna and Ogunnubi (2018), while analyzing the implications of the elections on Nigeria regional hegemony, opine emphatically that the electoral outcome did not portray Nigeria as a regional hegemon because it is expected that as a regional power or supposed hegemon, its preferences, interests and positions in regional organizations within its domain should be advanced or secured without any serious obstacles. Thus, using a descriptive approach hinge on secondary sources of data collection and analysis of documented materials, this paper assessed the Nigeria pro-African diplomacy (Afrocentric foreign policy approach) with regards to its regional leadership in the past two decades of uninterrupted democratic experience (1999-2019) given the contemporary realities African geopolitics.

UNDERLINING PRINCIPLES OF NIGERIA’S AFROCENTRIC FOREIGN POLICY

“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 (Balewa & Epelle, 1964 )”

The above assertion by the First Nigerian Prime Minister, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa on October 7, 1960, laid the foundation and set the pace for the principles that underpinned the pro-African orientation of Nigeria foreign policy which places premium on the promotion of African unity and development (Osaghae, 1998, Ogunnubi, 2018). This assertion, however, is in consonance with the idea of ‘manifest destiny’ as first advocated by Nnamdi Azikiwe, the first president of Nigeria in the first republic (1960-1966). According to him, Nigeria is positioned in Africa as a ‘messiah’ and should play a vanguard leadership role in Africa stability and development (Claude, 1964; Ogunnubi, 2018). This ideal was also buttressed by the statement of the Nigeria first Minister of Foreign Affairs, Aja Wachukwu (1961) who emphasized on the essentiality of an Afrocentric policy thus:

“Charity begins at home and therefore any Nigerian foreign policy that does not take into consideration the peculiar position of Africa is unrealistic”

From the excerpt above, Afrocentric diplomacy is seen as the cornerstone and guiding principle of Nigeria’s diplomatic engagements in Africa and has earned Nigeria as a subtle regional hegemonic status in Africa. The Afrocentric ideals has guided and played out significantly in bilateral and multilateral engagements with many countries within Africa and, to a large extent, has persistently underpinned its foreign policy since the 1960s till date regardless of its internal dynamics and issues (Dauda, 2006). However, the pro-African policy as it relates to its hegemonic roles in Africa includes: promotion of peace, prosperity, stability and development in Africa; promotion of political goodwill and understanding among Africa countries despite the cultural, linguistic and economic barriers caused by colonial expeditions; frowning at international intervention and presence in Africa; self-determination for all countries on the continent and the elimination of apartheid in South Africa and the eradication of all forms of racial discrimination in Africa; the promotion of rapid social-economic development of Africa through regional economic integration; the strengthening of sub-regional economic institutions such as ECOWAS and the reduction of economic dependence on extra-continental powers; and lastly, the development of cultural cooperation as a means of strengthening diplomatic ties with all African countries (UN Report, 1991).

Pertinently, Chapter II, Section 19 of the 1999 constitution which provided a framework for Nigeria foreign policy in the Fourth Republic further lend credence to the Afrocentric posture and pursuit of Nigeria foreign policy as follows:

“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”.

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Though, every succeeding regime devise ‘suitable’ diplomacy and strategy towards the achievement of the Afrocentric ends depending on the internal and external environment and realities per time.

In realists’ perspective, no actor acts in vacuum in international politics. Every orientations, politics and policies in the international arena are underpinned by certain ideologies (popular or unpopular). The case of Nigeria is not an exception. There are defined ideologies and principles inspiring its pro-African foreign policy pursuit which are African-nationalism and Pan-Africanism (Ujara & Ibietan, 2017). Over the decades, these ideologies have been put in perspective by guiding principles which include: African unity and independence, peaceful resolution of disputes, capacity to exert hegemonic influence in the region, non-alignment principle, non-interference in the internal affairs of states, and economic cooperation and development within the region (Ukwuije, 2015).

**A RETROSPECTIVE DISCOURSE ON NIGERIA’S AFROCENTRIC ENGAGEMENTS IN AFRICA**

Since independence, Nigeria has actively participated and played a vanguard role through myriads of efforts aimed at continental stability and development. Although it has been argued that Nigeria was not committed to the African problems and issues in the first republic (1960-1966) until the civil war experience which taught Nigeria the importance of good neighborliness, but it is not totally true. The Afrocentric ideals surfaced significantly in the foreign policy of the first republic. For instance, in 1960, Nigeria participated effectively in the multilateral United Nations peacekeeping mission that restored normalcy to Congo during the civil war. (Chibundi, 2003:5) Also, in 1961, Nigeria took a bold unilateral action against France for testing Atomic Bomb in the Algerian Sahara. An action Nigeria considered a continental blow and consequently broke diplomatic relations with France as deterrence to other world powers with similar intentions in Africa at large (Talibu & Muhammed, 2016).

Nigeria within the same period played leading role in the formation of Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1963 and Chad Basin Commission in 1964. Beyond any argument, it must be noted that the ideological framework which set the pace for the future leadership role was clearly spelt out in the First Republic. The open declaration of Yakubu Gowon that “Africa is the Cornerstone of Nigeria’s foreign policy”, in 1972 is predicated on the foundational ideologies laid by his predecessor, and particularly, the Nigerian Pan-Africanists. (Kia, Nwigo, & Ojile, 2017). In the struggle against colonialism and the apartheid regime in Africa, Nigeria did not leave any stone unturned to see that African states were freed from the shackles of colonial rule. Nigeria was instrumental to the fight against colonialism and eventual independence of Angola, Namibia, Rhodesia (present day Zimbabwe), among other African states. Its principle was a total eradication of colonialism from the Africa continent. Nigeria was financially and materially committed to the Liberation Movements as it recognized the MPLA as the legitimate government of Angola. Fawole (2003) argues that the resources in human and material terms, which Nigeria has committed in African States since independence, are multitudinous. He further reports that Nigeria spent more than sixty million dollars ($60m) in cash and kind to support the MPLA Movement.

Likewise, in the struggle against white minority rule in South Africa, Nigeria was at the forefront and saw the eventual dismantling of apartheid regime in the country. As part of efforts against apartheid, on February 13, 1976, Nigeria donated the sum of two million dollars ($2m) to South Africa’s African National Congress (ANC) and $500,000 to Namibia’s South West African Peoples’ Organization (SWAPO). SWAPO was later granted permission to open office in Lagos, Nigeria. At about the same time, the Federal Ministry of Information inaugurated a committee for dissemination of information (Al-Hassan, 2010). Also, in 1978 Nigeria under Murtala-Obasanjo regime, the British-owned Barclays Bank was partially nationalized by the Federal government of Nigeria. To further pressurize British government; in 1979 General Obasanjo nationalized the British Petroleum (BP), to stop Nigeria crude oil from being made available to the apartheid regime in South Africa and to stop Britain from recognizing the puppet regime in Rhodesia (Akinboye, 1999). In addition to all these, General Obasanjo, in December, 1976 launched the Southern African Relief Fund and the money realized was sent to Angola, Namibia and South Africa.

Having played a pivotal role in the formation of Organization of African Unity in 1963, Nigeria did not relent in its effort through the prism of the Afrocentric policy to see a politically and economically integrated West Africa sub-region and by extension, Africa integration. This quest, however, led to spearheading the formation of Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) on 28 May, 1975 with the signing of the Treaty of Lagos. Upon its establishment, Nigeria accepted the task of large financial commitments to ECOWAS, regularly, contributing up to one-third of its annual budget (Kia et al., 2016). This position was complemented by the occasional donations to meet pressing needs: Nigeria gave financial and moral assistance to the Liberation Movements in Southern Africa; Paid dues to the Liberation Committee of the OAU campaign against the Anglo African states for the creation of ECOWAS; Nigeria also spearheaded the African, Caribbean and Pacific Countries (ACP) in their struggle to negotiate as one body with the European Economic Commission (EEC) for improved relations bordering on trade, aid and investments. Bilaterally, Nigeria also gave material and financial donation to African states. For
instance, during President Shehu Shagari regime, Nigeria donated $5 million to Mugabe’s government among others. The dynamic nature of Nigeria’s Afrocentric engagements especially in the late 1970s gravely fostered its emergence as a regional power which in turn earned it a seat in the United Nations Security Council (Ibid.)

In pursuance of the Africa-centered foreign policy, Nigeria has been committed to regional order and stability. Nigeria has demonstrated its military prowess and commitment to the peaceful settlement of inter-state disputes and conflicts in Africa continent. These conflicts include Chadian conflict between Goukouni Weddeye and Hissen Habre; Ethiopia and between Morocco and Polisario Movement over the Western Sahara, Liberia Crisis, Sierra Leone civil war etc. Nigeria’s leadership role in the Libyan and Sierra-Leonean crises lend credence to country’s hegemonic stance in the continent. Similarly, in March and April 1979, through Kano I-II Peace Talks, Nigeria painstakingly took efforts to prevent the Chad conflict from metamorphosing into a fully blown international conflict, as France and Libya partook on both sides of the war. Nigeria afterwards sent peacekeeping forces to Chad under the auspices of the Organization of African Unity (now African Union).

Further still, as a crucial way to successfully restore peace to war-torn Liberia, Nigeria under Gen. Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida (IBB), championed the setting up of the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) in 1990. Since its establishment, ECOMOG has been instrumental to restoring normalcy to Mali, Cote D’Ivoire, the Gambia, among other conflict-ridden states in West Africa sub-region and Africa at large. The peace-keeping arm on which Nigeria has lavished enormous human and material resources also succeeded in achieving the same goal in the crises-ridden Sierra Leone where the legitimate regime of Kabbah was reinstated to power (Owa & Wisdom, 2017)). The preponderance contribution of Nigeria to regional peace missions in Liberia and Sierra Leone cost the country the sum of $10billion, not to mention the gallant men and women of Nigerian Armed Forces who risk their lives for peace, but hardly acknowledged by the international community.

In this same pursuit, in 1972, Nigeria signed an agreement with Niger Republic for Nigeria to supply 30,000 kilowatts of electricity to Niger from Nigeria’s own hydroelectricity kanji Dam (Rusk, 1972). This is despite the fact that Nigeria has not met its own local needs of electricity supply, as most Nigerian villages, towns and cities are in total ‘blackout’ of electricity till date. Also, in 1974, Nigeria donated to Niger relief materials worth millions of Naira when Niger was ravaged by a life claiming drought (Onwuka, 1982). Similarly, on bilateral notes, the Republic of Cameroon received dispatched food and other materials immediately after the Lake Nyos disaster; the Equatorial Guinea was given vehicles and other equipment; the drought-stricken Cape Verde and Namibia were sent food for its refugees; Burkina Faso also received a donation of 40 light trucks, to mention but a few (Onwunwa 1988:11).

Also, in a bid to meet the deficit in manpower needs in other African states, Nigeria established Technical Aid Corps Scheme (TACS) as part of its Afrocentric diplomatic initiatives in Africa. Nigerian volunteers whose services are needed in other states are annually deployed to other states to cushion manpower needs in different fields. So far, Nigeria’s foreign policy had been largely influenced and guided by a strong commitment to Africa issues and problems. In the ongoing Fourth Republic (1999-till date), Nigeria has not been reluctant at any time in its quest for integrated, stable and united Africa. Successive regime in Nigeria places more emphasis on African interest even at the expense of its national interest on different instances. The regional roles of Nigeria have been best summed up in the words of Adebajo (2002: 10) as follows:

“Politically, Nigeria has attempted to act as Africa’s spokesman at the United Nations, the OAU, and other international fora; militarily, it has sent peacekeepers to the Congo, Chad, Liberia, Somalia, and Sierra Leone, provided military training to armies from Gambia, to Tanzania, and supplied military assistance to liberation movements in Southern Africa; economically, it has promoted sub-regional integration through Ecowas and provided bilateral aid and technical assistance to African countries.”

Thus, given its numerous hegemonic roles in terms of colossus material and human commitment in the region, Nigeria enjoyed a subtle regional hegemonic influence which earned it the ‘giant of Africa’ image especially in the 1970s, and consequently propelling it to be more engaged in African affairs, without any rationality put in place to sustain such hegemonic influence over time. By implication, such age long projected self-image begins to experience decline especially with the emergence of South Africa as another regional power in Africa. Today, the over hyped African giant is losing recognition and acceptance, and consequently being described as ‘sleeping giant’, ‘crippled giant’ among other names pointing to its fading regional supremacy in Africa (Osaghe 1998; Akinterinwa, 2001; Ogunnubi & Uzodike, 2016). This, among other factors, however, propelled this paper to assess the approach of such Afrocentric engagements in relation to its regional hegemonic aspirations in the past two decades.
NIGERIA AFROCENTRIC DIPLOMACY AND ENGAGEMENTS IN AFRICA BETWEEN 1999 AND 2019

Since the inception of the Fourth Republic on May 29, 1999, Nigeria had witnessed four different political regimes, each with different strategies and diplomacy aimed at furthering Nigeria relations in the region and beyond. The former military Head of State, Olusegun Obasanjo, having won the presidential election and sworn-in on May 29, 1999, made rhetoric attempt to initiate a more dynamic foreign policy that looks beyond the Africa continent. This was featured in the statement to the newly appointed Ambassador in the early months of his tenure. In his address, he posited that “Nigeria’s foreign policy today extends, however, far beyond our concern for the well-being of our continent Africa” (Al-Hassan, 2010: 6). This statement was interpreted to mean a new dawn for Nigeria foreign policy as such paradigm shift was long overdue. But reverse was the case as the regime became more entangled with the traditional Afrocentrism by spearheading virtually all continental issues and shouldering African problems.

However, Nigeria’s roles in Africa and world affairs determine to a great extent the type of policies pursued and diplomacy to be adopted in achieving the policies per time. During the period under review, Nigeria diplomatically engaged the region both bilaterally and multilaterally under the auspices of Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and African Union (AU). Although Nigeria maintains cordial diplomatic relations with other sovereign nations of the world, it remains attached to Africa continental issues and problems. According to international Relations expert and a core realist, Hans Morgenthau (1975), the political engagements or and behavior of a state towards its external environment provides an accurate measure of its foreign policy instrument. In this light, this piece, would critically review the Nigeria’s Afrocentric engagements with apt regards to its regional hegemonic aspirations in Africa continent, and for the sake of clarity it would be sub-divided as follows:

- Regional Conflict Resolution Engagements

Starting with Olusegun Obasanjo regime (1999-2007), the administration made commendable efforts to restore confidence and credibility to Nigeria’s contributions to the prevention, management and resolution of various conflicts in the continent. Ebohon and Obakhedo (2012), while examining Nigeria’s hegemonic role in conflict resolution in Africa, notes that such roles contributed meaningfully towards ending myriads of intra and interstate crises that heralds West African sub-region and Africa at large. Nigeria has played subtle hegemonic leadership roles especially in the Fourth Republic through continental conflict resolutions engagements, bilaterally and multilaterally under the auspices of the ECOWAS, AU and the UN.

In the Afrocentric spirit, Obasanjo advanced a proposal at the Algiers Summit of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1999, for peace, Security and African solidarity in the new millennium which kicked off in 2000, and it was unanimously embraced by the heads of states and representatives in the Summit. Similarly, being an opinionated leader, in September 1999, during the fourth extraordinary OAU Summit in Sirte, Libya, Obasanjo equally made a proposal for the convening of a Ministerial Conference on Security, Stability, Development and Cooperation in Africa (CSSDCA) and it was also unanimously adopted. The regime started with finding a solution to the crisis between Britain and Zimbabwe over the land seizure from white farmers. Through mediation power of Nigeria under the auspices of Commonwealth, the Abuja Accord was brokered which created platform for dialogue and eventual resolution of the crisis till date (Olorunyomi, 2014).

Similarly, the peace process which eventually saw the end of the lingered Sierra Leone civil war (1991-2002) was not unconnected to the persistent efforts of Nigeria after ending the war alongside ECOMOG troops. As part of Nigeria’s efforts to stabilize Sierra Leone after the war, Nigeria donated the sum of $100,000 to set up the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) as part of the post-conflict reconstruction efforts. During the same period, Nigeria military contingents also played vital roles in peacekeeping missions in countries such as Guinea Bissau, Cote D’Ivoire Ethiopia/Eritrea, Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, and Western Sahara and in the Mano River area. Nigeria leading role in the Liberia crisis and its negotiation pressured the former president Charles Taylor to step down from power in August 2003. As part of efforts to end the lingered crisis in the country, Nigeria also granted asylum to Charles Taylor, the former Liberian President (Ibid.).

Nigeria’s enviable commitment towards solving African problems under Obasanjo regime could also be seen in various peace and mediation talks between Sudanese government and Darfurian rebel factions. In addition, the restoration to power of the President of Sao Tome and Principe, Mr. Fradique Menezes, after a military takeover in July 2003 was largely credited to Nigeria under the leadership of President Obasanjo. As a way of supporting his regime, Nigeria also donated the sum of $50,000 to the government of Sao Tome. In a similar vein, Nigeria succeeded in ensuring that due constitutional process was followed in installing democratically elected government in Togo after the death of President Gnassingbe Eyadema in February, 2005. None of this engagement came and gone without a cost (Human, material and financial) on the part of Nigeria. In fact, the continuous engagement of Nigerian troops in multilateral peacekeeping operations in areas such as the Sudan generated internal resistance and aggravated public opinion at home.
Nigerians at home were weary of the colossus human and material involvement in other states to the detriment of its own people (Gubak, 2015). It’s worth noting, however, that during the same era, Nigeria and Cameroon plunged into a diplomatic and military fracas over Bakassi Peninsula, but following the International Court of Justice (ICJ) verdict in 2002, Obasanjo retreated from the stiff opposition to maintain regional order and continental peace in spite of the criticism and public opinion at home. The pivotal role of the presidents of Olusegun Obasanjo and Thabo Mbeki of South Africa in the institutional development of the AU cannot also be overemphasized. Both regional powers were central to the establishment of New Partnership for Africa Development (NEPAD) and the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) frameworks, as the defining features of the change from the OAU to the AU (Rukato, 2010).

The President Yar’Adua regime (2007-2010) could not really operationalize any tangible diplomacy to foster Nigeria leadership pursuit in Africa due to his health condition as he was preoccupied with seeking medical attention abroad. Goodluck Jonathan took over power to complete the tenure after he died in office on 5th May, 2010 and he was later elected as President. Nigeria under both leaders did not alter the initial arrangement with regards to consistent commitment to Africa issues bilaterally and multilaterally. Its condemnation of the undemocratic change of government in both Mali and Guinea Bissau during the period is an evidence of this fact. Nigeria negotiated a peaceful resolution of the crisis and prevented the coup leaders in those countries from executing their detained erstwhile presidents and Prime ministers (Nigerian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2011). This is part of the human sacrifices in efforts to maintain regional order and stability in Africa.

Having taken over power, President Goodluck Jonathan through his ‘Transformation Agenda’ attempted to re-strategize Nigeria Foreign policy approach to serve its national interest, but jettisoning or redefining the Afrocentric engagements to enhance Nigeria’s national power was not the idea. For instance, the administration through its leadership, ECOWAS effectively managed the ouster of Laurent Gbagbo of Cote D’Ivoire when he refused to hand over power, after the 2010 Presidential elections in the country. Another apt instance can be seen in its condemnation of the undemocratic change of government in both Mali and Guinea Bissau (Omo-Ogbebor, 2017). Before President Jonathan handed over power to President Muhammadu Buhari, Jonathan played frontline role in the Burkina Faso crisis between 2014 and 2015 under the multilateral intervention of ECOWAS and African Union. However, the foreign policy position of the administration of President Goodluck Jonathan who succeeded the late Yar’Adua was generally perceived as a continuation of the foreign policy thrust of his predecessor with similar human and material commitment (Chidozie, Ibietan & Ujara, 2014).

Under President Muhammadu Buhari Civilian administration (2015 till date), the commitment to African issues and problems came with more vigor. It must be noted that Buhari’s government placed premium on the wiping out of Boko Haram terrorists and other terrorist groups from West African sub-region (Odubajo, 2017). On assuming office, Buhari embarked on diplomatic visits to Niger Republic, Cameroon, Benin Republic, Chad, among other African states for discourse on the ravaging insecurity in West Africa sub-region, and consequently ordered the Nigeria Military Command to be moved to Maiduguri, Borno State (Northeast region of Nigeria bordering Niger Republic) as his own strategy of declaring war on the terrorists who are using the border communities as hide outs. In the same spirit, President Buhari championed the creation of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), which composed of 8,700 standing army officers pulled from member countries of the Lake Chad Basin Commission, by donating the sun of $21 million to facilitate the establishment of the MNJTF headquarters in N’Djamena, Chad. The sum of $79 million was also released subsequently to finance the operational strategies of the task force (Vanguard, 2015; Uduma & Nwosu, 2015; Olowojulo, 2017). In short, Nigeria has been funding almost 100 percent of the MNJTF fighting terrorists in the Lake Chad Basin. In January 2017, Nigeria and other ECOWAS member states played vital roles in resolving the Gambian crisis caused by the refusal of President Yahya Jammeh to accept the loss of the 2016 presidential polls to opposition candidate, Adama Barrow. The military threats orchestrated by Nigeria and ECOWAS ensured that Jammeh relinquished power peacefully and subsequently went on exile, leading to the birth of the ‘New Gambia’ on January 27, 2017, as Adama Barrow took over as the president (Omotosho, 2018; Bello; Awosusi & Muhammed, 2019). In fact, recently, after the killings of 31 women by terrorists in Burkina Faso, President Buhari (2019) was quoted thus:

“… As we have done all the time, we will stand with our brothers and sisters in West Africa in all situations”

However, in spite of the burden burnt by Nigeria in its peacekeeping role in Africa, the country did not relent in its efforts and contribution to the development and stability in the continent. Without mincing words, Nigeria’s contribution to conflict resolution in Africa in the last twenty years is invaluable. No other nations in Africa can humanly and materially commit to the continent in such benevolent manner. For instance, during Nigeria’s intervention in the Liberian crisis (1991-2003), it spent $12 billion and lost 1000 soldiers. Also, about $34 million was expended on the deployment of Nigerian troops for the operation in Mali in January 2013 (Iganga, 2013; Olawale, 2003).
Given all the aforementioned, the questions worth asking here are: Has the cost (both human and materials) of these Nigeria’s conflict resolutions engagements boosted its internal conflict management techniques? Are these mediations, peace talks and peace operations tied to any economic gains or just for mere charade to parade itself as ‘African giant’? These, among other are questions which borders on national interests need to be addressed for Nigeria hegemonic roles (in terms of conflict resolution) to be transformed into national power, and in turn enhance its regional hegemonic status.

- **Regional Integration Engagements**

At both the sub-regional and continental stages, Nigeria had distinguished itself as a key financier and driver of the integration process. Nigeria’s approach to African regional integration is defined through an incremental paradigm. In other words, Nigeria had always championed a position that favors a gradual (step-by-step) approach to the attainment of continental integration. Spurred by the pan-Africanist ideals, Nigeria had since independence grown with conviction that development of Africa continent is hinge on political and economic integration through the prism of regional Organisations. This propelled it to champion the formation of Organization of African Union (Now African Union) and Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in 1963 and 1975 respectively with utmost readiness to bear their human and financial burdens. Having played frontline roles in the establishment of these Organisations, Nigeria continued to engage and actively play vanguard roles in the two Organisations to foster African integration. According to Ajetunmobi, et al, (2011), the first tenure of Obasanjo’s presidency came with fresh desire to explore Nigeria’s comparative advantages into tangible benefits, not only for the country, but also for other African countries.

In that spirit, during the 22nd Summit of ECOWAS Authority of Heads of States and Governments in Lome, Togo in 1999, Nigeria spearheaded the ‘Fast Track’ approach to integration in West Africa. Nigeria made a milestone proposal for a fast track approach to integration of the sub-region. This process, which originally involved close economic collaborations with Ghana, later advanced into the creation of a Free Trade Area involving Nigeria, Benin, Togo, Niger and Ghana. It also has resulted in considerable progress made in further integration of currencies, transport and power systems of West African states. As a chairman of the G77 during the year 2000, Nigeria successfully revitalized the group by convening a meeting at a Summit level meeting of the G77 in Havana, Cuba on 12th April 2000. Consequently, Obasanjo, together with former Libyan leader Mouamar Ghaddafi, proposed a South Healthcare Delivery Program that was unanimously adopted at the Havana Summit of the group. The idea is to provide assistance to the Healthcare sector of the needy members of the G77 (particularly African states). The program was adopted with its Secretariat in Nigeria. The budget for the program was estimated at $21 million and both Nigeria and Libya contributed about 50% of the budget.

In the same vein, the establishment of the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD), as a socioeconomic development program of the African Union during the 37th session of the Assembly of Head of States and Government in July 2001 in Lusaka, Zambia, was the brainchild of Nigeria. NEPAD aims to provide an all-embracing vision and policy framework for accelerating economic integration among African states. Nigeria under Obasanjo administration also utilized economic diplomacy to further Nigeria commitments to regional cooperation and integration through a plan to undertake a gas pipeline project linking the Republic of Benin, Burkina Faso, Cote d’Ivoire, Ghana, Mali, Niger and Nigeria on the one hand; and a West African pipeline project linking Benin, Ghana, Niger and Togo on the other (Oni & Taiwo, 2016).

As for Yar’Adua’s administration, efforts as made to prioritize Nigeria economic capability in its external relations through the President Yar’Adua’s ‘Vision 2020 Agenda’ aimed at raising Nigeria’s economy to become one of the 20 largest economies in the world by the year 2020 (Yar’Adua, 2007). The Agenda was properly conceptualized, comprehensively articulated and the implementation strategies adequately designed, to ensure the realization of ECOWAS Vision 2020 for which Nigeria is fronting. Albeit, the death of President Yar’Adua witnessed a modification in Nigerian foreign policy approach towards ECOWAS, the Jonathan’ presidency stressed that only a stable political and economic environment would give Nigeria a robust foreign policy. Despite the acclaimed modification in its foreign policy objectives, Nigeria remained attached to West Africa sub-region and Africa at large. Nigeria continued to demonstrate its support towards ECOWAS and AU.

Till date, Nigeria continues to contribute both human and financial resources to the continental integration process with no tangible national benefit. According to Oputu (2006) Nigeria has contributed so much in terms of human and material resources for the integration of the states in ECOWAS, yet it hasn’t brought significant results. Nigeria’s contribution to the AU budget remains unmatched in Africa. Nigeria and five other African countries contribute 75% of the AU budget. The other four are South Africa, Algeria, Egypt and Libya. As for ECOWAS, Nigeria is not only its host state, but also substantially supporting its budget up to about 60 percent annually.

- **Bilateral Engagements**

On the bilateral aspects, Nigeria has been committed to assisting other Africa states. Aside deliberately leavings
its border porous for other neighboring states to freely move in and out of the country and trade freely, it has since onset been of great help to other African states in terms of material and financial donations and human resources transfers. Under democratic regimes since 1999 till date, Nigerian successive leaders have paid courtesy visits to a number of African states as it embarks on different foreign assistance programs for them. Garba (1991:81) asserts that from the sustained financial and material assistance to African Liberation movements, Nigeria has given all kinds of Aid to many African countries which have experienced one type of disaster or another. Undeniably, Nigeria has humanly, financially and materially committed to individual African states even as the expense of its own citizens, and till date Nigeria has not retreated from those ‘Father Christmas’ gestures across Africa.

Following the establishment of Technical Aid Corps Scheme (TACS) program in 1987 in furtherance of Nigeria bilateral engagements and assistance to African states, different regimes (both civilians and military) have been overwhelmingly committed to it, and the pursuit has not been different in the period under review. The TACS program seeks to share Nigeria’s expertise with beneficiary countries through the placement of young Nigerian professionals upon request by desired African countries. Through the scheme, Nigeria has been sending young professionals in the fields of Agricultural, Education, Engineering, Law, Medicine among others to needy African states for initial two-year duration renewable upon request from benefiting states and Nigeria has hitherto been responsible for their monthly payments of the volunteers. Since its formation, the scheme has continued to enjoy patronage from interested African states in terms of provision of socioeconomic development. For instance, countries like, Kenya, Senegal, Cape Verde, Rwanda, Liberia, Niger, Congo, Gambia, Uganda, Ethiopia, Namibia have benefitted overwhelmingly from the treats offered by this program till date (Fawole, 2002; Ola, 2017; Koutonin, 2015; Adebawni, 2011, Ola, 2017). In fact, the scheme is today extended to the Caribbean and Pacific countries. In his study, Koutonin (2015) notes that over 35 African and Non-African countries demand for the services of TACS across the globe, with more than 1500 skilled and non-skilled volunteers of Nigeria citizens working in these countries.

As expected, these assistances are rendered at a huge human and financial cost on the part of Nigeria Federal government. In their analysis, Ogbonna and Ogundub (2018) unveil that over 26 billion Naira was expended on TACS from 2009 to 2018 with no corresponding national benefits. Meanwhile, foreign policy implementation of any state should be aimed at advancing its values and interest in relations other nations, and not otherwise. Nigeria bilateral engagements should be designed to advance its values and interest, and given the contemporary realities of geopolitics, it should be designed as soft power resources to project its foreign policy beneficially.

Despite Nigeria’s continual leadership roles in terms of economic, human and military commitment to the continent, it is not accorded corresponding appreciation and recognition in the continent. Instead, most Africa states treat Nigeria with contempt and suspicion. Many African states exhibit hostilities and discriminations towards Nigerians living in their midst. Most evident is the xenophobic prejudice towards Nigerians in South Africa and Ghana recently (Awosusi & Fatoyinbo, 2019). Yet, the Nigeria Afrocentric foreign policy thrust remains the same as Nigeria continues to engage the continent bilaterally and multilaterally. The paradox of the Nigeria gesture towards other African states is that these African nations are equally the ones routing political networks against Nigeria’s interests and aspirations at the levels of African Union and United Nations. In fact, most African states now take such Afrocentric benevolence for a ride. In a telephone interview, Magaji Bello (2020) recounts how Nigerian Lecturers sent to Uganda under TACS are mostly enjoyed by private Universities in the East African country instead of public Universities as stipulated by law. According to him, “the Proprietors of those private Universities smile to the bank as their core Staff are being paid by a father Christmas called Nigeria”. Meanwhile, there are lots of Nigeria universities with gross shortage of manpower and poorly financed. This is an obvious credence to my argument that the Afrocentric engagements (bilateral and multilateral) are practical waste of the country’s resources because it is neither advancing its domestic interest nor its regional hegemonic aspirations.

**CONCLUSION**

Nigerian foreign policy has evidently passed through various phases since its independence in 1960. Its posture today has not deviated from the traditional Afrocentric posture. The internal socio-economic challenges, criticisms and external rivalry have not deterred it from multilateral and bilateral engagements for continental stability and development. Nigeria is a recognized regional leader in Africa especially through the West African sub-regional Organization, ECOWAS. Through its pro-African diplomacy, Nigeria has designed diplomatic mechanisms to accommodate the needs and challenges arising in the region and every successive Nigerian leader have come to adopt it with little or no modifications.

Nigeria’s (human and material) contributions to African problems and issues are unrivalled, but the pertinent question that is worth asking is; what benefit(s) has the nation derived from such pro-African (Afrocentric) engagements? In concrete terms, Nigeria has not gained
commensurably from such engagements. Most African countries seem to have forgotten Nigeria’s roles and sacrifices in bringing them out of the shackles of colonialism. Paradoxically, Nigerians are the highest recorded victims of xenophobic attacks and discriminations across Africa. In fact, evidences abound of political connivance and conspiracy by some African countries that have benefited from the Nigeria ‘Father-Christmas’ engagements in Africa. For instance, Niger Republic which has constantly been benefitting from Nigeria, voted against Nigeria’s aspiration for a seat in United Nations Permanent Security Council in 2015 (Ogbonna and Ogunmubi, 2018). Also, the exclusion of Nigeria from AU Ad-hoc Mediatary Committee on Libya and other numerous activities that are detrimental to Nigerian’s interest by other African countries are apt instances. All these have invariably impaired Nigeria’s supposed hegemonic status in Africa.

According to Owoye (2002), it is more prudent for a nation to assume a high profile in international politics only as a condition for its economic progress. Here in lies the contradictions in the current state of Nigeria regional hegemonic aspirations and Afrocentric engagements in Africa. Obviously, from the above review, Nigeria prioritizes regional fame over economic benefits. The focus of the nation’s diplomatic ties has primarily been structured towards assuming hegemonic leadership roles in order to earn regional fame while the domestic economic structures keep falling. Meanwhile, in international politics, the economic capability of state actor largely contributes to its relevance and status per time, and a regional hegemon is one with a viable and unmatched economic capability. Also, no foreign policy can be sustained without a strong domestic (economic) base which would serve as substructure for any of such policy. This is currently lacking in Nigeria Afrocentric engagements in Africa.

Further still, there is no logical or strategic connection between Nigeria’s aspirations for regional hegemony and its engagements in Africa. The reality in terms of massive unemployment and harrowing poverty in Nigeria suggest that the nation is overstraining its domestic economic structures to parade itself as African giant in terms of bilateral and multilateral engagements within and outside the continent. Apparently, Nigeria’s economy is fragile, unstable and dependent on foreign and domestic loans which are serviced with huge amounts annually. For Instance, since President Buhari assumed office in 2015, the Federal Government of Nigeria and most state governments have added considerably to the nation’s debt profile, which now exceeds $85 billion. Currently, the nation’s debts have increased to almost where it was between 2005 and 2006, just before Nigeria benefitted from massive debt relief as a result of the coordinated efforts of Paris Club, International Monetary Fund, World Bank and African Development Bank (Ike, 2019). Just between the space of 14 years (2005-2019), Nigeria has lavished the debt relief partly on the altar of regional Afrocentric commitments. By implication, Nigeria is gradually losing its economic power in the continent, and theoretically, when a powerful state loses it economic leadership, hegemonic decline becomes inevitably imminent (Gilpin, 1981).

Evidently, no hegemonic state or aspiring hegemonic state sustains or attains regional and global hegemony through such a ‘wasteful diplomacy’ without a strategic and rational approach to advance its national power. In spite of the global hegemonic pursuit of the United States, its foreign policy gives premium to its national interest in terms of its citizens’ needs, territorial security, economy and military capabilities with zero tolerance for any act(s) that can impair such interests. This diplomatic philosophy has been described as America- First-Foreign-Policy. America’s success in shaping and leading the international order has been largely rooted in such foreign policy approach. The construction of border wall against Mexico and the recent airstrike in Iran which resulted to the death of Iranian Military Commander, Qasem Soleimani are all in the quest to protect US interests. In fact, during the 2016 election campaign, Donald Trump emphatically defined America global interest purely in economic terms. He expressed the global hegemonic roles in terms of economic benefits for America, and as such, he called on allied countries including Germany, Israel, Japan, Saudi Arabia, among others to compensate the United States for helping to protect their nations (Hensch, 2016).

Given the contemporary realities of Africa geopolitics, the Nigerian government needs to anchor its Afrocentric engagements on rationalities and measures that would advance its national power vis-à-vis its regional hegemonic aspirations. Just as the United States plays global hegemonic leadership roles with its national interests at the forefront, Nigeria can equally deploy such Afrocentric engagements to advance its economy, and specifically its bilateral engagements can be deployed in such a way that it would promote its economic capability which would in turn bring the nation to the forefront in African geopolitical discourse. For instance, bilateral assistance can be tied to certain negotiations hinged on strict economic conditions that are mutually beneficial with corresponding sanctions as deterrence. The current approach to regional engagements by Nigeria is cancerous to its regional hegemonic aspirations, and this calls for a national rethink.

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