



## **FOREIGN POLICY, INTERNATIONAL IMAGE AND NATIONAL TRANSFORMATION: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The main objective of this paper is to identify the relationship between foreign policy, international image and national transformation using Nigeria as focus from independence to date. The paper adopted a historical approach backed by textual analysis of secondary data which it relied heavily upon and these informed the findings, conclusion and recommendations that followed. The contention of the paper is that effective and proactive foreign policy articulation and implementation have profound effects on international image which could galvanize or impact on national transformation.

**KEYWORDS:** Foreign Policy; International Image; National Transformation; Perspective

### **INTRODUCTION**

When Nigeria became an independent sovereign entity in 1960, it articulated its own foreign policy. At independence, Nigeria could not really assert herself due to the fact that the newly independent state was just trying to find her footing, but Nigeria assumed wider roles shortly after independence (Ibijola and Opeyemi, 2012:121).

There are a lot of factors, forces and pressures that influence a country's foreign policy. Some of these factors include regimes, personalities, psychological environment of the decision makers, nature of the state's economy, historical experiences, the nature of the political society and several other factors go a long way in determining foreign policy (Babawale, 1988:682). Babawale (1988:682-683) further contends that:

In the Nigerian case, the fact of the fragility of the post-colonial state and the alliance between the local dominant classes that captured power after independence, and foreign capital is very illustrative. The basic pre-occupation of the dominant power elites therefore was the consolidation of inherited colonial relations and structures, the pacification or intimidation of non-bourgeois forces and the tailoring of the Political Economy towards the direction of private capital accumulation. A specific milieu has therefore been created for the nature and content of the foreign policy of the country given the outlined realities.

The foregoing averment by Babawale (1988) can be said to be the background that influenced the nature of Nigeria's foreign policy at the beginning. However, as Ashiru (2013) noted, though the principles of Nigeria's foreign policy have been fairly consistent since independence in 1960, the specific interests, priorities and emphasis of Nigeria's foreign policy have continued to change in the context of the changing domestic and international environment.

The international image of any country is an important determinant of how well the country is doing at home and abroad. The international image of a country therefore provides a basis for self re-appraisal in the event of any bad image. Image is relative. It can be a function of perception, which, again, can be a result of objectivity or subjectivity of purpose. A good image constitutes a source of goodwill and patronage for a country. Investors largely consider this factor in determining where to direct investment funds. It also explains the level of unfriendliness. It is therefore understandable why every government seeks to promote, at all times, a better image nationally and internationally (Akinterinwa, 2007).

Nigeria's image has been shaped by a number of factors since 1960. These factors include Nigeria's Afrocentric policy, Nigeria's big market for Euro-American finished products, Nigeria's oil boom, Nigeria's anti-apartheid policy, Nigeria's policy of technical assistance, and several other factors that evolved over the years (Akinterinwa, 2007).

National transformation is a shift in the orientation of a particular society or country such that the world is seen in new ways and new actions become possible that were impossible prior to the transformation (Nwolise, 2012 in Oviasogie and Shodipo, 2013:196). It refers to a fundamental reappraisal of the basic assumptions that underlie the country's reforms and developmental efforts that should alter the essence and substance of national life (Nwolise, 2012). Over the years, several orientational shifts have been experienced in Nigeria from her independence till date.

The objective of this paper is to establish the connection between foreign policy, international image and national transformation from a historical perspective. It contends that when foreign policy decisions are well articulated, it has an effect on the international image of the country as well as the progress or transformation drives of the country. This work is therefore segmented into: Introduction; Conceptual Clarification of Foreign Policy, International Image and National Transformation; A Historical Review of Nigeria's Foreign policy; The Nexus between Foreign Policy, International Image and National Transformation; Conclusion and Recommendations.

## CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

In this section, foreign policy, international image and national transformation are conceptualized.

### Foreign Policy

Foreign policy is defined by Goldstein and Pevehouse (2011:103) as the "strategies that government use to guide their actions in the international arena...they spell out the objectives which state leaders have decided to pursue in a given relationship or situation".

Carlsnaes (2008:335) approached the definition of foreign policy in a more detailed form. He argued that it:

...consists of those actions which, expressed in the form of explicitly stated goals, commitments and/or directives, and pursued by governmental representatives acting on behalf of their sovereign communities, are directed toward objectives, conditions and actors – both governmental and non-governmental – which they want to affect and which lie beyond their territorial legitimacy.

This implies that, for countries to relate effectively with one another, foreign policy must be well defined, well thought out, and must possess direction. Hence, Adeniran (1982:185) infers that foreign policy can best be understood through an explanation of what it actually is. Foreign policy, according to him consists of three elements. One is the 'overall orientation and policy intentions' of a particular country toward another. The second element is the 'objective' that a country seeks to achieve in her relations or dealings with other countries. The third element of foreign policy is the 'means' for achieving that particular goal or objectives.

According to Legg and Morrison (1971) "foreign policy is a set of explicit objectives with regard to the world beyond the borders of a given social unit and a set of strategies and tactics designed to achieve those objectives". This understanding subscribes to the designation of plans and clear cut strategies for actualisation of those plans. It is idealist because it fails to take cognisance of the contingencies in the international system in terms of the unpredictability of behaviours of international actors.

Another conceptualisation of foreign policy emerged from the obvious shortcoming of the above view. This view was well articulated by Vital (1968). To him, "foreign policy implies rather a field of related but distinct actions and issues in which there neither is nor can be foreign policy". According to his thesis, the realities of states' behaviour entail decisions and policies being formulated in a disjointed fashion, largely in response to immediate pressures and events, in a number of separate structures and issue areas. Thus, Frankel's (1964 and 1975) conception of foreign policy "as a dynamic process of interaction between the changing domestic demands and the changing external circumstances" is apt in the light of occurrences in contemporary global political order.

Ade-Ibijola (2013:565) simply defined Nigerian foreign policy as the driving factor behind Nigeria's interaction with other nations of the world. He further summed it as the declared intentions of a state. This conception of foreign policy can simply be reconstructed to read as the declared intentions of a state in relation to other states.

### **Nigeria's International Image**

A country's standing in the international system although dependent on some other factors, is highly dependent on her image perception being positive or negative. A good image results in respect, influence and prestige. While, a bad or negative perception of a country's image implies that such a country lacks respect, influence and prestige in the international system (Egwemi, 2010:131).

Ojo and Aghedo (2013:85) remarked that Nigeria's reputation is at its lowest ebb. Building on the works of some analysts and public commentators, they arguably described Nigerians in general terms as criminally minded. While they blamed this on the behaviour of a few Nigerians whose activities undermine the country, they also attributed this image deficit to the negative stereotyping of the country by some foreign media (Ojo and Aghedo, 2013:88).

These accusations have wider ramifications and consequences on the image of the country. However, Ojo and Aghedo (2013:90-91) are of the opinion that there are deliberate attempts to positively build the country's image. They named successes in survival instincts; a love for life; good followership/imitation; prowess in soccer, UN peacekeeping initiatives and decorations of Nigerian officers for meritorious service; resourceful and enterprising people; and youthful interest in education. The above factors import that "Nigeria is not all a gory picture of crime and violence, but also of creativity, skills, and enduring legacies of universal acclaim" (Ojo and Aghedo, 2013:91).

Bamiduro and Aremu (2012:11) expressed opinions that are similar to Ojo and Aghedo (2013) by underscoring that:

Nigeria's disfigured image in the global village has become an insignia of dishonesty, dishonour and disrespect; this is outright humiliation of a nation of almost 150 million people. Majority of Nigerians are industrious, God-fearing and law abiding people. But a tiny minority is destroying the image of the country and the governance ineptitude is adding salt to the injury.

They posited that the positivities in the Nigerian state far exceed the negativities from the foregoing averment, and as such recommend that, via credible, free and fair elections; invigorated/consistent anti-graft drive (without political interference); youth empowerment; promotion of entrepreneurship and financial support; and finally, the adoption of good leadership styles characterized by honesty, faithfulness, transparency, love and justice, the image of the country can be promoted (Bamiduro and Aremu, 2012:20).

Akinboye (2013) opined that Nigeria had indeed been battling with image crisis for the past three decades. He identified the major issue inhibiting the image to be corruption and stated that until the government shows seriousness in fighting corruption, Nigeria will not be taken seriously at the international level. He also identified terrorism and insurgency to be other sources of the image crisis in Nigeria, alluding that until the fundamental domestic sources of Nigeria's image crisis have been tackled, Nigeria's aspiration to be a regional influential nation will remain an illusion.

This position taken by Akinboye (2013) converges with Corruption Perception Index by Transparency International (2013); wherein it was recorded that on a scale of 0 (perceived to be highly corrupt) to 100 (perceived to be highly clean), Nigeria scored 25% in contrast to her 27% score in 2012. This score was derived from 9 surveys carried out in 2013. This ranked her 144<sup>th</sup> out of 177 countries globally (*Transparency International*, 2013). This factor as revealed by Transparency International gives a perception to the world that Nigeria is indeed a highly corrupt country and when this is the case, the image of the country becomes negative to the rest of the world.

### **National Transformation**

National transformation, according to Oviasogie and Shodipo (2013:196) means national change and reengineering towards the desired development goals. This definition connotes that national transformation is a gradual process and requires a definite purpose and end through which the success of the transformation process can be measured.

Mezieobi (1994, 1995 and 2010 in Edinyang and Usang, 2012:98), defined national transformation “as a systematic (complete but qualitative change or overhaul) of the overall social, economic...nation for the improved human conditions of the people.” This meaning of national transformation is similar to that of Oviasogie and Shodipo (2013) above, but this conception reinforces the view that the process of national transformation is one that is systemic in nature.

According to Ate (2012:317) national transformation in Nigeria can only make sense in its contemporary usage which ties the concept to economic indicators. Thus, he argued that “national economic transformation” is the prioritization of foreign policy and diversification of resources on cultivating special bilateral and multilateral relationships that are considered critical to the realization of the strategic vision of development. He argued that, there are some countries in different regions of the world that possess the industrial, technological and capital assets which could be exploited through economic diplomacy; and that there are global and regional issues in which Nigeria’s involvement could create linkages with the domestic economy to further its economic transformation agenda. [These](#) are valid opportunities to explore.

Furthermore, Nwoke (2014:51) illuminated the understanding of national transformation to involve the departure from “old economy” to a “new economy” in the global economic landscape. He asserted that national transformation could mean the investment in the new economy which is essentially embedded in the knowledge economy, which is an economy that can create knowledge and use that knowledge to pursue domestic and international goals of national interests. He concluded that knowledge economy, understood as an economy where knowledge is fast replacing physical resources as the driver of economic growth is one of the most important catalyst of national transformation in a rapidly globalizing world.

### **A HISTORICAL REVIEW OF FOREIGN POLICY IN RELATION TO NIGERIA’S INTERNATIONAL IMAGE**

Nigeria’s image crisis has historical foundation and dynamics (Ajayi, 2005:50). This section becomes relevant as it explores Nigeria’s image since 1960 in order to identify the highlights and turning points in Nigeria’s image and foreign policy.

#### **First Republic**

Tafawa Balewa, through his pioneering foreign policy anchored on Afrocentricism, was able to lay the foundation for Nigeria’s roles and influences in international politics which; ultimately helped to give a credible image for the country in the comity of nations (Ajayi, 2005). The expulsion of apartheid South Africa, breaking of ties with France and participation in the Non-aligned movement rang positive bells towards Nigeria’s image abroad (Folarin, 2013:21).

#### **Second Republic**

The expelling of illegal aliens from Nigeria, in the guise of national interest, was an action that was indeed inimical to the country’s development. Over two to three million illegal immigrants were given fourteen days to leave the country. This action alone created a bad image for Nigeria abroad (Lukpata, 2013:65). Thus, Shagari’s administration was described as inhumane, callous and irresponsible. It did incalculable damage to Nigeria’s reputation and standing among the Great Powers and the developing world.

This action was so disappointing that even the opposition parties and senior officials in the Ministry of External Affairs were frustrated because most of their efforts in building a positive image for Nigeria had gone down the drain as a result (Abegunrin, 2003:107). Nigeria also lost her reputation in this period as a frontline state fighting against the apartheid in South Africa because the administration was not as active and concerned as the previous administrations (Folarin, 2013:22).

The manner in which the management of Nigeria's presence in international organizations was organized, appeared very appalling and had made null the efforts that previous administrations had exerted to making the Nigerian image a good one on a regional and sub-regional scale (Garuba, 2008:8).

#### **Military Rule**

The civil war of 1967-1970, and the discovery of oil conditioned the Gowon era to a large extent. However, Nigeria was still active in the international system as evident in the recognition of China, the formation of ECOWAS, Niger Basin Commission and the Chad Basin Commission (Folarin, 2013:22). Nigeria's efforts under Gowon against apartheid, crimes against humanity, anti-colonial and anti-racial policies were indeed commendable (Ajayi, 2005:52)

The Murtala/Obasanjo regime was radical against colonialism and racism. Nigeria, under their administrations engaged in a large number of peace keeping missions and was more alert to issues of injustice mostly in Africa by promoting the causes of freedom fighters and Pan Africanism (Ajayi, 2005:52; Garuba, 2008:6). Generally, under their administrations, the country's image can be said to have been very favourable.

The Buhari-Idiagbon regime made efforts at restoring the battered image of Nigeria after Shagari's tenure by ushering in an anti-drug and anti-corruption policy to brighten the country's image (Folarin, 2013:22). This regime was able to gain direction in tackling the country's economic problems and debt incurred by Shagari's administration. The regime was credited in 1984 for having paid promptly for all imports with foreign exchange earned by the nation and did not borrow from any international financial institution. This factor was able to re-establish Nigeria's image in the foreign market (Ali, 2013:3).

Babangida's regime started by claiming that, it was an offshoot of the Murtala social revolution that was later intensified by Buhari, but it instead rubbished their efforts by reinstating dismissed officials and returning all that were confiscated, deported Keeling from Nigeria, a Financial Times journalist for investigating and reporting on the Gulf War oil windfall corruption (Ojukwu and Shopeju, 2010:19). Emordi (2008:6 in Ali, 2013:5) stated that "Babangida's administration institutionalized corruption as if it was a cardinal state policy". This compounded the moral image of the country as a very corrupt country.

Prospective investors found it hard to do business in the country, because of the bribes and kickbacks to the bureaucrats. The lack of credibility in the transition programme and the eventual annulment of the June 12, 1993 elections increased the downward plunge of the country's credibility owing to the fact that international observers deemed the elections to be the most peaceful and fairest elections ever conducted in Nigeria. The regime was also acclaimed to have had disregard for human rights and was autocratic in his approach (Ajayi, 2005:52).

The height of the decline in Nigeria's international image occurred during the late General Abacha regime. He disbanded all democratic institutions, assassinated a number of pro-democracy activists, and killed opponents and protesters. He had complete disregard for human rights and the opinion of the international community (Folarin, 2013:22). Things got worse with the execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa and his eight Ogoni kinsmen in November 1995, which put his regime at odds with the world, particularly the United Nations, the European Union and the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth in particular, outrightly suspended Nigeria from its membership because it considered all of Abacha's conduct a gross violation of its 1991 Harare Declaration of Commonwealth Principles (Josiah, 2008 in Folarin, 2013:23)

The administration initiated some measures to curb corruption like the War Against Indiscipline and Corruption (WAIC), but this was an irony in itself as his government itself was characterized by general mismanagement, "corruption of monumental dimension" (Emma, 2009 in Chukwuemeka, Bartholomew and Ugwu, 2012:71). The level of corruption was so much that it led to the ostracising of Nigeria from the comity of nations, and Nigeria became a pariah state. His administration almost emptied the government's treasury and after his death, over \$600 million and £75 million pounds were recovered from his family (Chukwuemeka, Bartholomew and Ugwu, 2012:71).

#### **Fourth Republic**

President Olusegun Obasanjo, at inauguration in May, 1999, inherited a nation with a battered image and without credibility externally. He made efforts to build the country's image and re-integrate Nigeria into the world while regaining her lost glory through shuttle diplomacy. Under his leadership, Nigeria

assumed leadership of several international organizations like the ECOWAS, African Union (AU) and G-77. Nigeria also hosted several international summits including those of the Commonwealth Heads of State and Government and the AU in 2004, the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) in 2005, and ECOWAS since 1999. The country had also hosted the All Africa Games in 2004. Obasanjo had been the guest of honour to the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) in May 2004. All these showed that the international community had begun to have confidence again in Nigeria (Ajayi, 2005).

Nigeria was able to recover most of the stolen funds in foreign banks located in Belgium, Switzerland, Britain, America and Germany. He held periodic meetings with the Nigerians in the countries that he visited from time to time in order to discuss issues of common interest and update them on government policies, as well as possible ways they can help move the country forward. He helped Nigeria regain her lost status of being the hub of air and sea transportation in Africa which was severely affected during the Abacha regime. Nigeria in this period also played a frontline role in the relations between the G8 and other developed countries. She also played a central role in the formation of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM). Obasanjo, through a US-contracted military outfit, restructured the Nigerian Military Professionals Resource Incorporation (MPRI) (Garuba, 2008:15-16).

Obasanjo's tenure recorded remarkable achievements in the areas of peace and security. There were active engagements in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Darfur (Sudan), where it sent peacekeeping troops; the country has also held peace talks between the Sudanese government and the warring factions in Abuja. The government had equally demonstrated efforts on the restoration of peace in Liberia and Sierra Leone. In Liberia, it sponsored Nigeria's former leader General Abdulsalami Abubakar through ECOWAS to lead the peace process that got Charles Taylor to relinquish power, while it facilitated the second track of peace and reconciliation in Sierra Leone, in collaboration with ECOWAS and its member-states (Garuba, 2008:17).

Obasanjo's government also championed projects such as Gulf of Guinea Commission, attempted to strengthen bilateral relations with Cameroun with which it settled the long dispute over Bakassi through the Nigeria-Cameroun Border Commission and the Republic of Benin with which it tried to address issues of cross-border crimes (Garuba, 2008:17-18).

The country and her leadership enjoyed accommodation and tolerance by the international community but the ordinary citizens are often made to suffer personality pillage, inhumane treatments and abuse of fundamental human rights at embassies and off-shore. Nigeria's image crisis at the level of individual Nigerians, rather than the state, is yet to be resolved despite the president's shuttle diplomacy. Other issues which engender and sustain such image problem externally include internal insecurity, poor infrastructural base, perpetration of financial crimes and lack of organization and discipline. As much as these may be perceived as internal problems, stating these internal challenges is important because foreign policy is a reflection of domestic policies externally (Ajayi, 2005:57).

#### **Yar'Adua/Jonathan Administration (2007-2014)**

The election that brought President Yar'Adua into power was reported by international observers as being flawed. The European Union specifically criticised the 2007 elections as being seriously faulty and did not meet the required international standards. This issue contributed to a decline in the country's image. The democratic credibility of the country had become questionable as a result (Yagboyaju, 2011:99).

At the time President Yar'Adua came into office, it was worthy of note that his health had been severely threatened. While he was trying to manage his ill-health, Yar'Adua made no provisions for the Vice President to act in his absence. Thus:

The consequence was that the ship of the Nigerian state was sailing rudderless on the international waters of foreign policy... Without functional institutions and without a leader, Nigeria's foreign relations and indeed the State of Nigeria also went into coma when Yar'Adua went into coma in Saudi Arabian hospital. Nigeria failed to show up at important international meetings, lost many positions in multilateral associations, forsook obligations, and found

herself in a situation where many of her allies started wondering what had gone wrong with Nigeria (Nwankwo, 2013:215).

More than external challenges, it is the internal challenges that are dampening Nigeria's attainment of great power status which Vision 20:2020 envisages. Key internal challenges include poor governance, insecurity of lives and property, irregular power supply, low quality public service delivery and rating of the nation's educational institutions; poor capacity to innovate; the unimpressive quality of its democracy and the inability to build consensus and resolve conflicts. More specifically, the insurgency in the North, the collapse of public education, growing unemployment, oil dependent economy, dilapidated economic infrastructure among others are major issues that deserve attention, if not radical government intervention (Olutokun, 2013; Okere, 2012 in Nwankwo, 2013:218).

It has become very obvious that crime and corruption are the bane of Nigeria's development. The current Boko Haram insurgency in the north-eastern part of the country speaks volume. These social problems, no doubt, have battered the country's image. Many foreign companies have had to withdraw their operations from Nigeria because of crime, corruption and insecurity. For those that managed to stay, doing business in the country has become very expensive. Therefore, there is urgent need for a holistic effort by the government, corporate bodies and individuals to stamp out the evils of insecurity, crime and corruption so that the country is relatively safe for both Nigerians and foreigners (Ajaebili, 2011:218).

Internationally, the pervasive corruption in Nigeria has tarnished the image of the country and has resulted in foreign nationals exercising extreme caution in entering into business transactions with Nigerians, thereby weakening the economic sector (Chukwuemeka, Bartholomew and Ugwu, 2012:68).

The Jonathan administration, like many other administrations in Nigeria has never lacked in good policies. The problem of Nigeria's foreign policy that is affecting the country's image is not in formulation, but in implementation (Nwankwo, 2013:220).

## **THE NEXUS BETWEEN FOREIGN POLICY, INTERNATIONAL IMAGE AND NATIONAL TRANSFORMATION**

From the above analysis, we have observed with keen interest the complex relationships between foreign policy, international image and national transformation as they affect Nigeria. It is evident that foreign policy, when conceived as the way a country relates with its external environment, has serious implications for the country's international image. In other words, foreign relations invariably dictate how foreigners are received and treated by host countries. On the other hand, the feed-back mechanism embedded in the foreign policy formulation and implementation process can help to drive national transformation.

Hence, the earlier allusion by Ate (2012) that national economic transformation is the prioritization of foreign policy and diversification of resources on cultivating special bilateral and multilateral relationships that are considered critical to the realization of the strategic vision of development becomes apt. In essence, the critical linkage between domestic processes (politics, economics, social, cultural, religion and so on) and the external situation towards which foreign policy is focused provides an illumination into how foreign policy, when carefully articulated can promote a country's international image and foster its national transformation.

Adelusi and Oluwashakin (2014:135) had argued that the linkage between domestic processes and external relations provides a specific context which identifies the extent to which specific issues can positively or negatively exert influence on achievement of a given policy. They contended that foreign policy constitutes a force for positive international image, indeed, a force for positive change, which should be maximally harnessed for national development and transformation. It therefore, suffices to mention that an engagement of a robust foreign policy position invariably promotes international respectability among the comity of nations and positively affects a country's national transformation agenda.



## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In the main, the paper argued that foreign policy is a reflection of domestic policies that are externally projected, and predicated on the works of a galaxy of scholars, foreign policy can be utilized as a potent force for positive international image. A positive image has wider ramifications and effects or import for national transformation. These were clearly and carefully established in the paper. The paper identified the following as constituting internal challenges to the attainment of positive international image and national transformation in Nigeria: leadership crisis; maladministration; serious governance issues; corruption and bureaucratic (personnel and institutional) lapses; deficit democratic practice; insurgency and terrorism to mention but a few.

This paper recommends that, conscious attempts/efforts should be made to curb insecurity, crime and corruption through invigorated institutions of governance and effective surveillance anchored on resource provision and prudent management. The ultimate effect of these on Nigeria's image and national transformation cannot be overemphasised.

As a corollary, the anti-graft drive in Nigeria should be re-awakened and the practical independence of the agencies charged with maintaining moral rectitude and probity in governance should be upheld to the extent that it is obvious to a common observer that, the country is serious and ready to break its unenviable romance with corruption. Unless and until this is done, a positive international image and national transformation would remain fictional and a tantalising mirage.

The paper strongly recommends a knowledge-based and policy research outcome/focused implementation of programmes in order to fast track national transformation.

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