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## **Nigeria's Leadership Role Quests: The Race of the Crippled** By **Dr. Ebere R. Adigbuo\***

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### **Abstract**

There is no doubt that Nigerians conceive their country as the giant state in Africa, principally for the country's human and material endowments. In the realm of foreign policy, it is Nigeria's status more than that of any other black African country, that most determines Africa's collective future. Nigeria is determined not just to play its leadership role in Africa, but to also build upon it.<sup>1</sup> It is against this background that Nigeria's problem of capability comes in. A country that utilizes less than 10% of total steel used in Africa, less than 12% of all the power generated in Africa, a country that is associated with institutional failings and where social upheavals threatens the polity because of inept and corrupt leadership, it is doubtful if Africa will entrust its destiny to the crippled state. Using the "leadership role conception"<sup>2</sup> as the theoretical framework, this paper examines the successes and challenges in this monumental task of leading Africa in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**Keywords:** Leadership, Role, Foreign Policy, National Interest, Nigeria, Africa

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## Nigeria's Leadership Role Quests: The Race of the Crippled

### Introduction

Nigeria is indisputably the most populous country in Africa, with about one hundred and eighty million people. Economically, the country has a huge gas reserves and is supposedly the seventh largest oil producing country in the world. Nigeria is also the biggest economic and trading partner to the West and Asian countries like China. With a vast military resource, it is commonplace to ascribe the role of a sub-regional and continental leadership status to the country. However, the issue is: how has Nigeria's aspiration for regional dominance influenced its foreign policy decisions towards the rest of Africa? It is a truism to state that almost all middle/regional powers are constrained by a number of domestic variables. The state of Nigeria's foreign policy is one characterised by ambivalence. On the one hand, Nigeria's policy-makers envision a future leadership role (regional dominance) for the country, especially within Africa. On the other hand, the complexity of international interactions has conditioned the reality with which Nigeria had to cope as a third-rate power in the international system.<sup>3</sup>

The ambivalence alluded to above demonstrates that Nigeria remains an important actor in the international arena. Thus, the country should not be impervious to the shifting emphasis from confrontation to collaboration in international politics. From the domestic setting, it is even more ambivalent as many observers have wished that Nigeria's show of benevolence to other African states should begin at home. Nigerians have their doubt. Can their nation assume any leadership position in the face of the challenges posed by ethnic and religious conflicts, collapsed infrastructure, weak institutions that encourage corruption and the resultant poverty and hunger? It is along this line of thought that Nigeria's former representative to the United Nations, Simeon Adebó, cautioned his compatriots that "no nation that is weak at home, politically and economically can be strong abroad. Foreign policy is a function of home strength".<sup>4</sup>

Adebó's remark is only recorded on one side of the foreign policy coin. On the other side is Okonjo Iweala's justification for Nigeria multifaceted assistance to other African States:

When there are crises, the (African) countries have looked up to Nigeria to be an arbitrator. If you are the older brother, the stronger brother or sister, you have to help those who come after you. It is engraved in our cultural approach to the pursuit of our foreign [policy] objectives.<sup>5</sup>

It must be appreciated that it was Nigeria's Prime Minister, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa that introduced the African centeredness of Nigeria's foreign policy the moment he proclaimed that we belong to Africa and Africa must first claim attention in our external relationship. On 7 October 1960, the Prime Minister outlined the foreign policy principles of the country when he addressed the United Nations

Assembly: non interference, peaceful settlement of disputes and promotion of functional cooperation among African states, amongst others.

Balewa also promoted the establishment of the Organization of the African Unity at a time the continent was divided into ideological blocks: (a) Casablanca Group, championed by President Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana – the group was radical in nature and advanced the political union of African states with an African High Command; (b) Brazzaville Group, mainly the Francophone countries that wanted continued influence of France in Africa; and lastly (c) the Monrovia group, led by Nigeria and other states that sought for the gradualist-functional cooperation among African States. The OAU was finally established under the guidelines of Nigeria's Monrovia ideological leaning. To establish the organization, Nigeria's legal luminary, Teslim Elias, drafted the OAU constitution.<sup>6</sup> There were other accomplishments. It was Nigeria, during Balewa's administration that spearheaded the expulsion of the racist South Africa regime from the Commonwealth in 1963. Nigeria also championed the trade deals between ACP and the EEC-(Africa, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States and European Economic Community) in 1966. Nigeria has on several occasions given aid to needy African states. During the 1973-74 OPEC oil embargoes, Nigeria sold petroleum products at reduced prices to African states, when Yakubu Gowon was the Head of State.<sup>7</sup> Gowon's belief in Africans in Diaspora predisposed him to settle the salaries of protesting workers in the West Indies. Another Nigeria's Head of State, Badamosi Babaginda, introduced in 1987 the Technical Aids Corp Program whereby young Nigerian professionals voluntarily served other African, Caribbean and Pacific countries in need of their expertise. At present, there are 1500 Nigerian volunteers serving in 32 countries, quoting the designer of the program, Bolaji Akinyemi, when he delivered the 2016 convocation speech of the University of Ibadan.<sup>8</sup> Other global, continental and sub-regional accomplishments by Nigeria are highlighted in the subsequent section of this paper.

What has Nigeria gained from the multifaceted assistance to other African countries? How does Nigeria's domestic setting impact on her leadership aspirations and how is her leadership perceived by other African states? Put differently, is Nigeria's *leadership role quests* in Africa the race of the crippled? These research questions will justify the extent to which Nigeria's leadership aspirations face many challenges. In achieving the above and together with this introduction, this article has been divided into five sections with the first schedule serving as introduction; the second part attempts to create a nexus between the theoretical framework and Nigeria's leadership aspirations in Africa; the third section further explores Nigeria's leadership role articulation and expectations. This section demonstrates the link between the country's leadership aspirations in Africa, using two strategies: economic buoyancy and soft power. The concept of soft power was popularized by Joseph Nye to demonstrate a nation's capability to achieve its foreign policy objectives by attraction and cooperation rather than using the traditional coercive means (hard power).<sup>9</sup> The fourth section reveals that leadership is a relational phenomenon and goes further to demonstrate how the crippled giant's aspiration is hamstrung by her domestic problems and how she is perceived by other African states. The paper concludes in the fifth section by insisting that leadership is earned

and needs lots of commitment and hard work from Nigeria. Some theoretical consideration is essential at this point.

### Regional Leadership Role Conception

This study is situated in Holsti's inquiry into how foreign policy makers perceive the roles their states play in the international system. To arrive at a typology of national role conceptions, Holsti reviewed a large number of speeches, parliamentary debates, radio broadcasts, official communiqués and press conferences of 71 governments found in 972 different sources. These sources provided evidence of 17 role conceptions articulated during the period from 1965 to December 1967.<sup>10</sup> Out of the 17 role conceptions Holsti outlined, what is of interest to this study is the Regional Leadership Role Conception.

The leadership role conception according to Holsti refers to duties or special responsibilities that a government perceives for itself in its relations with states in a particular region with which it identified, or to cross-cutting subsystems such as the then international communist movements.<sup>11</sup> Detailed discussion on Nigeria's regional role conceptions will be made in the next section that examines the country's role articulations and expectations.

Meanwhile, it is appropriate to understand that leadership as a concept is vital to organizations and societies. It harnesses, combines and manages men and resources to achieve specified goals. It makes peoples or states to do extraordinary things. From the layman's view, a leader is one that has primary authority and responsibility to plan, guide, control persons or institutions in a way to execute and achieve the societal or organizational goals. The leader is the main actor in the chain of the organizational activities. The leader, an individual or a nation, occupies the primary place in the activities, operations and actions of the groups, societies or states. Leadership is a relationship between the leader and the led. Thus, the leader influences the behaviour of the followers. In effect, leadership is an act of getting things done by others.

In today's world, the concept of leadership confronts enormous challenges, opportunities and possibilities. From the corporate organizations to complex political systems, whether in the North or the global South, the core problems facing institutions is that of leadership. The challenge of leadership today is global, whether in France where the electorate rejected all the presidential aspirants of known political parties to settle for the young Macron or in the United States where the unpredictable Trump, was elected America's 45<sup>th</sup> President.

The consequences of leadership failure are bizarre, most especially in the developing world unlike the global North that has strong institutions. But which country can alter Africa's narrative from that of abject poverty and a worsening dependence on foreign aid to an era of scientific innovation that can uplift Africans and make the continent competitive? As a universal phenomenon, leadership involves the attainment of societal or group objectives. For groups or states to achieve their set objectives, there is the need to believe in the leader. Leadership motivates, it does not rely on coercive measures. There should be the willingness on the path of the

followers to comply voluntarily with the vision of the leader. Other leadership ingredients as applied to this paper are economic capability, domestic political stability, and diplomatic use of soft power. Africa needs a leadership that understands this encompassing ideology; a worldview that can re-build the African nation-states from the medley of ethnic nationalities packaged by Europe in its Berlin Conference of 1884-85.<sup>12</sup> It is a worldview that appreciates that a market for globalization is not beneficial to the continent. Rather, what is beneficial is finding a niche in the production value-chain of economic globalization. That worldview should be able to create a common goal and destiny around which citizens in our countries can unite and strive together for progress. This is different from the narrow views that fuel the ethnic and religious-identity irredentism that has dominated the domestic political space in many African countries.<sup>13</sup>

How does the above narrative apply to Nigeria? Nigeria's quest for leadership in Africa is based on certain criteria: economic capability, sprawling demographics in human and material resources, and the use of soft power particularly in helping to decolonize Africa's dependent territories and settle its conflicts. Nigeria's Afro-centrism has been the kernel of her foreign policy since independence. To achieve her national interest couched in Afro-centric terms, Nigeria developed the doctrine of concentric circle that begins with safeguarding her sovereignty and territorial integrity in the innermost circle, followed by her interests towards the immediate West African neighbours in the second circle, and her interests in other African states and the world at the third and fourth part of the circle. The concentric circle doctrine enables Nigeria to pursue her leadership position in the continent and the entire world. It is in recognition of Nigeria's potentials that immediately after her 1960 independence, Dag Hammarskjöld, the United Nations scribe, appointed a Nigerian, General Aguiyi Ironsi as the African to command the UN peacekeeping force in the Congo. Nigeria also chaired for over two decades the United Nations Special committee against Apartheid. Nigeria understood its role in championing the cause of the black race, as she stood against the French government's atomic test in the Sahara desert, even when such a position was at odds with her economic survival as an emergent nation.<sup>14</sup>

### **Nigeria's Leadership Role Articulation and Expectation**

#### *Geo-political and economic considerations*

Nigeria's aspiration to African regional dominance has elicited commentaries. On the one hand, are analysts and practitioners that justify their country's claim for the continental leadership. The factors that influence this school of thought range from geo-political considerations, as Nigeria is strategically located within Africa to demographic justifications: Nigeria is the most populous nation in Africa and the largest black nation in the world. Economically, Nigeria is today branded as the largest economy in Africa. From this backdrop, the proponents of Nigeria's regional leadership were elated the moment their country helped to establish the OAU.<sup>15</sup> Nigeria's Prime Minister, Tafawa Balewa, saw the establishment of the OAU as a foreign policy accomplishment and a vindication of his leadership. He declared *inter-alia*:

The Addis Ababa Charter is ninety-nine percent what I hoped for. I would not have signed it if it did not satisfy me...Just as we in Nigeria have been laying down one stone after another in the process of nation building...just as we were determined to preserve our unity in diversity; so the Addis Ababa conference...recognized the fact that unity should not be tantamount to uniformity.<sup>16</sup>

The Prime Minister, Balewa, carried his advocacy on behalf of Africans to the United Nations as he canvassed for the restructuring of the global body. He strongly felt that Africans should be given a slot in the United Nations Security Council:

We believe the United Nations Organization is the only one sure guarantee of preserving the sovereignty of all states that are weak....The whole structure of the United Nations needs to be re-examined and the United Nations Security Council should be composed in such a way that the new independent African countries can have an effective voice.<sup>17</sup>

Other analysts that belong to this school of thought are Aluko<sup>18</sup> and the one-time permanent representative of Nigeria to the United Nations, Gambari.<sup>19</sup> These scholars are of the view that the liberation of Africa from all forms of domination, exploitation and foreign manipulation was dependent on Nigeria's leadership. This assertion was not limited to Nigerian scholars. In 1981, *The Times* of London re-stated that "Nigerians justifiably see themselves as the giant of Africa. It is the one element they are agreed upon. And they are now seeking to use their oil and emerging industrial muscle to influence opinion and guide events. It is Nigeria's foreign policy, more than that of any other black African country, that most determines Africa's collective future. Nigeria is determined not just to play its national leadership role in Africa, but to also build upon it".<sup>20</sup>

Nigeria's leadership aspiration in Africa needs to be positioned in the context of the country's broad foreign policy objectives which constitutionally are tied to Nigeria's national interest as prescribed in Section 19 of the 1999 Constitution. In this statutory provision, Nigeria's national interest can only be achieved through the promotion of African integration and unity, respect of international law, settlement of the continental disputes and the promotion of a just world economic order. In effect, Africa remains the centerpiece of Nigeria's foreign policy. The leadership school of thought is convinced that Nigeria is bound to lead Africa.<sup>21</sup> It is in this context that these Nigerian analysts and practitioners are persuaded to accept that Nigeria is destined to champion Africa's socio-economic and political transformation and development:

Playing such a noble role in the economic construction and reconstruction of the region presents Nigeria with an opportunity to assert her dominant position in the region as a matter of prestige. [Practitioners] argue that if Nigeria fails to do so, other credible and contending regional challengers such as Ghana, Egypt, Cote d'Ivoire and South Africa would take such responsibilities.<sup>22</sup>

It is an irony of history that issues of leadership that confronted the OAU at inception also befell the African Union (AU). Ghana's independence was in 1957. That feat

made President Nkrumah to lay claims on African leadership. He passionately sought for the political union of African states. He pursued an activist policy and canvassed for political freedom as a prelude to the economic and social developments of African countries. Moammar Ghadafi of Libya also labored assiduously for the establishment of the African Union and sincerely wished to be named the president of the African Union Government. His book titled *“Brother Leader Moammar El Gaddafi, Founder of the African Union and His Leading Role in the Face of Current African Challenges”* was published and released to commemorate the 13<sup>th</sup> AU Summit held in Sirte Libya, July 1-3, 2009. It is left to history to adjudicate whether the Libyan strongman was the founder of the AU. Other countries like Egypt and South Africa had at one time or the other expressed some leadership aspirations in the continent. But the concern in this study is Nigeria.

The establishment of the OAU and AU certainly reveals Nigeria’s regional leadership roles in articulating how African unity should be achieved and how the issues of the AU’s foreign policy agenda have to be prioritized. Nigeria’s leadership role is shown in the synergy between the preoccupation of Nigeria’s African policy and the policy agenda of the OAU and now the AU. That synergy between Nigeria and OAU ended the outrageous white minority rule and the enthronement of democratic governance in Southern Africa. Nigeria’s leadership role during the apartheid era earned her the status of a Frontline State.

However, it is a leadership role that has financial implications. During the struggle for majority rule in Southern Africa, Nigeria spent billions of dollars in pursuit of this questionable foreign policy goal. Nigeria’s Commissioner for External Affairs during Gowon’s administration, Okoi Arikpo, testified thus:

We have demonstrated our strict compliance with the OAU resolutions which called on all independent African countries to increase their material and moral support for the liberation movements, not only by making the obligatory annual contributions to the fund of the Liberation Committee of the OAU, but also by giving direct financial and general technical assistance and advice. In addition we give substantial financial aid where necessary to countries having common borders with the racist regimes.<sup>23</sup>

President Shehu Shagari reinforced the above foreign policy statement. Comparing Nigeria at independence and twenty years later, Shagari promised total support to the liberation of Africa. The cost of that policy statement was enormous, particularly, to a country saddled with innumerable socio-economic problems. In 1980, Shagari overlooked those problems, brought about by the decline in oil rents and the heightening of ethnic suspicions and rivalries to commit the country financially to an extraneous non-core foreign policy goal:

At independence, when economically, this nation had so little, Nigeria did not commit itself politically as well as financially to the struggle for the liberation of Africa. Today Nigeria is economically better off...Nigeria’s support will be total.<sup>24</sup>

President Shagari’s statement quoted above is a demonstration of Nigeria’s perceived economic viability in pursuing her leadership role conception. Possibly,

the huge petrodollar windfalls of the 70s that followed the Yom Kippur Arab-Israeli war, must have provided the Nigerian leaders the confidence to articulate and pursue their leadership role conception.

*Nigeria's usage of soft power*

Nigeria's contribution in ending colonialism and racist minority policy in Southern Africa was unprecedented. She openly supported armed liberation fighters in Zimbabwe (Rhodesia), Angola, Mozambique, Namibia, and South Africa, even without engaging with the racist regime militarily. Nigeria was not only the foremost contributor to the OAU Liberation Committee; she was also a regular point of call to the Southern African freedom fighters. Students from the Southern African dependent territories were offered scholarships to study in Nigeria, indicating Nigeria's belief in soft power. Nigeria's use of soft power is also shown in the manner she has helped to resolve inter and intra African conflicts. This is mostly achieved through diplomatic shuttles and appealing to the rivals in conflicts on the need for peace; these appeals were based on African identity.

Nigeria worked hard also to ensure the realization of the OAU's 1993 Cairo Declaration on the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution. Today, the AU has the African Peace and Security Architecture and Nigeria's uncontested leadership role is displayed in the resolutions of African conflicts. Besides all these, Nigeria has contributed over 200,000 troops to the United Nations peacekeeping forces. Nigeria has also played critical roles in Africa by single handedly spearheading the formation and funding of ECOMOG – the ECOWAS Peace Monitoring Group - that restored peace to the war torn Liberia and Sierra Leone. Nigeria's peacekeeping missions in Africa and beyond are many. In Africa, Nigeria has sent her peacekeeping forces to the Democratic Republic of Congo, Chad, Guinea Bissau and Cote d'Ivoire, etc. Nigeria as earlier observed, resisted France and went further to sever diplomatic relations when the country tested her atomic bomb in the Sahara desert. That singular act earned Nigeria some leadership applause as a nation that could resist a major power when the African territory is violated

Besides the undue extravagance displayed by Nigeria in what might today be described as an ethical issue in international politics – issues of ethnic segregation or apartheid - the country remains undaunted about African affairs. Nigeria and four other states – Algeria, Egypt, Libya and South Africa – contribute 75% of the total annual recurrent budget of the African Union, with each of these countries contributing 15%.<sup>25</sup> Though Nigeria continues to shoulder the continental budgetary allocation, the remaining 25% remained unsettled by the 49 member states of the African Union. As at 2011 and 2012, the sum of US \$72.4 and US\$ 43.8 million was yet to be settled by the 49 members of the AU.<sup>26</sup> Quite ironically, it is these 49 member states in Africa that actually hold the lens through which Nigeria's leadership role in the continent is perceived.

In addition to the huge financial and human resources Nigeria exhausts on African matters, the country is still playing an activist role on AU's bodies, like the AU Parliament, NEPAD - the New Economic Partnership for Africa's Development - and the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM). Even at this, it is debatable whether

Nigeria has articulated the national interests that should be achieved through these agencies. It is a political truism that countries maintain relations with others in order to goad their own interests which form the basis of their foreign policies.<sup>27</sup> This role expectation is not so with Nigeria. Nigeria's perception of an African centered foreign policy has overstretched the country. This has made Nigeria to pretend to be what she is not. Even at this, many African states have shown open hostility to Nigeria. The details of this hostility are reserved to the next section.

### Leadership in Africa – a Relational Phenomenon

Leadership, and in particular that of the African continent, is a relationship between the leader and the led. It is a reciprocal process that is based on some measures of consent among followers.<sup>28</sup> A state's political efficacy, or what can be termed self-image, that is, the state's belief in its capacity to control events in the continent, combined with other African states desire for leadership will help resolve Nigeria's quests for leadership in the continent. Two issues present themselves in this section. On the one hand, is how Nigeria's domestic problems have impacted upon her leadership aspiration in the continent; on the other hand, is the African states' perception of Nigeria's leadership.

#### *Nigeria's Domestic Problems*

With all sense of modesty, it is difficult to understand in what areas Nigeria is aspiring to lead the continent. Understandably, Nigeria's notion of leadership is viewed in spatial terms since its focus is on Africa. This leadership aspiration must be distinguished from the functional one that focuses on specific issues. Thus, while regional leadership requires certain military and economic capabilities, functional leadership demands expertise in particular areas, like scientific and nuclear capabilities or even issues about environmental degradation, to mention but a few. Functionally, there are doubts whether Nigeria is skilled both scientifically and technologically to lead the continent. Also, Nigeria's security challenges and the yet to be resolved economic recession has latently and manifestly crippled the African giant. Nigeria's economic recession brings to fore the ranking of top African businesses in 2006, years before the present economic quagmire.

In the 2006 *African business* Report, Nigeria's highest ranked firm that year was the Nigerian Breweries in the 44<sup>th</sup> position and only four Nigerian firms made the top 100 companies in Africa.<sup>29</sup> On the other hand, the South African companies occupy the top ten positions, 68 companies of the top 100 African countries also came from the country. Egypt and Morocco have 18 and seven companies respectively. The situation has remained unchanged these years with the South African companies maintaining their predominant position; the tide changed slightly in 2014, with Nigeria's Dangote Cement and the Nigerian Breweries occupying the 7<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> positions respectively. It must also be acknowledged that South Africa is the only African country included in BRICS and G-20. Established in 1999, the G-20 focuses on global economic policy coordination. It is conceptualized to stabilize and strengthen the global economy by bringing together the major advanced and emerging market economies.<sup>30</sup> Nigeria is excluded in this club. South Africa's membership of BRICS and G20 and her successful hosting of the 2013 World Economic Forum are unassailable factors working in her favour over Nigeria.

Niyi Akinnaso, a Nigerian analyst, berates his country's poor domestic setting as responsible for her exclusion from the G-20.<sup>31</sup> To him, since Nigeria lacks good leadership and sound governance, global and regional competitiveness will keep on eluding the country:

[Nigeria's] leadership crisis, accompanied by a political culture of corruption, has persisted and deepened in spite of various experiments with parliamentary, military, and presidential systems of government. Nigeria still reels from light to darkness; from crisis to crisis; and from one form of corruption to the other.<sup>32</sup>

Educationally, out of 100 top African universities, South African universities maintained the lead with 21 slots, while Egypt came second with 13. A Nigerian top university in the 2009 ranking occupied the 44<sup>th</sup> position, going by the Webometric Ranking of World Universities. The situation of the university ranking has not substantially changed all these years. Nigeria lags behind in areas of science and technology, the basis for industrialization. That Nigeria has the greatest number of universities in the continent and has many scientists scattered all over the globe is a fact that should be acknowledged. But there is still a gap in the sense that the country's education has not functionally addressed the socioeconomic needs of the nation. It is against this backdrop that an African Union Senior Expert on Higher education in Addis Ababa, Professor Olushola Oyewole, a Nigerian, lamented that "most of the projects embarked upon by African researchers were usually of no relevance and out of tune with the realities of the African communities".<sup>33</sup> It is a source of regret that despite Nigeria's abundant petro-carbon reserves, the country imports fuel for her domestic use. Nigeria is still confronted with power outages. The world economy is knowledge driven; it is an economy that thrives on creativity and innovation- the basis for industrialization. In this area, Nigeria is lacking the basic credentials of leadership. Leadership is undoubtedly measured in functional terms.

Many analysts malign the downgrading of Nigeria's status in the international forum in recent years. In 2013, Adebajo decried his country's sliding in global reckoning and relevance particularly on the foreign policy platform.<sup>34</sup> Years earlier, Bolaji Akinyemi was worried on how other African states refuse to identify with Nigeria on crucial matters that affect his country's national interests:

If Nigeria as the foremost black African power has certain responsibilities to Africa, then there should be no disputing the fact that Africa also has responsibilities to Nigeria. Nigeria, too, has definite interests to promote and protect, which will require the support and assistance of other African states. If when we say that Africa is the centerpiece of our foreign policy, we mean that Nigeria should identify with and defend the legitimate interests of Africa. Collectively, it also means that Africa and African states should identify with and defend Nigeria's interest. However, these four years of economic crisis in Nigeria have yet to elicit a supportive response from the few African states which are in a position to do so, such as in the areas of smuggling and currency trafficking.<sup>35</sup>

Though elites like Akinyemi solicit for Nigeria's respect in Africa, it is enlightening that the contrary prevails. Definitely, the fault is not from the stars. Has Nigeria's

internal contradictions contributed to the way the 'giant of Africa' is perceived by other African states? Gambari once argued that the formulation and execution of Nigeria's foreign policy "must be situated in its domestic, political and socioeconomic environment on the one hand and the external milieu on the other".<sup>36</sup> It is ironic that Nigeria's immense resources, coupled with the lofty foreign policy objectives pursued by her political elites, have not been supported by effective domestic governance. Though the country is endowed with huge natural resources, including massive oil and gas reserves, Nigeria is ranked among the poorest in the world. Nigeria's domestic setting had been confronted by violent conflicts from independence. Ehusani, a Nigerian cleric, gives an account of the violent conflicts that had crippled the African giant:

From the operation *wetie* that rocked Western Nigeria in 1964, through the unfortunate civil war of 1967 to 1970, to the Niger Delta militant uprising of recent years; and from the Sharia riots of year 2000 and 2001, through the sporadic carnage in Jos and its environs that has not abated since the year 2004, to the yet ongoing Boko Haram terrorist bombing campaigns, it has been a litany of violent conflicts that have tended to pitch the North against the South, Christians against Muslims, and the so called Indigenes against the so-called Non-Indigenes highlighting very graphically the failure of the critical institutions of state and the fragile and tenuous nature of our corporate existence as a nation.<sup>37</sup>

Members of the clergy were not the only crusaders of Nigeria's domestic malaise. Those in the nation's ivory tower joined in singing Nigeria's domestic songs of sorrow. Sam Ukala, a scholar that won the 2014 Nigeria Liquefied Natural Gas (NLNG) sponsored prize for literature, lamented Nigeria's plight as she yearns for an African and foreign leadership applause:

Nigerian peace-keepers are everywhere, but Nigeria has not found peace to keep in her own home: Kano, Benue, Plateau, Osun, Rivers, Bayelsa, Delta – in all these states and more, at any point in time in the last decade, there has been either a smoulder or a full blaze of crisis. Destruction of lives and property by criminals or angry youths, seizure of oil-flow stations, oil-pipe blow-outs and consequent roasting alive of thousands of our compatriots have become regular menu to our eyes, regular depressants of our psyche, and formidable impediments to sustainable development.<sup>38</sup>

Several factors have engendered Nigeria's vulnerability to ethno-religious extremism. These include governance failure occasioned by corrupt tendencies, increased proliferation of Small Arms and light Weapons (SALW), widespread poverty, porous land and maritime borders and ineffectual national security system. Pervasive poverty which must have resulted from governance failure has contributed to Nigeria's worsening external image. Poverty has exacerbated Nigeria's vulnerability to terrorism. In 2007 as an example, it was estimated that over 70 percent of Nigeria's 180 million people live on less than 1 dollar per day, with 35 percent living in abject poverty. Of this figure, Nigeria's 3 Northern zones have an average poverty incidence of 70.1percent as compared to 34.9 percent for the 3 southern zones.<sup>39</sup> Boko Haram has a pronounced presence in the North East of the country.

The above narrative is never to denigrate Nigeria. But it must be emphasized that international politics is a continuation of domestic politics. As Nigerians, we market ourselves to other African states. The second segment in this section is about the manner Nigeria is perceived by other African states.

#### *African states' perception of Nigeria*

The previous sections acknowledged the achievements of Nigeria in many areas, like, the establishment of OAU/AU, decolonization, alleviating the economic plights of some African states, and ensuring global peace and security through peacekeeping. Some African states recognize these exemplary gestures by Nigeria as shown in the concluding part of this section. In spite of these few acknowledgements, one might state that the level of consent from other African states on the issue of Nigeria's regional leadership was and is still uncertain. There is no doubt that Nigeria's position on certain continental matters had been challenged and in many cases overturn by other African states. Nigeria has for years made Africa the focal point of its foreign policy. Her pioneering efforts to the growth of the continent particularly through the OAU and now AU can never be overemphasized; yet the leadership of the African Commission has eluded Nigeria since 2003. Another Nigerian analyst, Dickson Monday, wondered how a nation that has the largest population in Africa is not qualified to represent the African Commission. "Burkina Faso defeated Nigeria in 2007"<sup>40</sup> A number of other cases attest to the assertion that Nigeria's leadership aspiration is a mirage.

First, without counting on Nigeria's contribution of over 72 percent of the ECOWAS funds, its neighbouring Francophone states had repeatedly battled to relocate the organization's parliament from Abuja to Cote d'Ivoire.<sup>41</sup> Second, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruling that Nigeria has no sovereign rights over the Bakassi Peninsula was, to say the least, a devastating blow to Nigeria's acclaimed regional leadership.<sup>42</sup> Nigeria's hasty acceptance of the ICJ ruling had brought untold hardship to the Nigerians living in the disputed territory. Tales of harassment by the Cameroon gendarmes have been recorded against Nigerians still living in Bakassi. Again, Nigeria's preparedness to cede its Bakassi region [listed in the 1999 Constitution as one of Nigeria's local Government Areas] shows the ineptitude of Nigeria's foreign policy in defining what constitutes her national interest. Ceding the Bakassi peninsula to Cameroon is an act of humiliation, particularly to the giant state in Africa. In realist terms, territories are hardly ceded.

In 2009, Nigeria expressed an interest to represent Africa as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council. In spite of the AU support for Nigeria's interest, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Togo almost frustrated the efforts by voting for themselves. Thus, while all participating African states voted for Nigeria, it was these West African states that did otherwise. That was how Nigeria was repaid for its pioneering ECOMOG peace efforts to these war torn West African states. However, self interest reigns supreme in international politics, with minimum regard to morality. Along this line, Saliu argues that a nation cannot hope and expect that having extended a good gesture towards another nation, the recipient will always want to reciprocate the gesture.<sup>43</sup>

Many Nigerians have been humiliated abroad for coming from this part of the world. Nigeria's relationship with its neighboring states like the Republic of Benin, Chad, Cameroon Gabon, Equatorial Guinea and Niger has seen odd times, particularly in maltreating Nigerians. For the incessant harassment of Nigerians at the Lake Chad region by the Chadian soldiers, Nigeria was forced to deport 700000 Chadians from its shores in 1983.<sup>44</sup>

The 2015 South African xenophobic attacks meted principally against Nigerians and other Africans are another classic example. The incident marked the 21 years the apartheid minority rule ended in the Southern African sub-region. The house of Nigeria's High Commissioner in South Africa was attacked with gun shots and her children abducted.<sup>45</sup> Nigerians visiting South Africa had on many occasions been deported for allegedly lacking vaccination papers. At one instance, Nigeria's Minister of Aviation, Kema Chikwe, was detained and denied entry into the country for similar reasons. Nigeria was forced to express its disgust over the unfriendly acts. Olugbenga Ashiru, Nigeria Foreign Minister under the administration of President Goodluck Jonathan, described South Africa's behavior to Nigeria as 'unacceptable', 'unfortunate' 'totally unfriendly' and 'un-African and an affront to diplomatic norms'.<sup>46</sup> Reciprocity is a fundamental principle of international relations. What leadership privileges can Nigeria claim when its nationals are slaughtered and their properties destroyed for residing in South Africa, a country Nigeria lavished its resources as a Frontline State?

Before the xenophobic ordeal in South Africa, the Ghanaian authorities descended on Nigerians for engaging in retail businesses, hoping in the process to reserve such for its nationals. The Ghanaian authorities acted contrary to the ECOWAS statute which inter-alia, recommends the removal between member states, of obstacle to free movement of persons, goods, service and capital, and to right of residence and establishment. It is the same country that in 2007 praised President Obasanjo for extending a 90-day credit to Ghana for 90000 barrels of crude oil. "Nigeria's big brother status has never been in doubt" a Ghanaian paper acknowledged.<sup>47</sup> Assuredly, Ghana is not the only country that remembers Nigeria's show of generosity. As soon as Sam Nujoma became the president of his country, Namibia, he showered praises on Nigeria:

The racist South African regime...held on to Namibia and tried to establish a puppet regime here, the so-called Government of National Unity. But we intensified the armed struggle, with the support of the Nigerian government.<sup>48</sup>

Nigeria marked its centenary (100) celebration in 2014, taking the country's existence from 1914, the colonial year the Northern and Southern Protectorates were joined together as one state. Some African heads of state poured encomiums on Nigeria. President of Gambia, Yahya Jammeh asserted that Nigeria had invested financial, material and human resources to bind the continent together. To him, Nigeria holds the key to the continued relevance of the continent on the global map. On the same note, the President of Malawi, Joyce Banda, also praised Nigeria for its commitment to peace, security and the development of the continent.<sup>49</sup> These and other praises showered on Nigeria proves the wastage on the side of Nigeria in

pursuing non-core foreign policy goals - issues of regional leadership. How those issues have addressed the plights of Nigerians is yet to be seen. Nigeria's foreign policy pursuits have not resolved her governance problems.

Before the conclusion, it must be observed that Nigeria has taken some measures to change the perception of foreigners about the country. The *rebranding project* was specifically undertaken by the Ministry of Information and Communication during President Umaru Y'Adua era. Unfortunately, the rebranding exercise had little to do with the country's gateway with the outside world, the Federal Ministry of External Affairs. That is another evidence of poor coordination amongst Nigeria's ministries and agencies. In addition to lack of coordination among the governmental agencies is poor funding which adversely affects foreign missions, the in-fighting and clique politics on issues of external posting and promotions.<sup>50</sup> This is part and parcel of the domestic constraints to effective pursuit of foreign policy goals.

### Conclusion

This study is guided by Nigeria's leadership role conception for Africa. The leadership role concept is unquestionably an elitist theory, given its concern with the rulers' perceptions rather than that of the ruled. It is a top-down leadership strategy. From that standpoint, Nigeria refers to the perception of the political elites that have governed the country since its independence in 1960. The political elite's idea of leadership has not profited the generality of Nigerians whose interest the country's foreign policy is supposed to serve. Richard Joseph observed quite appropriately that in the case of Nigeria, the state has been greatly eroded by excesses of prebendalism (official corrupt practices) to the extent that the Nigerian state has been weakened by the low identification of Nigerian communities with the various units of governance.<sup>51</sup> To boost the Nigerian economy, he suggested a sharp reduction in the funds stolen from the country's annual earnings, the dramatic reduction in lavish projects undertaken solely as means of siphoning wealth, and the conversion of the billions stashed abroad into investible capital at home.<sup>52</sup>

Nigerian foreign policy from 1960 has been guided by the same principles and objectives. Nonetheless, different regimes in the country had emphasized on a non-core foreign policy objective – leadership status in Africa. But leadership is earned. Many African states have not accepted Nigeria's leadership in African matters. At many instances Nigeria's perception on continental matters have been challenged and in many cases overturn by some of these African states. The situation is worsened by events that occur in Nigeria's domestic environment, particularly in areas of insecurity, corruption and poverty that had afflicted Nigerians. But can Nigeria lead a continent that has the lowest score in virtually every developmental index. Africa has the highest number and the largest concentration of poor nations in the world. It is a herculean task asking the poor to lead the poor. Akinterinwa's observation is apt:

Several countries, including some African states, have raised issues about contradictions between Nigeria's quest for permanent seat on the UN Security Council on the one hand and Nigeria's high level of indebtedness and inability to put her domestic situation in order on the other. In other

words, how can Nigeria fund the maintenance of regional or international peace and security operations with her level of financial insolvency and much dependence on the developed world assistance?<sup>53</sup>

Nigeria contradictory domestic setting has eroded the country's quest for prestige and honour. In as much as Nigeria performs poorly in the socioeconomic index, and the nation continues to have unresolved governance problems, it follows that the quest for continental leadership in Africa will remain a cherished dream. Nigeria's leadership role quest from this context is to say the least, the race of the crippled.

Notes

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