

Nigerian foreign policy-relations (1999-2010): A comparison of Obasanjo's (1999-2007) and Yar'adua's (2007-2010) foreign relations

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Abstract

The study employed a comparative analysis of Nigeria's foreign policy- relations. It analyzes Nigerians foreign policy- relations (1999-2010) with a significant comparison of President Olusegun Obasanjo's administration (1999-2007) and that of his successor, late President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua's administration (2007-2010) foreign relations. A comparative look at both Obasanjo and Yar'Adua administrations foreign relations reveals that the style and method tend to differ, thereby reflecting their idiosyncrasies. Obasanjo foreign relations focused on attracting Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) and getting debt relief for Nigeria and that of Yar'Adua focused on Citizen Diplomacy. The only similarity is that both Obasanjo and Yar'Adua administrations foreign relation is centred on almost the same foreign policy objectives.

Keywords: *Nigeria, Foreign policy, Foreign relations, Obasanjo and Yar'Adua*

Introduction

For a nation to pursue a viable and robust foreign policy abroad it must protect and promote its national interest. Nigerian foreign policy- relations has been pursued by various administrations in Nigeria under almost the same objectives. The only difference, according to Obi (2006) "while the style tend to differ, thereby reflecting the idiosyncrasies of the president or head of state and his foreign minister, the substance has remained basically the same".

The emergence of Nigeria's foreign policy can be traced to the 1960's when Nigeria gained independence from Britain, her ex-colonial master. Nigerian foreign policy- relations was however in a decline between 1999- 2010 during the civilian administrations of President Olusegun Obasanjo (1999-2007) and that of his successor, Late President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua (2007-2010), as compared to the robust foreign policy relations witnessed in the 1970's. A critical look at Nigerian foreign policy relations since 1999- 2010 attest that there is a decline in its robust foreign policy relations as compared to the 1970's. As, Obi (2006) asserts that "the period of 1975 to 1979 is usually seen by most authors and scholars as the golden era of Nigeria's foreign policy". By this he meant that this period witnessed a new form of dynamism and assertiveness that was quite alien to Nigeria's foreign relations. A comparison of Obasanjo's administration (1999-2007) and that of Yar'Adua's administration (2007-2010) foreign relations, attests to the fact that there is a significant difference between these two administrations style and pursuance of foreign policy relations and their achievements. Obasanjo administration's major achievements in his foreign relations was attracting Foreign Investments and getting debt relief for Nigeria. As, Adeniran (2008) noted that "under obasanjo, Nigerian foreign policy was made to focus on wooing Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) with the federal government's establishment of a one- stop- investment agency (Nigerian Investment Promotion Commission, NIPC) and the initiative of encouraging Nigerians in the Diaspora to become involved in

national development." On the other hand, Yar'Adua's administration did not give uppermost priority to the issue of foreign policy in the administration's agenda when it took office in May 29, 2007, as compare to his predecessor president Obasanjo. At the inception of Yar'Adua's administration, his Foreign Affairs Minister, Chief Ojo Maduekwe, declared that the administration will espouse what he called Citizen Diplomacy.

2. The Problem

Nigerian foreign policy- relations with other nations decline since 1999-2010, as compared to the robust foreign relations during the 1970's. A comparison of Obasanjo's Administration (1999-2007) and that of his successor, Yar'Adua's administration (2007- 2010) attest to the fact that Nigerian foreign policy- relations was in a decline. Both leaders foreign relations style has been criticised by some Nigerian scholars and authors, due to the fact that it did not yield the needed results in the area of Nigeria's image abroad, economic development and foreign investments in Nigeria.

This study however examines Nigeria's foreign policy (1999-2010) with a comparison of Obasanjo administration's foreign relations (1999-2007) and that of his successor, Yar'Adua (2007-2010).

3. Methodology

The methodology employed in this study for the purpose of data collection and analysis is the use of historical method with emphasis on secondary data source, while data were analysed qualitatively. The study also adopted a comparative approach with a comparison of President Obasanjo administration's foreign relations (1999- 2007) and that of his successor, Late President Yar'Adua (2007-2010)

4. Conceptual Clarifications

For the purpose of conceptual clarifications, the concept of foreign policy and that of Nigeria's foreign policy is vividly explained in this section.

4.1 Foreign Policy

There is no generally acceptable definition of foreign policy, as authors and scholars in the field of international relations have defined the concept in different ways and perspectives. Modelski (1962) define foreign policy as “the system of activities evolved by communities for changing the behaviour of other states and for adjusting their own activities to the international environment”. From the above definition given by Modelski, it can be asserted that foreign policy is developed by communities to checkmate and change the behaviour of other states in the international environment. For, Holsti (1995) foreign policy is defined as “the actions of a state towards the external environment and the conditions usually domestic under which these actions are formulated”.

Foreign policy refers to the external activities of a state pursued in other to promote its national interest and image in the international environment.

4.2 Nigeria’s Foreign Policy

Nigerian foreign policy refers to the external relations pursued by various administrations in Nigeria under the same objectives since independence 1960- date. It has to do with Nigeria’s external activities that promote its interest as regards the international environment.

5. Nigerian Foreign Policy- Relations (1999-2010): A Comparison

This section is a critical and comparative overview of Obasanjo’s administration (1999-2007) and that of his successor, Yar’Adua (2007-2010) as regards to foreign relations during their stay in office.

5.1 An Overview of Obasanjo’s Administration (1999-2007)

Obasanjo in his Inaugural Speech, on 29th May 1999, clearly stated that “we shall pursue a dynamic foreign policy to promote friendly relations with all nations and will continue to play a constructive role in the United Nations and the organisation of African Unity and other international bodies. We shall continue to honour existing agreements between Nigeria and other countries. It is our resolve to restore Nigeria fully to her previous prestigious position in the community of nations”.

An overview of Olusegun Obasanjo administration’s pursuance of Nigerian foreign policy from 1999-2007 focus on efforts at; (i) attracting foreign investments into Nigeria and (ii) getting debt relief for Nigeria. In obasanjo’s administration’s search for foreign investment for Nigeria, right from his inauguration as Nigeria’s executive president on May 29, 1999, was optimistic that the earliest way of developing the Nigerian economy is through attracting investment into the country. According to Obi (2006) “while many Nigerians are not really against the search for foreign investments, what most are kicking seriously against is the style been used by the president.” Obi (2006) went further to opine that “he (obasanjo) believes that the best way to attract investors into the country is going to their countries to beg them to come and invest in Nigeria”. Apart from the search for foreign investors, the greatest achievement made by Obasanjo’s administration in relationship with developed world was the issue of getting debt relief, were the president and key members of his economic team have engaged in so many diplomatic shuttles all over the world trying to convince the Paris and London Clubs, the IMF, World Bank and G8

countries on the need to grant Nigeria some debt relief. According to Obi (2006) “the Paris Club had a meeting on 29th June 2005 were the issue of Nigeria’s debt was discussed. The next day, the 30th June 2005, the club announced that it has agreed in principle to grant Nigeria debt relief” (Obi, 2006). Nigeria owed the club \$31billion, and the deal was that Nigeria was to make an up- front payment of \$6 billion of existing arrears to the club, thereby reducing the debt to \$25billion. This suggests that the club under the Naples terms wrote off 67 percent amounting to between \$17-18 billion which left a balance of \$9 billion which the Nigerian authorities hope to buy back at a market related discount of about \$6 billion. it is note worthy to comment that this deal was based on the International Monetary Fund’s (IMF) Policy Support Instrument (PSI). As regards this development the former president Olusegun Obasanjo the made an important nationwide broadcast to address Nigerians on this new development. Obi (2006) noted that “he (obasanjo) was highly elated and saw the debt relief as a result of his numerous travels which had attracted a lot of criticism from Nigerians”.

5.2 An Overview of Yar’Adua’s Administration (2007-2010)

An overview of president Yar’Adua’s administration attest to the fact that the issue of foreign policy was not uppermost in the administration’s agenda when it took office in May 29, 2007, as compare to his predecessor president Obasanjo.

In the first two years when the administration of president Yar’Adua took over the reins of governance in Nigeria from his predecessor, Obasanjo, it became very clear that the issue of foreign policy was not uppermost in the administration’s agenda. According to Ezirim (2011) “much as it is not clear what the policy thrust is, the much- touted citizens diplomacy is not even clear what it is meant to achieve as the proponent, Ojo Maduekwe, the Foreign Affairs Minister, has not been able to fully explain what he means by that which is known to be an obligation- that when a country does not treat another country’s national right, they could also get the same treatment for their own citizens”. Ezirim (2011) went further to explain that “this inactivity on the part of the president and his foreign policy team has left Nigeria as onlookers in a fast moving world”.

During President Yar’Adua’s administration, Nigeria’s voice was however not felt in major international forums, as Abba (2009) rightly opined that Nigeria’s voice was not heard in major international fora: Nigeria has initiated nothing spectacular in the last two years (i.e. 2007-2008) at the dynamic global arena and, apart from bilateral agreements which hardly followed up, Nigeria has, gained nothing from diplomatic activities under this government.” Similarly, Onyekwere (2009) noted that, “the seemingly diplomatic indifference of president Umaru Yar’Adua’s administration threatens the little gains the country earned under his predecessor just as the international community is reinventing stereotypes against Nigerians, while manufacturing companies relocate to neighbouring countries in droves.”

The foreign policy thrust known as citizen diplomacy adopted by the late President Yar’Adua and his Foreign Minister generated harsh comments and criticisms from commentators and scholars as, Ezirim (2011) rightly asserts that “the diplomatic faux pas committed by both the President and his Foreign Affairs Minister have been enough to warrant harsh comments from commentators and scholars.”

5.3 Comparison

A comparison of both Obasanjo and Yar'Adua's foreign relations reveals that the issue of foreign relations was not an uppermost priority in Yar'Adua administration's agenda or plan as his administration pursued a policy thrust known as Citizen Diplomacy, while on the other hand, Obasanjo was busy making foreign trips in search of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and getting debt relief for Nigeria. Obasanjo administration to a large extent attracted Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and got Paris Club to write off parts of the debts Nigeria owed the Club but Obasanjo's foreign policy style attracted lots of criticism from Nigerians over his incessant trips abroad.

Furthermore, a comparative look at both Obasanjo and Yar'Adua administrations foreign relations reveals that the style and method tend to differ, thereby reflecting their idiosyncrasies as Obasanjo foreign relations focused on attracting Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) and getting debt relief for Nigeria and that of Yar'Adua focused on Citizen Diplomacy. The only similarity is that both Obasanjo and Yar'Adua administrations foreign relation is centred on almost the same foreign policy objectives.

The idiosyncrasies of both leaders i.e Obasanjo and Yar'Adua has to be compared and requires assessment. This will give a clear understanding and will contribute greatly to the body of knowledge.

Obasanjo, was a former military head of state (from 1976-1979) and who later became a civilian president of Nigeria (from 1999-2007). Obasanjo's behaviour, attitude and opinion in pursuance of Nigeria's foreign policy (1999-2007) was greatly influenced by his previous experience and also he learnt a lot and copied the dynamics of his predecessor General Murtala Muhammed, who was head of state of Nigeria (from 1975-1976) who gave a well-defined, articulate, coherent and explicit policy for Africa without deference to any bloc or country. As, Ezirim (2011) assert that "this period saw a true manifestation of African policy of Nigeria as the regime under Murtala Muhammed gave a well- defined, articulate, coherent and explicit policy for Africa that was not tainted with fear or deference to any bloc or country". Thus, this period, according to Obi (2006) "the period of 1975 to 1979 is usually seen by most authors and scholars as the golden era of Nigeria's foreign policy". The experience of Obasanjo as military head of state (1976-1979) largely contributed to the success (i.e. attracting Foreign Direct Investment and getting debt relief for Nigeria) he achieved as a civilian president (1999-2007) as regards his foreign policy thrust as compared to Yar'Adua (2007-2010). Olusegun Obasanjo is a leader of international repute and was highly respected in the international community due to his proven track records and experience in the 1970's. To buttress the above argument, Ngara and *et al.* (2013) asserts that "he consistently and untiringly canvassed for the reversal of the abysmal socio-economic conditions in the Third World especially Africa, a role which no doubt rubbed off his personality as an important international statesman".

On the other hand, when assessing the idiosyncrasy of Late President Yar'Adua (2007-2010) who was a successor to President Obasanjo (1999-2007), you will discover that there is a striking difference between Yar'Adua and Obasanjo in their attitude, behaviour and opinion as regards their foreign policy thrust. Yar'Adua was a former Governor of Kastina State of Nigeria before he became president of Nigeria on May 29, 2007

and until when he met with an untimely death in May 2010. Thus, his Vice President, Dr. Goodluck Jonathan was immediately sworn in on May 2010. A critical look at Late President Yar'Adua's attitude, behaviour and opinion as regards his foreign policy thrust as well as his personality reveals that he has little or no experience in leadership and international reputation as compared to President Olusegun Obasanjo as Yar'Adua was only a State Governor in Nigeria before he (Yar'Adua) assumed the position of President of Nigeria in 2007. While Obasanjo was a one-time military Head of State (from 1976-1979) and also a President of Nigeria (from 1999-2007). This no doubt attests to the fact that President Obasanjo was more experienced in foreign policy formulation and implementation than Late President Yar'Adua. Obasanjo was more of an international figure than Yar'Adua because of the respect and reputation he (Obasanjo) earned in the international community.

Although, you would agree with me that Yar'Adua's reign or administration was short as compared to Obasanjo's as a result of Yar'Adua's untimely death in office in 2010, but in comparison of these two personalities, the distinction is however clear.

6. Concluding Remarks and Recommendation

In conclusion, Nigeria's foreign policy has under both Obasanjo (1999-2007) and Yar'Adua (2007-2010) administrations reveals that Nigeria's foreign policy lack a form of dynamism and assertiveness as was witnessed in the period of 1975 to 1979 which was regarded by most authors and scholars as the golden era of Nigeria's foreign policy. It should be noted that foreign policy is a vital instrument for promoting a nation's national interest.

For Nigeria to promote a viable national interest and image abroad it must pursue and promote a dynamic and assertive foreign policy, one that protect Nigerians in the Diaspora and promote Nigeria's positive image.

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