

AN ASSESSMENT OF FOREIGN POLICY DECISION-MAKING DURING GENERAL SANI ABACHA REGIME IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Foreign policy decision-making process is a product of internal and external environment; and some of these are not static enough to predict the behavioural pattern of states within the global system. The unstable nature of both internal and external policy environment make it difficult for the would-be statesman to have a clear roadmap in foreign policy making and implementation. This occurs often during the turbulent times when state needs to dissect policy carefully towards external environment. This is the case of General Sani Abacha regime in Nigeria. The domestic environment within which Abacha formulated Nigeria's foreign policy was riddled in crisis and turbulence. How the regime maneuvered the turmoil internal and external environment in the formulation and execution of Nigeria's foreign policy is the focus of the current research agenda. Thus, the article explores the impact of the turbulent political atmosphere of Abacha regime and how such was managed in the process of formulating Nigeria's foreign policy. Thus, the research found that the personality of Abacha greatly affected the outcome of Nigeria's foreign policy. Again, the research recommends that the formulation and execution of foreign policy should be to promote the national interests of Nigeria as opposed to the personal aggrandizement of Abacha. In this research, personality factor and political climate provide the framework. The methods of data collection is qualitative in nature Thus, the Qualitative Content Analysis is employed in data collection and gathering.

Keyword: *Abacha regime; foreign policy; domestic environment, Nigeria*

INTRODUCTION

The foreign policy direction of a country is a reflection of the preference and perception of its leadership. This preference depends largely on domestic and external factors.

Whether a perception of foreign policy emanates from the individual decision makers or at the level of nation – state, it is strongly linked to the political leadership. That is why the foreign policy of states may

in large measure be explained by differences in their leadership perceptions. Hence, there is a relationship that exists between personality and foreign policy. Every leader attempts to further his “interest” in a foreign policy of the country, but the way and manner he or she goes about doing this depends largely on preferences. This seems to be true of all statesmen who are charged with the responsibility of formulating foreign policy. The leadership of Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini in Europe during the late 1930s plunged the global system into World War II. It needs to be said that the decisive political posture of Nelson Mandela between 1994 and 1999 improved the posture of South Africa as human rights promoter within the global system. In Nigeria, Abacha as Nigeria’s Head of State, came to political prominence between 1993 and 1998 and such period represented a drastic disconnection in the manner with which Nigerian foreign policy has been formulated since 1960

(Oladimeji, 2022). Abacha’s intransigence greatly reflected in the way and manner he responded to internal and external issues during his period in office. He was an astute and confident military leader but failed to apply some leniency and clemency in handling some delicate political and social issues at domestic level. Such mishandling of domestic issues resulted in international castigation which later rendered his regime unpopular at international level. According to Nwoke (1996), Abacha’s ascension to power was misunderstood by the West who embarked on a hostile mission against the government. The so-called nationalistic determination of the government to remove Nigeria from the shackles of western stooge also worsened relations with western powers who had become used to Nigeria serving their selfish interest. The reluctance of the West to accept the reality of the day made Abacha to shift his attention to Asia. This move brought Nigeria into closer relations with China,

North Korea, Turkey, Libya Iraq, etc. Abacha perceived western hostility as an affront and he shifted Nigeria's foreign policy in response to the demand of the time. Nigeria had been suspended from the Commonwealth of Nations where diplomatic ripples had been on since November 1995, when Ken Saro Wiwa and 8 others Ogoni kinsmen were hanged after international plea for clemency was turned down by Abacha. This was one occasion where he portrayed an unyielding attitude. Abacha is a rigid personality who refused to listen to the yearnings and complains of the masses and only occasionally did he listen to people if such complain went along with his plan and interests. Nigeria suffered isolation from the international community in particular from the western world, seeing that military rule as incompatible with the contemporary trend of democratization. Starting from the Babangida military regime (1985-1992) the president had to step down due to pressure

from the West. Generally, the nature and quality of leadership of a state as well as political structure have significant bearing on the formulation of state's foreign policy. This research therefore queries the personality of Abacha and the resultant political structure in the foreign policy making process in Nigeria. How did the regime navigate the difficult terrain of international system? And what are the policy implemented to survive the difficult domestic and international political climate of the time? These are the questions that serve as the bedrock of the research. Thus, the paper assesses the personality of Abacha as well as the role of reactionary posture in the foreign policy of Nigeria under the Abacha regime. In this case, the research draws a useful link between state's foreign policy and the leadership posture. Therefore, the research will contribute to intellectual debates on the role of personality and domestic politics in foreign policy analysis. The research is divided into sections; with

each section delving into separate topic. Again, the research employs the theoretical framework of personality in discerning the role of Abacha in the formulating of Nigerian foreign policy.

Methods of Data Collection

The adopted methodology in carrying out data collection for this study are two methods (primary and secondary sources). The primary source, which employs qualitative techniques such as textual mining of speeches and interviews while the other means is content analysis of secondary sources data. The secondary sources of data collection included magazines, Newspapers, government publications and other scholarly materials on the study.

CONCEPTUALIZING FOREIGN POLICY

Foreign policy as a concept may defy precise definitions just like other social science concepts. This does not suggest that there is no appropriate and standard way of

conceptualising it. Although it needs to be stressed that the definition, or better still conceptualisation, of foreign policy may reflect philosophical orientation of scholar, nevertheless the definition should be intelligible enough to convey a sense. From the general point of view, foreign policy can be explained as a response of nation-state to the external milieu with which it has little or no control (Ra'ees, 2010). This definition is a signpost to the fact that international system is not predictable unlike domestic arena and, therefore, any policy being formulated by a state may prove to be irrational by the response from external environment. This implies that formulating rational foreign policy by national policy makers does not guarantee that the policy will be successful at international level. This is because it is very difficult to predict the response of external actors with which the policy is directed (Kegley and Blanton. 2012:215). In addition, the state actors are human beings and not

robots and in this case, it is very difficult to predict anything that has to do with human reaction. So, human beings is rational in thinking and conduct which is why they are prone to bad and good conduct according to Hobbes. In this way, foreign policy depends entirely on the rationality of human being and some other factors within the geographical confine of a state (Jackson and Sorenson, 2013:259). Many scholars including Carlsnaes (2008), Holsti (1995), Bull (1972) and Jackson and Sorenson (2013) have defined foreign policy based on their scholarly orientations. Notwithstanding the diverse opinions, there needs to be unanimity about what the definition should be. The only problem here, therefore, is how to identify basic constituents of foreign policy. How can one define a boundary from what is internal and external given the present stage of globalisation process? Is it possible to separate Malaysian water from Indonesia's? Can a state define its space boundary without

allying with other state actors? These are questions that have been generating controversy about foreign policy, which is rooted in the principle of sovereignty. Despite these seeming unanswered questions, it is necessary to define what foreign policy means within the purview of international relations.

Throughout the modern era, the issues, means and ends of foreign policy making for nation-states, have proliferated and significantly changed (Carlsnaes, 2013:300). Foreign policy as a field of academic study is a child of the 1960s and James Rosenau can be regarded as its pioneer (Rosenau, 1997:143). Rosenau defines foreign policy as an adaptive behaviour which is interpreted to involve ultimate goals or what is better known as national interest. Foreign policy as a sub-unit of international relations, which tries to explain the total of decisions made on behalf of a given political unit that entails the implementation of goals

with reference to its external environment (Holsti, 1995:20). In addition, Ra'ees asserts that "foreign policy inputs are those many factors that influence foreign policy decision-making, whilst the observable outputs of foreign policy are a feature of states behaviour within the international system" (Ra'ees, 2010:2). Going by Holsti's definition, foreign policy is the ideas designed by policy personnel to solve a problem or provide some changes in the external environment, that is, in the policies, activities, or actions of another state (Holsti, 1995:14). This definition implies that foreign policy formulation and implementation is implemented to achieve specific goals and objectives, which state cannot ordinarily attain within its solitary confinement. For Ra'ees (2010), foreign policy is the sum total of official external relations conducted by an independent actor (usually a state) in international relations. This definition seems to be narrowly defined given its sole

reference to governmental circle in the execution and implementation of foreign policy of a state. If foreign policy of a state can be defined in terms of official relations then it suggests that only governmental circle constitute the basic element of foreign policy of a state. This explanation, if at all acceptable, seems to suggest that other domestic actors are sidelined in this narrow definition. Rosenau (1997:146) therefore opines that the study of foreign policy defies any concrete theoretical lens, which is why it is expedient to consider all external and internal variables in dissecting the foreign policy of a state or a particular administration. Despite the divergences in the approach of scholars to the foreign policy definition, the point of convergence it is being made in response to external environment political terrain.

LEADERSHIP AND FOREIGN POLICY

The choices made by individual leaders are important in shaping international events

(Rouke and Boyer, 2004:64). This emphasizes the idiosyncratic characteristics also known as operational code or cognitive schema of political leaders who make foreign policy of a state. This analysis assumes that individuals make foreign policy decisions and that different individuals are likely to make different decisions. This level of foreign policy analysis, therefore, considers personality, health, ambition, personal experiences, educational background, worldview and perceptions of leaders. When studying personality and the impact on policy Rouke and Boyer (2004) examine leader's basic orientations toward self and toward others, behavioural patterns, and attitude about such politically relevant concepts as authority. Both scholars opine that active leaders are policy innovators; passive leaders are reactors. The more active a leader, the more criticism he or she encounters. In buttressing their claim, they concurred that Adolf Hitler, Josef Stalin, and Richard Nixon

were all active-negative personalities who showed symptoms of delusion, struck out their enemies, and generally developed bunker mentalities. The Adolf Hitler's mentality about the superiority of German race (Aryan Race in particular) in this case may well provide reason for nationalistic foreign policy that spurred the growth of hatred towards other nationalities in Europe. The result of Adolf Hitler's policy was the horrendous occurrence of Second World War. Such is the impact of leader on foreign policy making. According to Jackson and Sorenson (2013:267, the decision made by President George Walker Bush by ousting Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq dictated to the extent to which some states, most especially the Arab states, bend on castigating the subsequent US decisions in global affairs. Bush, as a leader was apprehensive of the capability of Saddam in making the US unpopular in the Middle East. Bush, unconvincing of the support of the US

Congress went ahead to engage in threat inflation and campaign of calumny against Saddam in order to win the support of the congress to invade Iraq. Most political observers like Barry Buzan (2013) and John Mearsheimer (2013) are of the view that such could not have happened under the leadership of Bill Clinton. In this case, the leadership of the US in 2003 dictated the decision that was to be made in foreign policy in relation to Iraqi issue. Mearsheimer and Buzan might be right on this thesis but some state leaders naturally are paranoid and when this happens it is an unavoidable psychological error. It needs to be stressed here that it is not only state leader that suffer from paranoia; ordinary individuals who do not have stake in governance also have such fear of being attacked. Besides, at the time President Bush took the step in attacking the Saddam regime, there had already widespread discontentment among various groups i.e. Kurds, Christians, Shiites of imminent use of chemical and

biological weapons by Saddam. This is because of previous history of wanting execution and killings by Saddam. Such heinous act might have played role in the decision taken by President Bush administration to dislodge the regime knowing full well the internal contradictions in Iraqi society would support his invasion. Another scholar, James Laura (2005), while explaining the nationalization of Suez Canal in 1956, Maintains that the influence and dauntless character of President Gamel Nasser is the most important factor that dictated the outcome of the event. The decision to nationalize the Suez Canal was promptly declared by the Egyptian president at the height of political tension among Israel, France, Britain and Egypt. Nasser was said to take advantage of the existing Cold War to nationalize the canal that has been previously dominated by France and Britain. The Nasser regime was well assured of USSR's support. As soon as France and Britain began their

military assault in Egypt the USSR and the US immediately intervened to avert another world war. Such was the leadership proficiency of President Nasser and the action was deemed timely. If the president refused to nationalize the Suez Canal in 1956, it might be presently under the control of both France and Britain. There are other internal and external variables that can influence the decision of a leader in foreign policy direction and the manipulation of such internal and external variable depends largely on the capability of a state leader. This is the case of Abacha regime.

John Mearsheimer (2013) and James Laura (2005). In foreign policy, decision making process is a complex one. The policy making environment makes it difficult for statesmen who are in charge of formulation and implementation of foreign policy to do so in a concise manner (Stein, 2008:103). The decision making process greatly depends on the external and internal environment and the

control is not within the reach of any decision maker. It is possible to mitigate the effect of domestic environment; this at times depends on the nature of political climate. In democracies, the chance of a President/Prime Minister to have an overbearing influence of foreign policy decision making process is very low (Renshon, & Renshon, 2008: 512). And in this case, all domestic actors i.e. Congress, bureaucrats, and relevant ministries have significant input in the decision making process. The decision making process could be different in authoritarian regimes where the Head of Government has complete control over the foreign decision making process as it happened under the Abacha regime.

DOMESTIC POLITICS AND ABACHA REGIME

On 17th November, 1993 Abacha took over power from an Interim National Government led by Chief Ernest Shonekan, he took a number of measures: he dissolved the

democratic structures and institutions by sacking all State and Federal Legislatures including the governors as well as adoption of full martial laws. The Abacha administration itself was not only a child of circumstance, but was also the main beneficiary of Nigeria's protracted political logjam following the annulment of the popularly acclaimed free and fair presidential elections that had produced Moshood Abiola as the winner. The gross human rights abuse under Abacha regime fuelled the collective western condemnation of the regime. The highpoint of the regime's blunders was the negligence of global plea for clemency in the death sentence passed on the Ogoni leaders including outspoken author and playwright "Ken Saro-Wiwa, Nordu Eawo, Saturday Dobe, Paul Levera, Daniel Gbooko, Barinem Kiobel, Felix Nuate, Baribor Bera, and John Kpuine who were executed by hanging in 1995" (Phillips, 2013).

In response to the execution of the Ogoni activists, Western leaders deliberately isolated Nigeria as punishment. For instance, the Canadian government took a drastic decision by closing its High Commission in Nigeria. In the same manner, South Africa cut diplomatic relations with Abacha's regime, while the American government imposed full military and economic sanctions purposely to frustrate as well as to compel the Federal military government to change its rigid unpopular style of administration. Under the leadership of Abacha government, security forces are accused of committing extrajudicial killings, used excessive force to stop anti-government protests. All these actions resulted in massive death and serious injury of many individuals, including innocent civilians. Security personnel's beat and tortured detainees, there were reports of female sexual abuse of suspects and prisoners by security personnel

and many prisoners died in police custody (Meredith, 2005).

It should be reiterated that the security services routinely harassed human rights and prodemocracy groups, including labour leaders, journalists, and student activists. The Government denied citizens the right to change their government; it continued to suspend the Constitution and did not hold and implement the results of free and fair elections. Domestic violence against women remained widespread and permitted by law. Ethnic and regional discrimination remained widespread and interethnic and regional tensions often became violent; a number of persons were killed in various local ethnic conflicts (Meredith, 2005).” The Government continued to suppress harshly demands for greater local autonomy by members of ethnic minorities in the oil-producing Niger-delta region, including the Ogoni minority (Meredith, 2005). The Government severely restricted the right of

workers to associate in independent labour unions and to strike. Child labour remained a problem. Some children, including children trafficked from nearby countries, were subjected to forced labour. Of these abuses, those that were largely societal rather than governmental in origin generally persisted throughout the year without significant improvement (Meredith, 2005).

The Abacha regime, however, was not totally blind to what happened within the country. For instance, he supported the Economic Community of West African States and sent Nigerian troops to Liberia and Sierra Leone to assist in restoration of peace and democracy to those countries in the region. Despite being condemned by the US State Department, Abacha still developed personal relationship with some American politicians. Senator James Inhofe travelled to Nigeria in 1997 to meet with Abacha as a form of strengthening their friendship. He also developed strong ties with other

American political figures such as Rev. Jesse Jackson, Senator Carol Mosley Braun, and Minister Louis Farrakhan and other several African American political leaders visited Nigeria during his regime (Albert, 2010).

In this regard, attention is drawn to the strategies adopted by General Sani Abacha to legitimize his reign both at home and abroad. These strategies were more of a display of personal aggrandizement of the leader than what could be considered as foreign policy objectives as conceived since Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa period. According to Dadzie (1999), Abacha's ascension to power was misunderstood by the west who embarked on a hostile mission against the government. The nationalistic determination of the government to remove Nigeria from the shackles of western imperialism also worsened relations with western powers who had become used to Nigeria serving their selfish interest. Their reluctance to accept the reality of the day

made Abacha to shift his attention to Asia. This move brought Nigeria into closer relations with China, North Korea, Turkey, Libya and Iraq. Abacha perceived western hostility as an affront and he shifted Nigeria's foreign policy in response to the demand of the time. Nigeria had been suspended from the Commonwealth of Nations where diplomatic ripples had been on since November 1995, when Ken Saro Wiwa and 8 others Ogoni kinsmen were hanged after international plea for clemency was turned down by Abacha. This was one occasion where he portrayed an adamant attitude.

The Arrest of Abiola

Perhaps the first major domestic action by which the regime drew serious international criticism was the arrest and detention of Abiola. Abiola was the undeclared winner of the presidential election of June 12, 1993, an election annulled by the then military Head of State, General Ibrahim Babangida and whose consequences brought Abacha himself

to power. He won the election as the presidential candidate of the Social Democratic Party (SDP), which was organised to ease the military out of governance and restore democracy after ten years of military dictatorship. Even though the election proceeded peacefully, the results from several states had already been released when the announcement was suspended midway without explanation, and the entire election later voided by the Babangida regime who gave unconvincing reasons for doing so. The unilateral abortion of an election adjudged the most peaceful, orderly, and fairest in the nation's political history angered the generality of Nigerians who were already tired of the military's authoritarian excesses (Jackson, 2007:590). Protests broke out all over the country against the Interim National Government headed by Shonekan that Babangida established to replace him. Notable Nigerians, pro-democracy and human rights advocates openly canvassed for

General Abacha to help remove the illegal Interim National Government because it was not the democratic government that millions of Nigerians had voted for on June 12, 1993 (Kasali, 2007:129). The outcomes of the violence, riots and strike eventually led to the ouster of that illegitimate government headed by Shonekan by Abacha. Abacha came to power on 17th November 1993 on a promise that his stay in power would be brief. Rumours were rife that Abiola was probably privy to Abacha's take-over, especially with some of his loyalists joining the new junta as ministers such as Kingibe, Babatope, and Jakande (Fawole, 2004:25).

It was also conjectured erroneously that Abacha would only stay a short while in office and then hand over to the acclaimed winner of the annulled presidential election. Having waited in vain for the military authorities to re-validate his electoral mandate as he had been promised at the inception of the Abacha regime, Chief Abiola

at a public ceremony on June 11, 1994, proclaimed himself president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and subsequently went underground for a few days (Kolawole, 2005:875). At the public declaration in Epetedo area of Lagos, Abiola confessed to his exasperation after waiting for months for those who had stolen the popular mandate to relinquish it. Appeals to their honours as officers and gentlemen of the gallant Nigerian armed forces have fallen on deaf ears. Instead, they have resorted to the tactics of divide and rule, bribery and political perfidy, disinformation and vile propaganda. He was thus eventually arrested, charged for treason and detained. In weeks and months that followed, Nigeria literally ground to a halt by violent demonstration, nation-wide strikes by workers in the petroleum, banking, education and transportation sectors.

While the business of government and the economy were at a standstill, the regime unleashed a reign of terror of almost

unprecedented scale on the populace. The arrest and detention of the politician, admittedly a domestic exercise of authority, instantly elicited unfavourable reactions from the international community that had earlier on frowned at the scuttling of Nigeria's democratisation process (Kolawole, 2005:874). The news of the inhuman treatment being deliberately meted out to Chief Abiola, and in clear violation of his right to decent and humane treatment in detention, did further damage the junta's image and correctly portrayed it as a gross abuser of human rights. The international scepticism that greeted Abacha on coming to power was therefore further reinforced by this ugly episode.

The Mismanaged Coup Accusation

While the regime's mismanagement of the diplomatic fall-outs of Abiola's detention persisted, the world was stunned early in March 1995 by the announcement of the detection of a coup plot to overthrow General

Abacha. The regime accused the former Head of State, General Olusegun Obasanjo and his deputy, General Shehu Musa Yar`Adua, as well as a host of other military officers, civilian activists and journalists (Kraxberger, 2004:416). The accusation against Obasanjo and Yar`Adua were quite easy to fathom. It will be recalled that General Obasanjo relentlessly campaigned against Babangida`s political, economic and social engineering. His boldness and trenchant criticisms of the previous regimes obviously made General Abacha uncomfortable. He was a presidential contender during Babangida`s unfinished transition process. He still nursed the same ambitions under Abacha and, as a result, effectively used the platform of Abacha`s own National Constitutional Conference to campaign for the early exit of the junta (Kraxberger, 2004:417). His ambition to become Nigeria`s democratically elected president obviously clashed with General Abacha`s own designs for a longer stay in

power, and this marked him as an obstacle that had to be removed. Initially there was widespread disbelief of the coup story. Several officers, including the two retired Generals, and a host of civilian activists and radical journalist, were arrested and detained (Meierding, 2010:27). No matter how much the regime tried to convince Nigerians about the reliability of the coup story, the general scepticism was further compounded by the secret trail before a military tribunal to prompt confession and to implicate Obasanjo, Yar`Adua and others. General Obasanjo later claimed that the conviction of the accused coup plotters was actually dictated by Abacha and “he was parcelled out like wrapped presents on July 14, 1995 to some Citizens of this country who were seen as vocally too dangerous or uncompromising for the comfort of a deceitful, godless, corrupt, soul-less, oppressive, murderous, obstinate and wicked regime” (Kraxberger, 2004:425). The arrest, trial and sentencing of

mostly democracy activists and radical journalists on ludicrous trumped up charges of being “accessories after the fact” of coup making, succeeded in damaging the regime’s fragile credibility at home and abroad (Fawole, 2004:21). The stories of the way the trial was conducted indicated that the charade was designed to put the junta’s opponents out of circulation. Obasanjo remarks further that

The whole exercise was a charade and a cover-up to arrive at predetermined objective of eliminating and silencing those who refused to be compromised. It was the most iniquitous political Act by any government since Nigeria’s independence (Kraxberger, 2004:425).

The absurdity of the entire farce did not escape the attention of the international community, which pleaded with the Dictator for Clemency, a plea he reluctantly yielded to by commuting the sentences of death to long years of imprisonment (Fawole, 2004:22). With the stage-managed conviction of General Obasanjo, a widely respected international statesman, and his former deputy, Yar`Adua, as well as several

civilians, the junta had, at least, succeeded in putting its most vociferous critics out of circulation. It used that to send a powerful message that no one was sacrosanct and that he was ready to deal mercilessly and perhaps illegally with anyone trying to castigate the regime. Nonetheless, the framing, arrest and conviction of the alleged plotters of the phantom coup, created a bad image for the regime which, almost two years into its existence, was yet to establish even a modicum of credibility at home and abroad (Nwanolue and Iwuoha, 2012:79).

Condemnations poured in from world leaders and international organisations. In swift reaction, the Washington-based African-American lobby group, Trans Africa, sent an open letter signed by 56 prominent African-American leaders-Congressmen, Mayors, political activists, entertainers, etc-urging Abacha to “expedite restoration of democracy to Nigeria’s 100 million people”

because “to do less will result in incalculable damage to Africa’s most populous nation and lead to the eventual global economic and political isolation” of the country (Fawole, 2004:23). Even FIFA, the world soccer governing body, had to hurriedly cancel the 8th World Youth Football Championship scheduled for Nigeria in 1995 on the grounds of political instability in the country and the concomitant security problems (Nwoke, 1996:125). Nigeria had thus begun its inexorable descent from being the formidable African giant of the 1970s and 1980s to a mere pariah in the mid-1990s. The country was yet to emerge from that when the story of another imaginary coup allegedly involving Abacha’s deputy, General Oladipo Diya, was broken by the regime. This further compounded the isolation of the regime and robbed it of the much-needed sympathy of the global community.

Abacha foreign Policy

Abacha devised all methods to ensure that international outburst did not affect the disintegration of Nigeria. Besides, all international issues that borders on security was the main foreign policy focus of the regime. In his lecture at Nigerian Institute of International Affairs in Lagos in 1996, he responded to the way some security threats have been removed from international system through the signing in August 1996 of a Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). He opined,

It is an historic event which brought an end to further qualitative improvement of nuclear weapons. Negotiations for this treaty had been a priority item on the disarmament agenda of the United Nations for several decades. Its adoption therefore marks a significant reduction in the overall level of threats posed by weapons of mass destruction. It is in our view that the most remarkable achievement in recent times in the efforts to rid the world of scourge of nuclear armament (Abacha, 1996).

Abacha also responded to the way in which Pelindaba Treaty was signed in Cairo in April

1996 to make Africa a nuclear weapons free zone. This treaty, apart from being a collateral disarmament measure, also represents an important contribution to confidence building in Africa. It complements the principled position which Africans have consistently pursued in the interest of peace, stability and security in Africa and the world at large. Abacha in his lecture said,

Let me seize this opportunity therefore to commend those nuclear weapon states which have signed the protocol to do so without further delay in order that the full objectives of this treaty would be realised. The threat to global peace and security does not only derive from existence of nuclear weapons in the hands of the world dominant powers. Since the end of the cold war, many nations of the world have been preoccupied with the struggle to contain the forces of fragmentation and micro-nationalism. Indeed, some political units have already fragmented while others are threatened by instability and possible disintegration. Unfortunately, our continent, Africa has not been immune from this precarious situation. In Nigeria, our efforts have been to resist these forces in order to ensure that our country, the most populous black nation on earth, remains strong, united and indivisible (Abacha, 1996).

The quote signifies that Abacha was mindful of the fact that Nigerian security was being threatened from outside. In order to prevent such spillover, he therefore recognised the Pelindaba Treaty as one of the numerous ways to curb inflow of nuclear weapons into Africa and to destroy the existing ones. This may sound moralistic from a regime that was bent on dealing militarily with anyone who went against his regime overtly or covertly. Nevertheless, Abacha realised that it was of importance to attend and yield to issues that might affect the territorial integrity of Nigeria.

Therefore, it was the national interest that propelled the regime to intervene in regional conflicts, most notably in Liberia and Sierra Leone. One would have expected that a regime with pariah status in international system should maintain its isolationist stance in such case. The need to keep the regional peace and stability at all

cost impelled the regime to intervene either overtly or covertly in regional conflict. The more reason for such intervention was to ensure that the spillover effects of the conflict could be sustained given the presence of internal political imbroglio in Nigeria (Abubakar, 2009:179). Thus, the Abacha regime was of the conviction that the refugee exodus from such warring states might complicate more the tension in the domestic political landscape. Equally, the intervention, according some scholars, was to prevent the existence of foreign troops which included national armies and mercenaries from the region (Albert, 2007:168; Ali, 2009:22). Because of the paranoid nature of the regime, Abacha was very keen at keeping all foreign elements at bay both from Nigeria and from West African sub region. It needs to be recalled that the regime had been declared pariah, with various countries severed bilateral and multilateral relations with it. But such pariah status was not effective when

Nigeria entered Sierra Leone and Liberia to enforce peace and stability through ECOMOG force (Inamete, 2001:120). One would have expected that the international actors responded to halt the intervention of Nigeria in such instance. But because of the nature of international political system, which does not always respond swiftly to African issue, Nigerian intervention in that wise was seen as welcoming, not only in Africa but also in the global space. Such conclusion was buttressed by the alliance of UN and ECOMOG forces under the leadership of Nigeria in Mano River region. This is buttressed by Prof. Munzali Jibrin, Secretary General of Nigerian University Commission, 1996 to 2001,

Africa has the bad reputation of being neglected by international partners during conflicts and war. The time Africa needed international intervention in Burundi and Rwanda was not forthcoming and also in places like Chad, Sudan, Central African Republic and many more. So, intervention of Nigeria in both Liberia and Sierra Leone would definitely be implicitly welcomed by the West as they did not have total commitment to maintaining peace and order in the region. One

may therefore see Nigeria's intervention as welcoming in this regard. Abacha spent heavily on this and according to an estimate, Nigeria lost 1,000 soldiers and spent over \$1 billion in Liberia and Sierra Leone (Interview, November 29, 2015).

Thus, if Nigeria did not swiftly prevent the seeming political imbroglio in Sierra Leone, such might have degenerated to genocidal war as it happened in Rwanda and Burundi. The lesson of slow response to the Somalia and Rwanda wars from the international community compelled Abacha regime to respond immediately to the regional conflict in order to prevent spillover effect (Laro, 2002). It thus safe to say that the stability in the region, prevention of refugee exodus from conflicts, and keeping foreign troops out of the region could adequately serve as national interest of Nigeria to intervene in regional conflicts under Abacha regime.

Abacha Regime and West Africa

The Nigerian foreign policy formulation towards the West African states has its political precedence. This is most especially

true during the Nigerian civil war, 1967-1970. Such war has assisted keen observers of Nigerian foreign policy to discern the constituents of national interest in the intervention and interference in the West African states affairs. The lesson of the civil war of 1967 to 1970, where apartheid regimes in Southern Africa supported the dismembering of Nigeria, prompted the Head of State at the time, General Gowon, to realize the danger inherent in all these regimes in the southern part of Africa. He also initiated the policy of good neighbourliness especially towards the immediate neighbours like Chad, Niger, Benin, Cameroon, Sao Tome and Principe and Equatorial Guinea (Adebajo, 2002:23). It must be remembered that during the Nigerian civil war, some of these neighbouring countries acted as a transit point for smuggling ammunitions into the war front against the federal government. For example, France used Benin and Togo territories as a

transit point for ammunition in order to help the Biafran secessionists. Only Cameroon, as Nigeria's immediate neighbor, did not allow its territory to be used by the external powers (Oladimeji and Kirmanj, 2015:689).

After the war, therefore, these neighbours were considered by Gowon as constituting an important element in safeguarding Nigeria's territorial integrity. In stimulating the confidence of its neighbours, Nigeria under Gowon entered into bilateral agreements with some neighbouring countries. In 1973, for example, Nigeria-Benin and Nigeria-Niger joint commission were established (Okon, 1978:56). Border patrol mechanism was also instituted with close neighbours to ensure that no external forces, militants, and rebels are allowed into the country. It should also be noted that it was in the spirit of national interest that Gowon called for the establishment of a regional economic group in 1968. But because of the ongoing civil war in Nigeria, the community

became a farce. It was the conviction of Gowon that if the community could be established it would serve Nigerian interests. One, Nigeria is the largest market in the region and by this Nigeria stands a better chance of sourcing for markets for its industries in the region. The community would also act as a check on the external powers' relation, especially France, in the region. With the diplomatic efforts of Gowon and Eyadema of Togo, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was founded in 1975 (Oladimeji and Kirmanj, 2015:689). The narratives therefore suggest that the interests of Nigeria are intertwined with that of West African states of which Nigeria is a hegemony. As the Nigerian civil war experience has shown, Abacha regime was also trying to ensure that no external powers used the region to launch attack on the regime. It thus needs to be reiterated that Nigerian national interests concern in West Africa are four-fold under

Abacha regime. (1) Stability in the region and the promotion of greater regional cooperation; (2) Prevention of refugee exodus from conflicts; (3) Keeping foreign troops (national armies and mercenaries) out of the region; and (4) Developing markets for investments, goods, services and labour (Bobbyi, 2010:231). Looking at the four factors mentioned above, it is clear that they involve both political and economic dimensions to actualising Nigeria's national interest. The regime therefore was right to intervene in the region to stem the tides of war.

Research Findings

The purpose of this paper has been to investigate Nigerian foreign policy under General Abacha in relation to his leadership style and domestic polity. Mainly, the aim has been to explore the personality actor in the formulation of foreign policy and to discuss those interests that affected the outcome of Nigerian foreign policy under Abacha. Thus, the research has found that the unwillingness of Abacha regime to surrender power to the duly-elected president impinged

negatively on the regime posture in the international political arena. Again, the gross human rights violation against the Nine Ogonis and other Nigerians was the last straw that made the West to declare Nigeria as pariah state with its attendant implications.

Discussions of Research Findings

The Abacha regime displayed a typical example of foreign policy complications wherein it was difficult to isolate the interest of the regime from that of state. Abacha looted public treasury to satisfy his personal interest and sponsored state mission to various parts of the world for image laundering. The image crisis Nigeria suffered during Abacha impelled the regime to sponsor state missions to some parts of the world to convince the international community of the legitimacy of the regime at home. It was not the interest of Nigeria that was so paramount in the mind of the sponsor but that of the regime. After defied international plea to release MKO Abiola, the

winner of the June 12 Presidential Election, Abacha promised Nigerians that he would organise a transition programme. Such transition programme later revealed to be in the interest of the regime as Abacha wanted to contest for the post of President. Such personal interest forced the regime to loot the state treasury to appeal to some internal and external parties to actualise its ambition. As mentioned earlier, it was in an attempt to satisfy and convince the West of its transition programme that made the regime organised international tours. When Abacha discovered that the West did not yield to its campaign he turned to the East and some other African countries to promote its regime.

It needs to be addressed here that the West did not oppose the candidature of Abacha as one of the contestants for the presidential position, but it was the high-handedness of the regime coupled with continuous incarceration of the winner of June 12 General election as well as extra-

judicial killings and incarcerations of innocent Nigerians that made the West declared the regime as pariah. In such an instance, Abacha turned to countries like Iraq, South Korea, Malaysia, China, Russia, Iran etc to bolster the image of the regime within the international system. In addition, Abacha also befriended some individuals in the U.S., UK and other western countries to bolster the image of regime in its bid to transmute to democratic government. Abacha's regime was an enigma as he continually kept changing its promise to Nigerians which eventually led to internal turmoil and instability.

Recommendations

Foreign policy is not all about personal aggrandisement and showcase of might alone. The country is expected to devise other means of dealing with external pressures, which will be in consonance with the goals and objectives of its national interest. Again, foreign policy is a response of state towards

external environment which of necessity needs to take into cognizance the domestic and external imperatives. The Nigeria's foreign policy under Abacha failed to give proper attention to the needs and aspirations of Nigerians. Many Nigerians were denied visa and entry to some western countries as a result of Nigeria's pariah status and such policy standing resulted in loss of business and trade activities by Nigerians. Commercial activities were almost paralysed internally as a result of constant institutionalisation of state of emergency by the regime. All these scenarios should have been avoided by the regime. The priority of state's foreign policy is to advance the interests of the citizens and not otherwise.

Conclusion

Nigeria under Abacha experienced the worst governance ever existed in the history of Nigeria. In this case, the poor governance at domestic level as rendered the domestic structure inept. Foreign Affairs Ministry,

Nigerian Institute of International Affairs and Nigerian Institute of Policy and Strategic Studies which are responsible for the upward formulation and execution of the country's foreign policy were grounded to a halt. Most of these foreign policy apparatuses did not have life of their own and most of their policies conformed to the dictates of Abacha regime. In this manner, foreign policy direction reflected the domestic governance under Abacha regime. In addition, dictatorship and gross human rights abuses was the primary cause of the poor image of Nigeria within the international system during this period. Such can be linked to the execution of Ogoni activists who demanded for fair use of their land for the purpose of preventing collateral damage to the environment. Abacha was intransigent to the global plead and went ahead to execute nine of them popularly called "Ogoni Nine". It was this domestic execution that alerted the international community to the atrocities

being perpetrated by Abacha against Nigerians. The response of the international community was the withdrawal of Nigeria's membership from the Commonwealth. The situation led to drastic political and economic move from countries like Canada, South Africa and New Zealand. It needs to be stated here that the response of Abacha to domestic and international issues were a product of its intention to perpetuate his rule in Nigeria. He was intransigent about international sanction and domestic outcry. Abacha shunned international criticism and ignored the need to release the acclaimed winner of June 12, 1993 election. All these domestic troubles made formulation of foreign policy deficient as some countries reluctantly related to Nigeria. Abacha refused to travel out of the country and unwilling to attend any meeting of international organisation. This he did in order to avoid any criticism from external environment. Notwithstanding his negative

traits in the understanding of Nigerian foreign policy,

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