

## **An Assessment of Nigeria's Foreign Policy Under Muhammadu Buhari (2015-2019)**

**<sup>1</sup>Oni, Kayode Julius, Ph.D.**

<sup>1</sup>Department of Political Science, Nigeria Police Academy, Wudil, Kano, Nigeria.  
Email: [kayodeoni22@gmail.com](mailto:kayodeoni22@gmail.com)

### **Abstract**

Undoubtedly, a country's foreign policy is generally influenced by both the internal and external environment. It goes to say that fundamentally, the conduct of Nigeria's external relations has never been free from the domestic circumstances. The many but varied constituents of economy, pressure group, political system, public opinion among others exert pressure on foreign policy decision making. The Nigerian internal environment has been fraught with series of challenges which have had consequences on the conduct of her external relations and her image to the rest of the world. Based on this premise, this study, through analytical method, assessed Nigeria's foreign policy from 2015 to 2019. The study found out that in the fight against graft, the Buhari's administration solicited for the supports of some big powers and successfully prosecuted a number of public office holders. It however contends that the economic policies introduced yielded little dividends whilst the signals coming from internal security are still in the negative as maiming, killings and destruction of public property are still the order of the day. It recommends that government should address the comatose economy

**Keywords:** Environment, Foreign Policy, Internal, Leadership, National Interest and Personality.

### **Introduction**

In a world that is essentially interdependent, foreign policy is essentially a strong weapon for relating with other nations of the world with the aim of making gains, and, of course, it can be used to create enemies. In other words, foreign policy is usually carefully designed to promote, protect, secure and of course defend a nation's vital interests such as the preservation of national sovereignty, the defence of territorial integrity, promotion of economic, military and other strategic interests. These are factors that are pivotal to foreign policy decision making.

Foreign policy is a nation's reaction to the external environment involving the re organization of both domestic and external relations (Nnoli, 1986). The stability at home, the viability of the economy, social cohesion and the people are some of the indices in the domestic domain that determine the gain that can be achieved in external relations.

Yet conducting the complex business of foreign policy objectives has always been the responsibility of a country's leadership. As the orchestrator of policy, the leadership gives

direction to foreign policy and evaluates its priorities. Thus when Buhari assumed leadership of Nigeria in 2015, the economy was still in floundering shape, the security architecture of the state was decimated especially in the northeast as a result of the deadly activities of Boko Haram, corruption had permeated all spheres of the country's sectors, and youth restiveness was the order of the day as across the country due to joblessness. The government was therefore confronted with the challenge of resuscitating the economy, fighting corruption and ending Boko Haram through the instrumentality of a focused external relations. The continued comatose economy, the sharp practices ravaging the conduct of government business and the pervasive sporadic attacks by the Boko Haram in the northeast despite the Buhari's administration to sanitize the society motivated this study.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical perspective of this study is premised on the decision-making approach. The choice is informed by the fact that actions taken by decision makers are informed by multiplicity of interactions that are targeted at the external environment. The approach is leveraged on the notion that a political action is better understood by studying the position of political actors. In policy making including foreign policy, decision has to be taken and there are usually alternatives from which a choice has to be made.

The decision-making approach was pioneered by Richard C. Snyder and his colleagues after the Second World War. They maintained that decision making lies at the heart of all political actions and therefore it alone provides the common focus under which they can bring together the political actors, situations and processes for the purpose of analysis. Aside from the application of decision making process to political leaders, the approach was equally relevant for analysing decision making behaviour of judges, regulatory agencies, legislative processes and individual decision makers (cited in Varma, 2000).

The approach has been criticized for requiring an analyst to take cognizance of too many factors and for attributing too much rationality to the process of decision making by assuming that officials carefully consider the pros and cons before arriving at any particular decision. Again, in developing countries including Nigeria, information collection mechanisms are not only weak but haphazardly institutionalized. Having easy access to relevant information is therefore difficult. Most of the institutions vested with information gathering power and responsibility are either rare or totally absent (Dauda, 2002). Yet the model is particularly relevant in the fact that only a few, an elite group, make decisions for all. We argue that, the few decision makers are well informed, articulate and well equipped with the necessary skills and training to enhance foreign policy decision making. This is particularly so in Nigeria where majority of the people are more concerned about issues of domestic concern and less about matters outside their territories.

## **The Domestic Environment**

Undoubtedly, the multiplicity or multi-dimension of circumstances of a given nation are predictably the decisive factors that configure its foreign policy. Scholars generally agreed that the domestic environment has profound impact on the making of foreign policy. According to Nunn (1965, p.249);

Every nation's foreign policy, in both formulation and execution, is affected and moulded by certain basic factors, which are peculiar to that nation's unique circumstances. And such factors affect its outlook on the external world defines policy issues and priorities, determines the choices open to policy makers, otherwise influence the decision they make.

Foreign policy decision makers operate in the domestic environment to impact on the external environment. How a country conducts its affairs, engage in any dialogue with the outside world, is a function of the internal situation.

It is important to note that the operational milieu in which foreign policy is conducted and become operative and indeed active is crucial to a systematic foreign policy decision making. The profundity of the domestic environment was clearly captured by Northedge (1968, p.210) as he encapsulated that:

Restricted by pressures originating within the country, the internal political situations with due allowance for variations from one country to another will determine how forceful a government can play its diplomatic hand, what it cannot do for fear of losing support at home. What it must do or try to do if it is to hold its own against the opposition if under attack from its own supporter, the temper of domestic public opinion, the pattern of organized pressure groups, acting as lobbies, the organs for articulating and shaping opinion foreign affairs

Needless to, therefore, state categorically that the foreign policy protuberance of a state is influenced by the many and varied elements in the domestic domain.

### **Thrusts of Buhari's Foreign Policy, (2015-2019) Nigerian Foreign Policy Objectives.**

No matter the size or the state of the economy, every country has a set of foreign policy objectives to achieve. These are what policy makers intend to actualize by influencing the behaviour of other state and non-state actors. The 1999 constitution from which the Buhari's administration drew its strength contains in Section 19, Foreign Policy Objective and Directive Principles of Foreign Policy whose provisions invariably fall within the well-known goals which had always underpinned Nigeria's foreign policy. These are:

- i) Promotion and protection of national interest;
- ii) Promotion of African integration and support for African unity;

- iii) Promotion of international cooperation for the consolidation of universal peace and mutual respect among all nations; and elimination of racism in all its ramifications;
- iv) Respect for international law and treaty obligations as well as the seeking of settlement of international disputes by negotiation, mediation, conciliation, arbitration and adjudication;
- v) Promotion of a just economic order (cited in Agbu, 2001, p.247)

It is pertinent to quickly understand that in spite of the changes in leadership styles, the fundamental substance of the Nigerian policy has remained consistent. “in spite of the change of capability, personnel and orientation as well as variations in style and tempo, evidence suggests greater continuity than discontinuity” (Otubanjo, 1989, p.9).

### **Buhari's Foreign Policy Actions**

After several previous failed attempts, Muhammadu Buhari won the presidential election which was conducted on March 28, 2015. He roundly defeated former President Goodluck Jonathan. The major factors that engendered the performance and, to that extent, the success of President Muhammadu Buhari at the 2015 general elections included; failure of the Jonathan's administration to deal decisively with the security challenges particularly the insurgents in the north east, the pervasive corruption across the country; poor economy. Consequently, President Buhari had hinged his campaign promises on combating terrorism, fighting corruption and improving on the dwindling economy.

On assumption of office, President Buhari embarked on shuttle diplomacy to the Nigeria's West Africa immediate neighbours. The visits were meant to open channels on how to combat the menace of Boko Haram whose activities had damaged the image of Nigeria in the community of nations. For instance, “Boko Haram have abducted more than 500 men, women and children including the kidnapping of 276 school girls from Chibok in April 2014; 650,000 people had fled the conflict zone by August 2014” (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boko\_Haram).

**Table 1. Terrorists' Attacks Attributed to Boko Haram 2009-2014**

Bombings	Bombing Casualties	Armed Assaults	Casualties
4	7	14	219
11	127	35	107
74	587	89	258
384	764	103	376
564	975	167	876

Source: Institute of the Study of Violent Groups (2014)

The wanton killings and destruction of properties by the sect as shown in Table 1 has had grave consequences on the living conditions of the people in the northeast and in general the bombings, killings have worsened the image and economic condition in the country. It

not only created atmosphere of fear but despair. Added to this was the fact that the scare resources that ought to have been used to build schools, provide other basic infrastructure for the wellbeing of the people by the government are spent on providing internal security. In point of fact the atmosphere of violence in the northeast created serious gap in the economy as people fled their ancestral homes.

Given the atmosphere of despondency, fear, terror that pervaded the country particularly in the north east occasioned by the deadly activities of Boko Haram, it is imperative that an understanding of the domestic domain is critical to the conduct of meaningful and purposeful foreign policy. The Anti-Boko Haram summit initiated by President Buhari aimed at providing a platform for discussing the regional offensive against the insurgency helped to decimate the group.

The war against Boko Haram had some measures of success under Buhari as the areas captured by the sect during the Jonathan's administration were reclaimed by the Nigerian army in the north east. According to the Commander in charge of operation, General Lucky Irabor, "we have made significant progress in this war, Boko Haram terrorists no longer have the capacity to wage their terror attacks. What you now find is that they are running from one remote location to the other, looking for safety". We note that the decimation of the sect by the military was able to stabilize the northeast to some extent. By extension this has had the consequence of sending correct signal to the outside world about the commitment of the Buhari's administration in ending insurgency in Nigeria.

### **Anti-Corruption war**

The inauguration of a democratically elected government in 1999 heralded new hopes and of course a new dawn. However, several years after its inauguration, not much has been achieved in terms of sanitizing the corrupt nation state.

One of the goals central to Buhari's administration was to confront corruption to a standstill. The phenomenon of corruption had become so endemic that it had become more or less the norm in the country. "The masses do not help the situation in that they themselves give bribes and encourage government officials and security officials to steal and loot the treasury and go freely around the society (<http://www.vanguardngr.com/2014>). There were allegations that the administration of Goodluck Jonathan gave cover to corrupt public officials. On the 19th of December, 2013 the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Hon. Aminu Tambuwal accused the President of using deceptive language in fighting corruption in Nigeria' (Ihuoma, 2013). Buhari's administration inherited a corrupt domestic environment when he assumed office in 2015. Poised to end corruption, anti-corruption war remained one of his top priority. Needless to restate that corruption can damage the image of a country among the community of nations.

The achievement of foreign policy goal by any government in a democracy can be leveraged on creating a congenial domestic environment. In point of fact, providing the necessary foreign policy infrastructure, namely; good roads, modern railway system,

building schools, pipe borne water and a host of others is sine qua non to creating a vibrant internal environment (Oni, 2011). Provision of infrastructure albeit good, yet, we cannot isolate this for discussion even when we know that in Nigeria, provision of basic infrastructure is a challenge.

Aside the issue of infrastructure, the nation's resources must be seen to be equitably distributed or allocated and judiciously utilized. It will be mere wishful thinking to perceive that people will be happy when government turns blind eyes on looting of state treasuries by public officials. Perceptions about Nigeria by her allies, friends or foes in the global arena, can only be in the positive when appropriate measures are freely taken by the government to instil discipline, fight corruption and reclaim ill-gotten wealth.

Since the election of President Mohammadu Buhari in April 2015, fighting corruption has been his focus to reshape and re-define perception of Nigeria by the outside world. In truth, there were widespread allegations of selective prosecution of corrupt officials, yet, we observe that the administration of Mohammadu Buhari has demonstrated some reasonable modicum of sincerity in the war against graft and by extension improving the image of Nigeria. After all, foreign policy is about the way a country is perceived (image) in the international system with its attendant honour, prestige and respect. According to Saliu (2006, p.197) "attendant upon the configuration of power in the international system, the way a state is perceived to some extent determines the leverage it enjoys". Evidence abounds to show the support Nigeria has enjoyed since 2015 when Buhari assumed office.

- i. The United State of America Secretary of state, John Kerry at the World Economic Forum held at Doros in Switzerland extolled Buhari's graft war.
- ii. In October 2015, the United Kingdom pledge her support for Buhari's anti corruption war. According to Grant Shapps, the Minister for International Development, "UK is fully committed to helping Nigeria to increase its security, stability and prosperity" we would continue to provide capacity building, technical and investigative support to tackle corruption.
- iii. Under Buhari, Chief Justice of the Nigerian court, Walter Onnoghen was convicted by the code of Conduct Tribunal on April 18, 2019 for false assets declaration.
- iv. In May 2018, the Nigeria Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) announced that 603 Nigerian figures had been convicted on corruption charges since Buhari took office in 2015
- v. In Dec, 2019, Mohammed Adoke, a former Attorney General and Minister of Justice under Goodluck Jonathan who was accused of being bribed to grant oil licenses to Shell, was extradited back to Nigeria from Dubai and was immediately arrested. (<https://en.m.wikipedia.org> ).

Furthermore, quite a large number of retired military officers, public officials and politically exposed persons (PEP) with allegations of corruption hanging around them that

served in the previous administration are either in detention or helping anti-graft agencies in their investigations.

**Table 2: List of PEP in the EFCC detention or helping in investigation.**

Names	Case Status	Remarks
i. Col. Sambo Dasuki Former Sec. Adviser	Charged for alleged diversion of \$2.1 billion budget for arms	Investigation on going
ii. Olisa Metuh, Nat. Publicity Sec. PDP	Charged for corruption, breach of trust, diversion of Public Fund	Convicted
iii. Col. O. Adegbe, Former ADC to Ex-President Jonathan	Alleged disbursed ₦10b oil proceeds to PDP convention delegates, collected \$47m and some euros from the office of NSA	Granted bail
Peter Odili, Former Governor of River State	Alleged received ₦100m from money budgeted for arms	On EFCC is radar
Tanko Yakassai, PDP chieftain	Alleged pocked ₦63m for campaign pupose	On EFCC's radar
Farouk Lawan, Former member of the House of Rep.	For alleged bribery in oil subsidy scam	On trial
Senator Ahmad Sani, Former Governor, Zamfara State	Alleged gross mismanagement of funds during his tenure as governor	On trial
Abdurasheed Maina, Former Chairman of Pension Reform Task Force	Allegation of Police pension scam	On trial
Joshua Dariye, Former Governor of Plateau State	Misappropriation of ₦1.6billion	Jailed
Jolly Nyameh Former Governor of Taraba State	Diversion of public funds	Convicted

Source: *The Economy*, March 2016

Aside prosecution of corrupt public officials, the administration of Mohammodu Buhari left no one in doubt of his administration's commitment to anti-graft war. Unlike his predecessors, he declared his assets and liabilities. According to him 'I pledge to publicly declare my assets and liabilities, encourage all my appointees to publicly declare their assets and liabilities as a pre-condition for appointment'

Quite cardinally, Buhari used the war against graft to advance the course of the nation in the comity of nations. As a major plank of his administration, he used it to re-shape and re-define the perception of the rest of the world about Nigeria and Nigerians. This brings us to the economic perceptive of the foreign policy of Buhari administration.

### **The Economy**

In contemporary times, in the international system, economic factor is essentially key in determining the direction of external relations. "Economic interests, the struggle for resources, have now become the principal agent for the foreign policies of nations" (Aminu, 2005, p.57). The Nigerian state, a mono cultural economy which is highly dependent on oil revenue has not been free from economic crisis and other domestic challenges since the return of democratic governance in 1999. This was what perhaps

informed the view of former President Goodluck Jonathan as acknowledged by Ani (2014, p.21) that:

In the era of globalization, at a time of grave challenges, to national and international security, such as we face from terrorism and transnational criminal networks, at a time of poverty and youth restiveness in our country, we have no choice but to adjust and adapt the way we conduct foreign policy, as we respond to the forces of globalization at the service of our domestic priorities.

In spite of the transformation agenda of the administration, the country's Foreign Direct investments (FDI), development of non-oil sectors, industrialization was still low and poor. We clearly note that Nigeria's domestic political, security and economic realities as well as those of the international scene more than anything have dictated the thrust and contents of the country's foreign policy in the period under study. The president embarked on diplomatic shuttle not only to launder the image of Nigeria but to a reasonable degree, diversify the country's foreign revenue sources. The visits were particularly meant to attract foreign investors, particularly in the non-oil sector and other international business/development partners to do business in the country.

It is important to note that, Buhari visited China to solidify trade and economic and diplomatic relations with that country. Consequently, an agreement was signed to enhance development of infrastructure and industrial activities in Nigeria, between China and Nigeria on Technical and Scientific cooperation. The visit was not without its own benefits or gains. China granted a loan to Nigeria to finance the 2016 budget deficit and other infrastructural development plans (Bello *et al*, 2017).

### **Foreign Policy Actions of the Buhari's administration (2015-2019): The Challenges**

There is general agreement that foreign policy decision makers operate in the domestic environment to impact on the international environment. The notion of the understanding of the operational milieu in which foreign policy is conducted and become operative has had tremendous influence in the policy actions of the administration. After all, "foreign policy is but an extension of domestic policy" (Osuntokun, 1996). The administration's promise to improve the nation's economy yielded little improvement. For instance, strategic measures put in place to use foreign policy to aid re-directing foreign capital inflows towards industrialization, yielded little result as investment was still in the direction of oil and gas. "The non-oil sector has the potential or capacity to provide food for human population, source of raw materials for industries (Olayugbo & Olayemi, 2018). In our estimation, aside from promoting national cohesion and national security, creation of a happy and society full of economic opportunities should be the goal of the nation's interests. The question that is begging for answer is: can Nigerians be said to be happy? A happy people is a source of support to the state. The growing or rising youth joblessness is



attributable to the economic crisis in the country. Government economic policies have failed to resolve the economic contradictions. “His economic policies did not earn him the legitimacy of the masses due to the rise in inflation and depreciation of the purchasing power of the people’ (<https://en.m.wikipedia.org>). This has had negative impact on Nigeria’s international relations.

In our estimation, the signals coming from internal security are still worrisome. Undoubtedly the Buhari administration, more than the predecessor, strengthened the resolve to end insurgency in the north east. However, the menace of Boko Haram is still devastating. As the head of the Nigeria office of Germany’s Konard Adenauer foundation, Hildegard Belrendt Kigozi puts it ‘despite the progress under Buhari to fight insurgency, there are still attacks on an almost daily basis and regular bombings’. We observe that a nation that is not internally secure cannot attract foreign investors. And again it cannot be haven for tourists. In spite of the enormous resources wasted on fighting insurgency, and decimation of the group, they still maim, kill and destroy properties. No meaningful foreign policy can be conducted in an atmosphere of chaos. Consequently “Nigeria’s unhealthy domestic policy environment has narrowed down the menu of policy choices at the multilateral level (Idumanje, 2010).

While we agree that corruption is not peculiar to Nigeria, the fact remains that corruption has become a norm in the country. In spite of the arrests, detention and conviction of corrupt officials by the Buhari’s administration, the damaging effect of the cankerworm cannot be under estimated. The perception about Nigeria by foreigners is still that of corruption. Albeit, certain modicum of successes may have been made, yet the image of the country is still worrisome. “A filthy external image is, therefore, a negative incursion on development aspirations of any country including Nigeria’ (Saliu 2006, p.362). Foreign policy is about image, so the government has to do more. This is because “corruption acts as a disincentive for foreign investments” (Mcculley, 2011).

## **Conclusion**

The study illuminated the internal circumstances in the conduct of Nigeria’s foreign policy under the Buhari’s administration. The work shows the achievements of the administration in the domestic domain in terms of the fight against corruption, improved economy and war against insurgency. It further showed how those internal elements affected foreign policy outcome and the challenges that vitiated foreign policy in the period under review.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were suggested;

- i. A vibrant economy is kernel to the conduct of a purposeful foreign policy. Government needs to device strategic measures that would enhance foreign direct investments in the non-oil and gas industry. Added to this is the need to

- create a genial environment in terms of employment generation and building infrastructure.
- ii. Closely related to improved economy is the need to re-position the security architecture of the state in order to speedily end the activities of insurgency. This becomes necessary in order to enhance an atmosphere of geniality.
  - iii. The ill impacts of corruption are multi-dimensional. Therefore, there is need to strengthen existing institutions and block loopholes in order to free the country from shackles of corruption.
  - iv. Government needs to do more to brighten the image of the country. In other words, the management of the image of the country should be a source of concern to political authorities. Government should confront the issue of insecurity frontally to ensure peace not only in northeast but in the country. The way a state is perceived to a large extent influences the leverage it enjoys in the community of nations.

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