

The Impact of Nigeria's Foreign Policy Actions from 1999 – 2007

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Abstract

The study examined Nigeria's foreign policy actions from 1999–2007 and its impact on Nigerians. The paper argues that public policy is a veritable instrument that states can use to boost its economy and image at the local and global levels. The study adopted the institutional approach in explaining the subject-matter while the sources of data were based on secondary sources (textbooks, published articles, journals, materials from the internet etc.). Data from these sources were analysed descriptively through the qualitative method. Findings in the study show that the restoration of democracy in Nigeria accelerated the integration of Nigeria into the comity of nations at the regional and global level. Furthermore, the foreign tours embarked upon by the then president, Olusegun Obasanjo coupled with his leader to leader approach adopted to drive the government's foreign policy actions helped to increased Nigeria's volume of trade and foreign direct investment inflow into the country. However, for any public policy to make any meaningful impact on the people, political leaders and policy makers must be proactive and be willing to take practical steps to ensure the effective implementation of such public policies and programmes.

Keywords: *Impact, Nigeria's foreign policy actions, Public policy and Actions*

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Background to the Study

Prior to the enthronement of democracy in 1999 the political situation in Nigeria was unstable due to the actions and policies of leaders in the country. The administration of Sani Abacha for instance engaged in human right abuses and indiscriminate arrests and detention of citizens and perceived enemies of the government. The hanging of Ken Sarowija in 1995 by the Nigerian government further attracted international sanctions against Nigeria hence, the country witnessed policy inconsistency and political instability from 1990–1998. The situation degenerated when the election that was adjudged the fairest and freest was annulled by the Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida administration in June 12 1993. These and other policy actions affected Nigeria socially, economically and politically. The above situation changed on the 29th May 1999 when democracy was restored with the swearing in of Olusegun Aremu Obasanjo as president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. His foreign policy actions and measures taken to improve the socio-economic condition in Nigeria forms the major thrust of this paper.

Method and Scope of the Study

Nachmias and Nachmias (1985) see methodology as a system of unambiguous rules and procedures upon which the basis of an enquiry is formed and claimed knowledge evaluated. Methodology according Kaplan, cited in Obasi (1999) is to help in understanding in the broadest possible fashion both the products and the process of scientific investigation. The study adopted the descriptive method. Data for the study was sourced from secondary sources while analysis was done through content analysis. The focus of the paper is limited to the impact of Nigeria's foreign policy actions under the president Olusegun Obasanjo administration, 1999–2007.

Theoretical and Conceptual Analysis

The need for an analytical framework in an investigation was re-enforced by Lieber (1992) who argue that behind every concept or an analysis, there is a theory or view point, which makes it possible for the presentation and interpretation of facts. Therefore, for there to be reliability in an investigation, there is need to also come out with models, or the formulation of theories, for empirical theory seeks to create knowledge that is impersonal, retraceable and cumulative (Lieber, 1999:p.12). Thus, this paper adopted the systems theory in analysing the subject-matter. System scholars see the society as a complex set of systems and sub-systems existing and operating within a particular environment. They posited further that the systems theory deals with interdependence and inter-relationship among groups, organizations and individuals based on the input and output mechanism. Input in this context refer to contributions and demands made by individuals, groups etc. Output and feedback on the other hand, refer to responses and reactions from the political through a process known as the conversion box. The systems political theory therefore explains the various interactions that take place in the process of policy formulation and implementation in any given state or society. This theory is relevant in this study because the policy actions of former president Olusegun Obasanjo had positive impact on the Nigeria political environment within the period under review. This explained why systems scholars posited that input to a system can be stimulated internally or externally as reflected in the actions taken by the Obasanjo-led administration in 1999–2007. System scholars include: David Easton, John Locke, Almond and Verba etc.

Pre-1999 Political Situation in Nigeria

Several factors threatened peace and security in Nigeria prior to the enthronement of democracy in the country. Some of the factors include: The annulment of June 12th presidential elections which was adjudged to be the fairest and freest in the history of Nigeria, the trial, conviction and hanging of Ken Sarowiwa by a special military tribunal in 1995 increased the political tension in the country. The suspension of Nigeria from major regional and international organizations further worsened the political crises in the country. Thus, the search for new strategies to ensure peace, political stability and sustainable development continued even after the restoration of democracy on the 29th May 1999.

Socio-Economic Impact of Nigeria's Foreign Policy Actions from 1999–2007

This aspect of the study examined some of the policy actions of former president Olusegun Obasanjo taken between 1999 and 2007 and its impact on Nigeria's socio-economic development. Opinions of scholars and experts in the field of international relations were also examined and analysed in order to guide the study. While commenting on the International Court of Justice ruling of 10th October 2002, on the Nigeria – Cameroon border dispute, Koffi Annan, the then Secretary General of the United Nations commended Nigeria and Cameroon for using peaceful means to resolve their differences and appealed to the international community to provide support for both countries within the context of preventive diplomacy. In a congratulatory message sent to former President Olusegun Obasanjo, published in This Day Newspaper of February 2 2004 captioned “Nigeria, Cameroon consider non-aggression pact” the former UN Secretary General commended Nigeria for resorting to nonviolent measures in resolving the long standing dispute. Realizing the fact that a country's foreign policy is derived from its domestic policy, the administration of Olusegun Obasanjo started by carrying out internal domestic restructuring of Nigeria in line with the systems theory as applied in the study. The belief is that when the subsystem and institutions are effective, the whole system or society will function effectively hence, the government in year 2000 set up the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices and other related offences Commission (ICPC) which helped in the arrest and prosecution of corrupt citizens in the country. The government proceeded further to pursue an aggressive foreign policy under what was known as political economic diplomacy which was a major policy thrust of the administration. The policy entails:

- (a) Recovery of stolen funds
- (b) Campaign for debt forgiveness and
- (c) The attraction of direct foreign investment (DFI).

During the period, Nigeria participated actively in regional and international affairs hence in 2002, the Olusegun Obasanjo-led administration approved the participation of over 200 volunteers to some less developed countries in Africa, Caribbean and the Pacific as part of the 2002/2004 Technical Aid Corps (TAC) scheme. Practical steps taken by former president Olusegun Obasanjo to advance Nigeria's image and economy were his visit to Brazil in 1999 where the Nigeria – Brazil Joint Commission was established. This singular step led to the signing of several trade and cultural agreements between both countries. It will be recalled that Nigeria's foreign policy form 1999–2007 witnessed radical changes from the usual passive

conservative approach to a more radical and proactive foreign policy spear-headed by the president himself. Nigeria's foreign policy thrust from 1999 – 2007 was anchored on debt forgiveness and outright cancellation owed by poor African countries through a fair, equitable and just framework. Apart from advocacy, the foreign tours embarked upon by the then president through his leader to leader approach yielded several dividends as Nigeria was re-admitted into the comity of nations through the lifting of all sanctions earlier imposed on the country. The cancellation of Nigeria's foreign debt by the European Union (EU) and other international organizations coupled with the signing of several trade agreements no doubt helped to increased Nigeria's volume of trade within the period. The above achievements prompted Alade cited in Jibrin (2004) to state that president Obasanjo has come into the job with impressive if not intimidating credentials. This is as opposes to the limitations of the previous military leaders (Jibrin, 2004:p.134-139). While stating the foreign policy objectives of his administration, Olusegun Obsanjo stated clearly in his inaugural speech 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 (UN), African Union (AU) and other international bodies...”

Conclusion

The paper examined political events in Nigeria from 1999–2007 and observed that major changes and achievements were recorded in Nigeria's relations with other countries. Particularly, the paper revealed that Nigeria's foreign policy from 1999–2007 witnessed a dramatic change from a mere theoretically based foreign policy to a more dynamic one. The study derived its data from secondary sources while the methodology was based on the descriptive method. The systems political theory was adopted in order to critically explain the subject-matter while the analysis was done through the qualitative method.

In all, the study posits that public policy if well-conceived and implemented can be a tool for the development and advancement of any society. Furthermore, the study shows that it is not enough to formulate public polices, programmes and actions but rather leaders and policy makers are expected to design practical steps and implementation frameworks and standards as clearly demonstrated by Chief Olusegun Obasanjo in his leader to leader diplomacy approach.

Recommendations

The following recommendations will no doubt help to improve the policy formulation and implementation process in Nigeria and Africa:

1. Leaders in Nigeria and Africa should look beyond mere formulation of policies and programmes but rather practical steps should be designed or put in place to ensure the success of such policies, programmes and actions.
2. The leadership recruitment process should be made more open and transparent to ensure that only focussed and result oriented persons emerge as leaders and policy maker.
3. Public policies that are inimical to Africa's growth and development should be discarded by African states especially if such policies are related to financial issues

and economic development. This is important because most neo-colonial policies and actions are aimed at promoting foreign interests in Africa.

4. It is also necessary and fundamental for African states and parliaments to engage in periodic review and evaluation of existing policies and programmes in order to meet contemporary challenges and events. Such reviews and appraisals will help Nigeria and African leaders to meet the needs of their people. This will also promote indigenous African interest rather than giving preference to foreign policies and ideologies.
5. In line with the sustainable development goals document, there is need for partnership with development partners and stakeholders at the national, regional and global levels. Such partnership will help to exploit the cooperative advantage of other nations in terms of trade and defence related issues.
6. To ensure effectiveness in the policy formulation and implementation process, there is need for constant review and appraisal in order to make existing policies and programmes of government meet changing circumstances and events.
7. There is need for inter-governmental relations and cooperation among the three arms of government (Executive, Legislature and the Judiciary) in the process of policy formulation and implementation in Nigeria.
8. The people (citizens) should also be conscious and vigilant in monitoring the activities of leaders to ensure that leaders do not promote their personal interest while serving the state. Keeping watch over the government will help the government to be alive to its responsibilities. The citizens can effectively watch over the government through effective participation via civil societies and non-governmental organizations.

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