

7. Nigeria's Foreign Policy

7.1 INTRODUCTION

When we talk about interactions among nations or nation-states, reference is made to the inter-dependence of nations in international politics and economic relations. The attention here is on interaction among international actors who operate across national boundaries. Attention is equally directed at relations among the different state systems, irrespective of conflicting ideologies, values, cultures, leadership characteristics, levels of economic development, typologies of political systems etc.

In other words, relations, deep or shallow, exist among the following groups of states: superpowers/medium powers/weak powers; the South and the North; the East and the West; industrialized/developed states and non-industrialized/developed states oil-producing and oil-consuming states ex-colonial, imperial states and ex-colonized/post-colonial states etc. Nigeria, like all other modern states, takes part in international politics.

Definition of Foreign Policy: Undoubtedly, Foreign Policy is central to interaction among nations or nation-states. It can be defined in at least three ways:- (i) it is the general orientation and policy intention of a state towards other states. (ii) it can be regarded as the objective that a state strives to achieve in her interaction with other states. (iii) it can also be considered to be the means for achieving particular or specific external goals and objectives of a given state in the comity of nations.

7.2 REASONS FOR NIGERIA'S RELATIONS WITH OTHER NATIONS

Nigeria relates with other nations for several reasons.

- (i) **Economic:** There is no state or nation in the international financial and economic system (no matter its level of development) that is totally self-sufficient in natural resources, raw materials and manufactured goods. Developed and developing states are therefore compelled to interact with one another in order that each nation might procure for itself those goods it does not produce. This is true for economically developed and industrialized nations. It is also true for developing states like Nigeria. Thus Nigeria *exports* oil and raw materials and *imports* manufactured and processed goods of all categories which it does not produce.
- (ii) **Social:** Since no state is an island, state actors ensure regular contacts among states along inter-personal lines - sportsmen and women, leaders, diplomats, businessmen, politicians, scholars, journalists, students etc. These people from different states meet at different levels to exchange ideas and thereby promote international understanding.

- (iii) **Political:** By relating with other nations, Nigeria seeks to know other states better. Of course, international order, security, peace and stability are better achieved when states set aside prejudices and biases occasioned by colonialism, imperialism, history, culture and ideology and co-operate, to start with, at the diplomatic level, one with the other. Gradually by moving into other areas of co-operation, the spirit of international interdependence is thereby fostered and enhanced. Better understanding among states also permits international actors and state systems to prefer peaceful settlement of disputes to declaring war or hostilities. For example, Nigeria still counts the blessings she got from friendly French-speaking neighbours which refused Biafra and its supporters landing facilities during the Nigerian Civil War. It was also because of this reason, among others that President Shehu Shagari refused to go to war with Cameroun in May 1981 in spite of provocations by the latter against Nigeria.

7.3 FACTORS AFFECTING NIGERIA'S FOREIGN POLICY

Several factors affect Nigeria's foreign policy particularly its orientation, conduct and general direction.

- (i) **History:** The colonial factor, the so-called "traditional ties" between Nigeria and Europe accounts for why Nigeria's foreign policy remains, since Independence, essentially pro-West and, to a considerable extent, anti-socialist Russia. However, during the Civil War during which the Soviet Union demonstrated its support for the Federal Government, (to which Nigeria has responded favourably ever since), Nigeria's foreign policy might well have been entirely pro-West.
- (ii) **Geography:** Nigeria's concern with Africa as the Center-piece of her foreign policy and the intense activities in the sub-continent (ECOWAS, etc), demonstrate the importance of geography and locality. There is the factor of the strategic position of Nigeria on the coast of West Africa. It is endowed with rich mineral resources; its land area is the greatest in Africa.
- (iii) **People:** Different people or personalities from within and outside a country affect negatively or positively the country's foreign policy. Such personalities include foreign policy elites who through writings in newspapers, protests, public demonstrations, etc, express their foreign policy preferences and options. The Nigerian people have the largest population in Africa and this greatly influences her foreign policy. The cultural diversity of the people — ethnic, religious, particularly, Christians vs Moslems — influences her foreign policy.
- (iv) **Nigeria's place in the international order:** The location of Nigeria as a weak power in international economic and political order dominated by the politically and economically developed states limit the areas of operation (and the effectiveness of same) of Nigeria.
- (v) **Political will:** This may well be a vague notion but it is nonetheless important. Political will relates to the *desire* of the leaders to either perpetuate an unjust international and national economic order or seek to make it more just or less iniquitous. The emphasis is on desire rather than ability. The issue is whether or not as beneficiaries of an asymmetrical international economic order, Nigerian foreign policymakers and political leaders care much about reforming or restructuring the order. Once political will is absent, every other pronouncement is idle.

- (vi) **Self-preservation:** Like all other states, Nigeria seeks first and foremost to preserve herself as an entity in the international system. What this means concretely is that anything perceived as threatening the corporate entity is regarded as a security threat. This prevents leaders from taking risks. Yet in international politics, risks must be taken occasionally.
- (vii) **National interest:** Perhaps the most important factor affecting Nigeria's foreign policy is national interest. Again, although an ambiguous term (it can be interpreted in several ways depending on the interpreters), its elements include the following, economic well-being; acquisition of prestige and power; state security and survival; self-preservation; improvement of the political, social and cultural well-being of the people. It is generally acknowledged that national interest can best be pursued in a position of neutrality vis-a-vis all power blocs, all sorts of international conflicts and wars, etc. Thus, the adoption of the principle of non-alignment.
- (viii) **Economic factor:** The economy of any state has a very great influence on her foreign policy. The Nigerian economy is characterized by dependence on Western economy arising from massive importation, large external debts and control by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, low level of industrialization, and dependence on petroleum products as the main foreign exchange earner. The Nigerian economy is weak and fragile. All these influence the Nigerian foreign policy. For instance as Nigeria's economy is dependent on Europe, Nigeria is much more related to Western Europe than to the Eastern Europe. Furthermore, Nigeria is a member of OPEC because of her asset of petroleum. The amount of aid Nigeria can give to other states, and the strength and capacity of her armed forces will depend on her national wealth.

7.4 PRINCIPLES AND FEATURES OF NIGERIA'S FOREIGN POLICY

Principle of Non-alignment

Non-alignment principle is a deliberate policy of a state in which she declares herself as observer of conflicts of the power blocs, particularly military. It also implies the diversification of political, commercial, cultural and military links with the great powers. It may also be either a passive or an active non-aligned state, the claim is always that they judge all policy issues in international politics on their own merits. Lastly, non-alignment is a catchword for the spirit of mutual peaceful co-existence. The legendary Indian Leader, Pandit Nehru, said in 1959 that "the only camp we should like to be in is the camp of peace and goodwill", while the Egyptian leader, Gamel Nasser, declared "I will not be the stooge or satellite or pawn or hireling of anybody."

Since the Lusaka Conference of the *Non-Aligned Powers* (Conference of states that are not aligned) in September 1970, the main emphasis of the Movement has been the following:

- (i) Total decolonization
- (ii) Closer economic co-operation among member states especially on a regional basis.
- (iii) Securing better terms of trade for the group's commodities as well as the need to be consulted on, and participate in matters of world peace.
- (iv) Diversification of external links thereby reducing dependence on the West. The links here refer mainly to economic and military matters.

- (v) Formation of a sort of political movement with other neutral powers in order to strengthen their political independence and, ultimately, economic independence.
- (vi) Overcoming, in the shortest time possible, the differences between the economically less-developed and more-developed countries.

The guiding principle of Non-Alignment for Nigeria is that the country would not be aligned with either of the two major blocs of states that emerged after the Second World War — East and West. Its major canons are that Nigeria has the freedom to be able to judge issues on their merit; that Nigeria is going to support constituted authority everywhere without bothering herself about how such authorities get to or even maintain themselves in power. Also, Nigeria will not, except invited, interfere with the internal affairs of other states. She would avoid creating situations that can make Nigeria and Africa become theatres of war. She would avoid what may end up being a new (neocolonial) bondage. She would contribute to the search for and creation of peace by insulating itself from war. Lastly, non-alignment means for Nigeria the devotion of her leaders to the improvement of social and economic conditions of their people.

While Nigeria has been successful, to some extent, in achieving some of the stated objectives of its non-aligned foreign policy posture, the principle has, in some concrete cases, served as a cover-up for the conservatism of the Nigerian state. It has opposed revolutionary movements seeking to change the present or inherited structure of the International Economic Order. Certainly, Nigeria is committed to the achievement of the latter objective, but the modalities it proposes (reforms, gradualism, pragmatism, etc) can hardly achieve this grand objective.

Africa as the Centre-piece of Nigeria's Foreign Policy

(a) Origin: Before the Nigerian Civil War, the country's foreign policy was too much concerned with extra-African relations. There was tremendous soft spot for Britain and the USA, the former's most formidable ally, given the colonial and imperial ties in the areas of language, common administrative, educational and legal systems, trade and business links; the concept of Britain as the "Second home" to the country's very important personalities was obvious. They buy houses there, own hotels, have important investments and, what is more, their wives give birth in British hospitals, their children attend school in British schools, etc.

However, the civil war phenomenon and the realization by Nigeria that without the loyalty and support of her immediate neighbours she could have been dismembered plus the consideration of her leadership potentials, turned the country's foreign policy-makers' attention and focus inwards a little. This explains why, since the end of the Civil War, Nigeria has had greater economic ties with West Africa in particular and Africa in general. It should be noted, however, that compared to the trade relations with the West, Nigeria — Africa economic relations are still at a very low ebb. Political, social and cultural relations are more pronounced.

(b) Meaning: What is meant by the term "Africa as the centre piece of Nigeria's foreign policy" is that the country's main energy, resources and skills are to be devoted to Africa. It means that the country's foreign policy now has a much sharper focus: what goes on in Africa is now Nigeria's major concern; that Nigeria would initiate major foreign policy actions for other African countries to copy rather than merely react to

issues as they arise or unfold. It also means that whatever may be the moods, whims and caprices of Nigeria's political and military leaders, however unstable diplomatic personnel, particularly Foreign Affairs Ministers may be at their posts, however indebted Nigeria may be, she is now more concerned with Africa than with other continents of the world. It means that Nigeria now has to use all the indices of power and influence at her disposal — human and material resources; population; skill; expertise etc — to define, protect and enhance the interests of Africa in international relations.

(c) Reasons: The main reasons for this foreign policy stance are not farfetched. They include:

- (i) *Reduction of the dependence of Africa on the super and other powers:* The Lagos Forum or the Concert of Medium Powers, an idea of our former Foreign Affairs Minister, Professor Bolaji Akinyemi, intends, amongst other things, to draw attention of "little powers" and the extremely poor Third World States to the need for inward-looking and self-reliance. Nigeria is envisaged to be a leader of this group.
- (ii) *Fostering economic development:* Nigeria intends to emphasize the need to foster economic development, interdependence and co-operation among African states. The lesson is that the economic salvation of Africa lies inside and not outside, the continent.
- (iii) *Commitment to economic independence:* Even if it is only at the rhetorical level, Nigeria is committed to the economic independence of Africa. Nigeria is against the EEC — Yaounde-type or home-type Agreement or any other form of neo-colonialism which maintains the present unequal international economic order. Nigerian scholars, foreign policy elites, military leaders, captains of industry, commerce and business, etc; who gathered in Kuru in April 1986 to chart a new foreign policy orientation for the country, were of the view that African economic independence can come about only when each African state is economically sovereign and free from neo-colonial and imperialistic economic interferences and sabotage. Nigeria seeks to give leadership in this goal of economic independence and self-reliance for African states.
- (iv) *Leadership of Africa:* Nigeria is the largest country in Africa. She has a population of over 100 million inhabitants and occupies a territory of about 9 million square km. She is also endowed with rich mineral resources and strategically located at the West Coast of Africa. Nigeria therefore considers herself to be placed in the leadership position. She is committed to the total liberation of all oppressed peoples in Africa particularly the blacks in South Africa, the eradication of all forms of colonialism and neo-colonialism in Africa, the unity of African States and the restoration of the dignity of the Black race. Nigeria has assumed the leadership of Africa in the belief that it is through her leadership role that African States can best attain these lofty goals.

(d) Implications: This foreign policy posture has some important consequences for Nigeria viz:

- (i) *Abandonment of lukewarm foreign policy attitudes:* Since the beginning of the 1970s, Nigeria has progressively abandoned its lukewarm foreign policy attitude of the 1960s. She has become more involved in African affairs. For instance whereas in 1966, she had trade pacts with only two African States outside West Africa (Zaire and Egypt), by 1973 this had increased to 16.

- (ii) *More commitment to the OAU:* Again, since 1970, Nigerian leaders have consistently used the OAU platform to stress the need to translate resolutions and slogans into concrete realistic efforts to achieve meaningful co-operation. At the Commonwealth Conference in 1973, Nigeria got all African States to negotiate as a bloc with the EEC. She also spear-headed OAU's first major economic Conference in Lagos in 1980. This resulted into the Lagos Plan of Action. She was equally a prime mover of the Harare (Zimbabwean capital) Declaration on Agriculture in 1984. By using the OAU and the ECOWAS, Nigeria has, since the 1970s, been able to influence, in some ways, the external economic relations of other African States.
- (iii) *More positive response to the liberation of Southern Africa:* There is perhaps no better index of Nigeria's commitment to the African continent than in her response to the crisis occasioned by Apartheid in South Africa. Nigeria abhors the existence of the White Minority Government and its obnoxious apartheid policies. The major theme in the foreign policy pronouncements of successive Nigerian civil and military leaders has been anti-colonialism and anti-racism. The existence of white minority regimes until April 1980 in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) and up till now in South Africa has given Nigeria an ever-present foreign policy theme. She condemns South Africa regularly and often champions African pressure and lobby groups in the UNO to impose sanctions on South Africa. Examples include expulsion of the racist regime from the Commonwealth in 1961; limited UN sanctions against Rhodesia in the 1960s and 1970s; UN Security Council's qualified arms embargo on South Africa.

Nigeria does more than that; beginning from 1968, Nigeria has been a regular supplier of armaments, materials, money and goods to the freedom fighters in Southern Africa. The African National Congress (ANC) and South-West African Peoples' Organization (SWAPO) have often publicly acknowledged the commitment of Nigeria to the dismantlement of racism and apartheid. Also, there is a national organ — National Committee Against Apartheid (NACAP) — in the Political Department of the Nigerian Presidency which sensitizes and informs the Nigerian people about the deplorable situation in South Africa. It also arranges fund-raising activities in aid of fellow blacks suffering untold hardship and deprivations under the apartheid system.

Nigeria contributed immensely to the independence of Angola, Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Namibia

- (iv) *Non-interference:* Nigeria's foreign policy is guided by the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of other states. Nigeria respects the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States. Even though Nigeria poses as the leader of African States she does not interfere with their internal affairs. She allows each state to settle its internal matters as it likes.
- (v) *International co-operation:* Nigeria is of the view that international peace and economic growth depend on co-operation among states on the basis of equality of States. Consequently Nigeria has entered into economic and cultural agreements with many States of the world. Nigeria believes that international co-operation could be best attained through membership of international organizations. Thus Nigeria has acquired membership in the UNO, The Commonwealth of Nations, the OPEC, the OAU, and many other international organizations. Moreover Nigeria has respect for

international laws and treaties. This is done with the belief that this would promote world peace and security.

KEY POINTS

1. Nigeria relates with other nations for economic, social and political reasons.
2. Foreign Policy can be defined as:
 - (i) The general orientation and policy intentions of a state toward other states;
 - (ii) The objective that a state strives to achieve in her interactions with other states;
 - (iii) The means for achieving particular or specific external goals and objectives of a state.
3. The following factors, among others, influence Nigeria's foreign policy: History (ties with ex-colonial countries); Geography; People; Place of Nigeria in the International order; Political will of leaders; Self-Preservation; National Interest.
4. **Principles/Features of Nigeria's foreign policy.**
 - (i) *Non-alignment:*

This is a political status of states and refers to either a passive or an active non-involvement posture in international politics. It aims, since 1970, at total decolonization, closer economic co-operation among member-states; securing better terms of trade, etc.

For Nigeria, it means she has freedom to judge issues on their merit; to avoid Africa and Nigeria becoming theatres of war; to contribute to the search for and creation of peace by insulating herself from war, etc.
 - (ii) *Africa as the centre-piece of Nigeria's foreign policy:*

This means that the country's main energy, resources and skills are to be devoted to Africa; the country's foreign policy has a sharper focus on Africa: what goes on in Africa is her major concern. The reasons for this foreign policy stance include

 - (a) the need to reduce dependence of Africa on the super and other powers;
 - (b) the need to foster economic development;
 - (c) the need for economic independence;
 - (d) the need to offer effective and dependable leadership to Africa;
 - (e) the need to foster the spirit of African nationalism and unity.

The implications are also clear:

 - (a) Abandonment of lukewarm foreign policy attitudes;
 - (b) There is more commitment now to the OAU and all it stands for;
 - (c) More positive response to the South African liberation.

- (iii) *Nigeria's foreign policy* is guided by the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of other states.
- (iv) *International co-operation* among states on the basis of equality of states is also an important feature of Nigeria's foreign policy.

SAMPLE EXAMINATION QUESTIONS

Essay Questions

1. Why does Nigeria relate to other countries in the World?
2. Enumerate the factors which influence Nigeria's foreign policy. Which of these, in your own view, are more important than others?
3. What do you understand by the principle of Non-Alignment? Is Nigeria really a non-Aligned State?
4. Why has Nigeria made Africa the core or centre-piece of her foreign policy?
5. Examine the implications of 'Africa being the centre-piece of Nigeria's foreign policy'.

Objective Questions

1. Foreign Policy is NOT one of the following:
 - A Means for achieving external goals and objectives of a state
 - B Objective that a state strives to achieve in her interactions with other states.
 - C General orientation and policy intention of a state toward other states.
 - D Policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of other states. E Policy of achieving good relations among states of a Federation
2. Which of the following factors does NOT influence Nigeria's foreign Policy?
 - A The country's dependent status in international politics
 - B History
 - C Geography
 - D National Interest
 - E Nigeria's Economic Independence.
3. The Principle of non-alignment describes the position of a state which
 - A interferes in world politics only on the side of the West.
 - B interferes in world politics only on the side of the East.
 - C does not interfere at all.
 - D declares herself militarily aloof from international conflicts of the blocs.
 - E is neutral in issues of inter-world power conflicts.

4. Which one of the following is NOT a feature of Nigeria's Foreign Policy?
- A Neutrality in inter-state conflicts
 - B Africa as "centre-piece"
 - C Non-interference in internal affairs of states.
 - D Non-alignment.
 - E International co-operation.
5. The notion of "Africa as the centre-piece of Nigeria's foreign policy" implies the following except that the interests of
- A the Western power bloc should be sacrificed for Africa's interests.
 - B the Eastern power bloc should be sacrificed for Africa's interests.
 - C Africa should take precedence over Nigeria's national interests.
 - D OAU should take precedence over those of the Commonwealth.
 - E ECOWAS should take precedence over those of the NATO.

Answers

- 1. E
- 2. E
- 3. D
- 4. A
- 5. C