

OBAFEMI AWOLOWO UNIVERSITY, ILE-IFE, NIGERIA.

Inaugural Lecture Series 102

**NIGERIAN DIPLOMACY:
THE BURDEN OF
HISTORY**

By Richard Adeboye Olaniyan

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Introduction

Reflecting on the variety of inaugural lectures delivered by my distinguished predecessors in this University, one could observe that they fall into three main categories.

First, those that reminisce with a touch of nostalgia about their role and place as participants in the onerous task of institution building. Secondly, those that focus on the inaugural lecturers' areas of specialization, usually the results of recently completed research or those that attempt a reflection on the nature of their disciplines. Thirdly, those that attempt to identify broad issues which have the potential to open new debates or, usually, reopen old ones. The issues involved may be ones that have been bugging the speakers, or that are of some concern to other people in the academic community. It may be reflective or predictive in tone. It may seek to convey a message or champion a cause. The history of the ritual of inaugural lectures in this University may also be said to have offered a fourth example: those that combine a bit each of the first three categories.

A topic such as the "Nigerian diplomacy: the burden of history" clearly belongs to the third category.

Since my distinguished colleagues in the Department of History - Professors I. A. Akinjogbin, B.O. Oloruntimehin and Kola Folayan have reflected on "History and Nation Building", on "History and Society", and on the "Arab Factor in African History" respectively, I thought it would be appropriate to examine the role of history in an aspect of our national life, namely, the pattern and behaviour of our external relations and to situate this within the context of history or the national experience as a constraining, defining, specifying or liberating force. This, I must quickly add, is not an exercise in historical determinism, rather, it is an attempt to take a critical look at the beginnings of our diplomatic culture, how our peculiar historical development has contributed to shaping our initiatives and responses in our external relations. The choice of this topic was greatly influenced by the German historian Friedrich Schiller's admonition in his inaugural lecture at Jena in 1789. Schiller believed that the historical profession should pay attention to what is considered relevant

by the society. He believed that the historian should be able to:

select from the stream of events those that exercise an essential, unmistakable, and easily comprehensible influence on the present shape of the world and the situation of the contemporary generation.¹

If we as professional historians must remain relevant in the contemporary world, we must need to exude greater enthusiasm for and extend our warm embrace of contemporary issues. This is the challenge of Schiller's admonition. It is not a call to abandon the past but rather it is one to employ the knowledge of the past to enlighten the serious consideration of the great issues of our time. This is the only way we can be relevant, for example, to the immediate concerns of the statesman, the diplomat and the busy bureaucrat whose interest is to confront diplomatic issues in their bid to promote and protect what they perceive as national interest.

It is important to remind ourselves that it is no longer fashionable to hold tenaciously to the "antiquarian fallacy" of history which consigns the role of history only to the elucidation of the ancient past. Progressive historians now reject the distinction often made between technical history and contemporary history as unnecessarily artificial and therefore untenable. More and more historians are now emphasizing the unity of the past and present. As the distinguished historian Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. maintains, the need to modify our conception of the past has become imperative because of the tremendous rate of social change brought about by the impact of scientific and technological progress which nowadays quickly turns our "present" into the "past". In the nineteenth century, for example, the historian's "past" was conceived as "a generation or two back". "Now it is yesterday".

This acceleration, according to Schlesinger, was due mainly to the fact that:

...the emergence of a more extensive educated public than the world has ever known has increased the popular demand for knowledge about problems that torment

modern man. History becomes an indispensable means for organizing public experiences in categories conducive to understanding.²

History is about change, and change is the stuff of history.

In other words, changes that affect our world, our society, can also modify our conception of history itself in order for history to be current and relevant. As one of my colleagues has aptly observed, "the basic role of history is to clarify the structural changes which have shaped the modern world. These changes derive their significance from the fact that they determine the framework or setting of present actions".³ What Professor B.O. Oloruntimehin is saying, and with a great deal of justification, is that "the task of the historian is to study and interpret the changes embodied in society and explain the reasons for them."⁴ The intention is to "cast some illumination,"⁵ as it were, on the society, thereby providing an opportunity for the society to gain a better understanding of its past and its present to serve as pointers to the future.

The historian need not feel that only the political scientist can satisfy the needs of the statesman or the policy maker. As Wilhelm Dilthey maintained, "the historians of a nation stand in a more direct relationship to its political life than any other group of pure intellectuals."⁶ In spite of the divergent views on what lessons can be drawn from history, it is safe to say that most intelligent policy makers actually do invoke the spirit of the Muse; they do refer to history in the process of decision making. Henry Kissinger, historian, political scientist and diplomat underscores this point, when he says that "no significant conclusions are possible in the study of foreign affairs - the study of states acting as units - without an awareness of the historical context."⁷

The scope of diplomatic history is much wider today than it used to be. It is defined as "an indispensable aspect of the study of international relations," which is "concerned with the actions or gestures of governments, their decisions and, when possible, their intentions."⁸ Much is expected from the diplomatic historian; his task, according to Paul Gordon Lauren, is

to construct a clear and accurate record of the formal relations and interactions among sovereign nations, analyzing and interpreting the ways in which they formulate their policies, the foreign and domestic factors with which they must contend, the techniques and modalities they employ, and the results they achieve in attempting to realize their objectives.⁹

The point we need to stress here is that the historical dimension is vitally important to our unraveling the paradoxes of our time, to understanding our contemporary predicament.¹⁰ Decisions of men and women determine what policies states make. This is why an understanding of the human actors is very crucial to the proper appreciation of the whole concept of diplomacy, defined as the "process of dialogue and negotiation by which states in a system conduct their relations and pursue their purposes by means short of war."¹¹

The central thrust of this lecture is this: that Nigeria's foreign policy and diplomacy, like any other country's, can hardly be meaningfully appreciated outside its history, that colonial inheritances, economic dependence, internal political structures and institutions, as well as forces from the external environment, have impinged upon its diplomatic behaviour and responses; and that only the force of dynamic leadership can effect a departure from the historical pattern and development.

In order to achieve our objective in the sixty-minutes allotted this exercise, we shall attempt an analysis of the development of Nigerian foreign policy and diplomatic style from the year of our political independence and pay particular attention to the identification of such forces that impeded the development of enduring dynamism.

The burden of colonialism

The cartographic shape of Nigeria as we know it today is a reflection of Africa's colonial past dating back to the imperialist adventures, compromises and agreements among European colonial powers at the Berlin West African Conference of 1884-1885. The colonial past bequeathed to the modern nation of Nigeria national boundaries

that paid little respect to the homogeneity of ethnic-nations. In this, Nigeria is not unique as most modern African states were similarly treated. Ethnic groups were split across international boundaries which were haphazardly drawn. Much as these national frontiers have been deplored by African nationalists and statesmen, they have remained inviolable and, indeed, have become inseparable from national sovereignties and the integrity of the African states.

Specifically in the case of Nigeria, the impact of the colonial experience on the future direction of policies, went beyond the problem of boundaries. In political relations, for instance, a pattern was established in the last few years of colonial rule whereby most relations were with Britain and its Western allies. Little or no contact was allowed with the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc for political and ideological reasons. Travel to Eastern bloc countries particularly Russia was forbidden and the importation of Communist literature was banned. The consequence was that on attainment of independence, the pattern of Nigeria's political relations with other countries had been defined. All contacts were with Britain, France, the United States and other Western countries. What was more, diplomatic relations were established with only this group of states and certain countries in the Arab world for obvious religious reasons. The pattern of independent Nigeria's diplomacy was already being identified about four years before independence. In August 1956 when the Sessional Paper¹² outlining the basic plan for the training of Nigerians for future overseas representation was laid before the Parliament, one of the paper's assumptions was that these future diplomats would be trained by institutions in Britain. Indeed, the first set were trained in Oxford University and had practical attachment training in the British Foreign Office and in British diplomatic missions in Washington, D.C. Ottawa and Rio de Janeiro. One other unsavoury aspect of the independence was the assumption in the paper - which was not seriously criticized in Parliament - that for some time after independence, Nigerian interests in some countries would have to be looked after by British diplomats in those places as Nigeria would not be able to afford the cost of maintaining diplomatic missions in

all the places where it had any form of interests. Here we can make a little observation. While it is true that the cost of maintaining diplomatic missions in every country where Nigeria had interests might indeed be prohibitively expensive for a country that was just emerging to independence, the wisdom behind accepting institutionally a country "looking after" our own interests is questionable. In diplomacy, all intentions are suspect until proven otherwise and for Nigeria to proceed to independence willingly allowing another country to handle part of its diplomacy would look like a strong invitation to neo-colonialism.

Another aspect of the colonial legacy which borders on the political was the strategic military situation. One of the major considerations that influence the credibility of a country's foreign policy pretensions is the power capability underpinning its claims. And, one crucial element of power calculations is the military strength available to the country. The army inherited by Nigeria at independence was grossly inadequate. As it was the case in most other colonial territories, the imperial masters created only the barest possible armed force. Poorly trained, poorly equipped, the army was just another national symbol like the flag and anthem. It offered no striking capacity and it was doubtful if it could play any serious defensive role if it had cause to. Apart from a handful of men who served in the Congo in the early 1960s, most had no combat experience. At independence there was no navy and no airforce; the colonial masters had no need for them. Thus, our capability for adventurous foreign policy at independence - if we had any desires for such - had been seriously curtailed by the nature of the military strength at our disposal. What was more, the Nigerian Government had signed a military agreement - the Anglo-Nigerian Defence Pact - with Britain which among other things provided for the training of our service men in British military institutions and provision of ground facilities for British forces when necessary.

As it was in the political, so it was in the economic dimensions. In trade relations, for instance, the training patterns established during the colonial era had ensured a dominant position for Britain,

other Commonwealth partners and Britain's Western allies particularly in Europe and America. Most of Nigeria's imports came from Britain and the rest from these other countries. The situation was such that economic considerations were a prime factor in Nigeria's decision to join the Commonwealth on attainment of independence. Trade patterns that derive from continued economic links with the erstwhile colonial master ensured that trade and other economic links with the country's immediate neighbours in the West African sub-region were hardly developed. The dependence on Britain was further insured by a variety of other intangible arrangements such as preferential tariffs, membership of the sterling monetary zone, shipping, air, telecommunications and other services.¹³ The pattern continued long after independence as the cost of divesting was considered prohibitive. Rather than strive to divest the country of its colonial encumbrances, the Prime Minister, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, was more concerned with solidifying economic relations between Nigeria and Britain, and even at a time, advocated that the Commonwealth develop into an economic union, or at least take on more economic functions.

Thus, at independence several facets of Nigeria's national life, many of which impinge on the conduct of foreign policy were conditioned by the colonial experience. Nigeria's immediate friends were from the Western bloc, and for a long time the country continued to shun advances from the East bloc. Nigeria attached prime importance to its Commonwealth connections - in general political and economic relations. In fact, the maintenance of good relations with some countries was only to be considered if the obligations of such friendships did not impinge on Nigeria's obligations to its Commonwealth partners. The situation was such that for most of the First Republic, the Commonwealth remained in the centre or the inner core of the concentric rings of Nigeria's foreign policy priorities. But the burden of the legacy of colonialism is just one aspect of the burdens which Nigeria was born with at independence. The other important one which also had to do with history was that of the neighbours Nigeria is saddled with.

The Neighbours

If neighbours were wives, there have been occasions when Nigeria would have probably sought a prolonged separation, if not outright divorce. As it is, Nigeria, like all nation states cannot choose its neighbours. It is a fact of the colonial history of Africa that Nigeria's immediate neighbours - Republics of Benin, Niger, Chad and Cameroon - are products of French colonialism. Some sixty nautical miles away in the south-eastern direction off the Bight of Bonny is the Republic of Equatorial Guinea (a former Spanish colony) on the strategically located island of Bioko and Rio Muni. Beyond the immediate neighbours are other states in the West African sub-region which together speak three different European languages, namely, English, French and Portuguese. This diversity and distinction of colonial traditions and experiences did and still affect Nigeria's foreign policy. The fact is that even beyond the frontiers of the immediate neighbours, Nigeria has to contend with more francophone states than anglophone nations in the pursuit of its Africa-centred foreign policy objectives in the West African sub-region and in the continent as a whole. The implication of this in all its stark ramifications is forcefully apparent: Nigeria has to recognize France as a regional neighbour not exactly in the geographical sense but more in the historical and geopolitical sense.

But perhaps the implication is not as obvious as it seems. There are other factors which lend complexity and intricacy to the bilateral and multilateral planes on which Nigeria's diplomacy has had to operate. The nature of the relationship between France and her former colonies is unique among the neo-colonialist arrangements now extant in international politics and diplomacy.

An appreciation of the French concern for their nation's glory and greatness and their readiness to employ and exploit all resources to sustain that central thrust of their domestic and foreign policies will go a long way to enhance our understanding of the position of the francophone countries within the francophone African community. francophone countries in Africa are independent and sovereign in their own right. But they nevertheless remain quite in-

timately associated with France to the extent that they constitute the satellites in the French orbit, a state-system that has France as its centre, and one that enhances and promotes the cultural, diplomatic and strategic interests of France.

The broad outline of the emergence of this French sphere of influence could be rendered simply and succinctly. The process of decolonization began to gather momentum after the Second World War. The original intention was to keep much of the former empire in Africa as France overseas, thus African territories would be administered as part of the internal political process. This expectation fizzled out, and a new arrangement was devised by the middle of the 1950s whereby francophone African states were to be retained within the francophone states in Africa under the Fourth Republic constitutional frame work would be accorded the status of overseas members of the "French Union". This was the idea of "Greater France" with the former colonies regarded as constituting France overseas. France was most reluctant to part with its colonial empire. The constitutional attempts to launch the "French Community" and the "Franco-African Community" to promote the same interest between 1958 and 1960 did not quite amount to much. By this time the wind of change, of political independence, had begun to blow over Africa. It was now clear to the architect of the French Fifth Republic, President Charles de Gaulle, that a new arrangement was imperative if the independent francophone African states were to be retained within the francophone state-system. His answer to the new political realities was to establish cooperation arrangements between metropolitan France and the new states. These formed the foundation of the close link between France and its former colonies. The only objector to this arrangement was Sekou Toure's Guinea which, upon becoming independent in 1958, chose to stay outside the Gaullist French fold.

France was well aware from long association of the benefits that would accrue to it from continued relationship with its former African colonies and hence the determination to maintain a tight rein on them even when they had gained political independence. In the first place, France would continue to enjoy the power and the prestige

of remaining at the apex of a subordinate state-system. Certainly, in the context of global politics, this is essential to the apparatus of a great power image in the post-war world. Secondly, in real terms, the agglomeration of its former colonies into a new 'commonwealth' informed by the philosophy of francophonie and controlled by France would continue to make accessible to Paris the human and material resources available in the former colonies.

One could appreciate France's objectives better in the light of the post World War II cold war politics when the struggle for supremacy in a bipolarised world between the United States and the Soviet Union almost totally eclipsed the other powers. President Charles de Gaulle saw to it that no effort was spared to consolidate the dominant position of France. First beginning with fourteen emergent African states, the francophone world has successfully incorporated into the sphere of influence of France the former Portuguese, Spanish and Belgian colonies. These are now so well organized that they form a closely-knit international forum sponsored and sustained by France. France extends to the members defence pacts, military and security agreements, diplomatic, economic, cultural and technical assistance.

In most of these states the French presence is enormous. In the area of security services, several of the francophone countries depend heavily on French military personnel, equipment and training. France's awesome military presence is complete with sophisticated weapons, military, naval and airforce bases located in certain strategic areas which are combat ready and which could be put in the service of the host countries or other parts of the francophone world as the needs arise. Involved in these military institutions and operations are thousands of French military forces which could be used in direct military engagements as was the case in the conflict between Chad and Libya.

In the economic sphere, francophone-African countries are all tied to the French monetary and customs system. The French Treasury remains the dominant institution to which the two special central banking systems and operations are effectively linked, thus the

economy of the francophone African community is very much tied to the French economic system and fortune. The political and educational systems of these countries reflect unmistakable influence of the French tradition and continuing inspiration.

This close relationship between France and its former African colonies is effectively maintained through defense pacts, military cooperation agreements, and through the direct employment of French citizens who serve as technical assistants and advisers, through various economic and aid packages, training schemes for military and administrative personnel, and the coordination by France of the diplomatic activities of these countries. There is also the factor of cooperation by the ruling elites in these states who are themselves products of the French culture, and for political, economic and security reasons, and we may add, for their own survival, find much of value in their close association with France.

This neo-colonialist arrangement which involves our immediate neighbours and a large number of other countries in the West African sub-region, puts France in a special position in our foreign policy considerations. The import of these realities is that France must be considered for all practical purposes our neighbour with whom we have to relate.

There is a possible danger in over simplification which may create the unintended impression that the francophone states in West Africa share the same ideological views or are likely to be influenced to the same degree by France in their foreign policy objectives or that they are similarly well disposed towards Nigeria. While we may identify Benin Republic as radical, Cameroun and Niger will be considered moderates, and Chad, a good example of a typical pro-French francophone state. Cameroun which is a leader in the Centrai Africa region and which shares with Nigeria a commitment to decolonisation and dismantling of apartheid is more prone to be suspicious of Nigeria's interests. Border problems with our neighbours occur from time to time, but border clashes with the Cameroun are more likely to be serious because of the discovery of oil resources in the area. The border clashes in 1970 and 1981 created tension and anxiety

and strained relations. The resolution of these was a measure of mature and cautious handling on the part of Nigeria. The Chadian civil war, although an internal affair, had security implications for Nigeria. The fear of spill over effects of a war that was later internationalized, with France and Libya becoming involved, were real: these could mean introduction of sophisticated weapons into Nigeria by trouble makers and anti-social elements; and the inevitable mass movement of refugees across the border, creating social and security problems especially in the urban communities.

It would also seem that weak neighbours are often suspicious, and for many of them, suspicion may be the only line of defence. Nigeria's large population, its enormous economic resources and leadership activities, all of which give it an advantage over its neighbours, also give room for suspicion. It is not conceivable that Nigeria and France will share similar objectives in their African policies considering their different aspirations. The policy prescription that we may advocate on the basis of a correct diagnosis of the history of the relationships between the two countries is that existing economic, diplomatic and cultural ties should be strengthened. It is of course a well known fact that France is one of Nigeria's major trading partners with her heavy involvement in automobile and construction industry, as well as in the expanding market for high technology, industrial goods and military hardware. In the increasingly mutually beneficial links between Nigeria and France there is bound to emerge other areas of cooperation and collaboration.

It is important to stress that Nigeria's policy must be anchored on better understanding of France and the francophone states. Greater cultural contacts must be promoted between Nigeria and our immediate neighbours as part of our bridge-building across cultural gaps created by colonialism. A more systematic identification and authentication of our boundaries should be embarked upon as a matter of urgency so as to minimise the frequency of border clashes. A border patrol unit with highly motivated and patriotic bilingual personnel could be raised in the armed forces to protect our interests in the critical areas of our nation's frontiers. All these would help

build the solid basis for effective diplomacy conceived as a political instrument of our national policy.¹⁴

Perhaps we should conclude this section on the importance of neighbours in the sub-regional system by making a point or two on Nigeria-Equatorial Guinea relations. Equatorial Guinea is one of those three countries — others being, Cameroun and the Republic of Benin — which Nigerian military strategists refer to as the 'triangle of survival'. Given its strategic location, it is quite important that Nigeria develop and maintain good relations with that country. The details of the generally bad relations which had existed between the two countries over the years are fairly well known, even including the fact that at the time of General Murtala Muhammed, Nigeria seriously contemplated annexing that country. Also well documented are the waves of expulsions of Nigerian migrant workers in that country. What needs to be emphasised here is the recent development in relations with Malabo particularly with regard to that country's flirtations with South Africa and France.¹⁵ It is our contention here that the recent revelations are the harvest of our past lack of strategic consciousness and planning. This has been the source of our dilemma as we are now susceptible to subtle blackmail from Malabo which continues to make all sorts of unreasonable demands. When these are not immediately met, the country then makes what it knows to be advances to either France or South Africa. But Nigeria cannot ignore Equatorial Guinea now. That country's provision of facilities of various kinds, particularly military ones to both South Africa and France constitutes danger to Nigeria's national security since Calabar, one of Nigeria's major towns, is a mere twenty-minute flight from Malabo. Most of Nigeria's coastal cities are within striking distance from Malabo and Nigeria's oil rigs are clearly visible after less than three-minute flight from Malabo. Because of the current acceptance in Nigerian military circles of the danger which a hostile Malabo may pose to Nigeria particularly if South Africa should be allowed to consolidate its hold there. Nigeria has become unnecessarily open to Malabo's blackmail. And this has been the source of the various aid packages granted to that country by Nigeria including loans on

generous terms, construction of a hospital and a school, as well as the establishment of businesses.

Given the economic constraints facing Nigeria, there is no doubt that Nigeria is doing its best to meet Malabo's demands. But it is doubtful whether it is sensible policy acceding to Malabo's requests whether these are made with the usual accompanying threats to look to South Africa if we cannot meet them. It is doubtful, even in the face of sanctions, if we can compete with South Africa in the granting of largesse to a country in order to win its favour. We may have to find better means of dealing with the menace posed by Equatorial Guinea's senseless flirtations with a country acknowledged by all of black Africa as a dangerous pariah. Malabo continues to flirt unashamedly with South Africa and France and continues to pursue provocative policies. Only recently, ignoring Nigeria's commitments to the struggle against the dumping in Africa of any industrial wastes - toxic or not, the Equatorial Guinea government signed an agreement with a U.S. Company, to receive and bury industrial wastes on its own territory.

Moreover, the Equatorial Guinea-French connections, particularly the fiscal arrangements which have incorporated Malabo into French monetary union, the CFA, and into UDEAC, further confirm the success of France's policy to contain Nigeria in the West African sub-region both political and culturally

Patterns in Foreign Policy Development: Balewa to Babangida

Naturally, the period of Nigeria's history when the constraints imposed by colonial legacies on foreign policy formulation and execution was during the First Republic, 1960-1966. As noted earlier, the patterns of political and economic relations established during the last few years of colonial rule influenced very much developments in the post-independence era. While the country laid claims to the pursuit of non-alignment in its external relations, it preferred to make friends with only the countries of the Western bloc and shunned the advances of the Eastern bloc states. For a long time, the Soviet Union was not allowed to open a diplomatic mission in Lagos and when it eventually did, the staff strength was very much curtailed and their

movements greatly circumscribed. Nigeria attached great importance to its Commonwealth connections which it valued even more than its membership of the United Nations and the OAU. An example of this was in December 1965, when following the Unilateral Declaration of Independence by the minority white government in Rhodesia, the OAU Council of Ministers adopted a resolution calling on Britain to bring down the rebellion. At the OAU meeting, the Nigerian minister was one of the sponsors of the resolution. However, when the time came for implementation, Nigeria, as was the case with several other members, chickened out. Rather than implement the resolution which had called on OAU member states to break diplomatic relations with Britain if it failed to bring down the illegal regime, the Nigerian government opted to deal with the problems through the forum of the Commonwealth of Nations. Hence, it sponsored a Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Meeting which was held in Lagos in January 1966. That meeting was to be the last diplomatic action of Alhaji Abubakar, as he was assassinated barely twenty-four hours after the close of the meeting. That the move to use the Commonwealth forum did not produce the desired results, is not important here. What is worthy of note is that the Nigerian government which even before independence had been laying claims to leadership in Africa, could not implement an OAU resolution to which its Foreign Minister was party. It is quite irrelevant that the two-week ultimatum given by the resolution for Britain to bring down the illegal regime was unrealistic. What is important was that Nigeria preferred to hobnob with its Commonwealth colleagues, friends chosen for it by its colonial history, rather than those who should be its natural allies - its regional neighbours in the Organization of African Unity.

But the constraints on the foreign policy making process in Nigeria during the First Republic were not imposed mainly by the historical burdens of colonialism. Other push and pull factors impinging on the foreign policy making process included the dictates of party policies, the need to balance ethnic and religious interests, regional considerations and the dictates of a federal system of government which allowed regional governments to make undue incursions into

the foreign policy arena, incursions which were permitted by constitutional provisions and which sometimes gave the impression that the Nigerian government was pursuing different and contradictory foreign policies especially in the case of relations with Israel and the Arab world. Also having its own impact was the relatively undeveloped nature of the country's medium for the conduct of foreign policy. The setting up of the foreign policy bureaucracy was in its infancy and trained diplomats were but a handful. This could not but have an impact on the quality of foreign policy since diplomacy is the medium through which foreign policy is conducted. If the quality of a country's diplomacy is poor, that country may not be able to harness whatever advantages which other elements of power might have conferred on it.

The collapse of the First Republic in January 1966 ushered in a new era of political instability as governments continued to be installed and removed through the barrels of the gun. There was one exception though: the comedy of errors that passed for the Second Republic which was inaugurated in October 1979 and mercifully came to an end in December 1983. Each government had to operate in an international system with already defined historical constraints. The test of subsequent government's credibility in international affairs was the extent to which it was able to break free of systemic constraints and chart a truly free and independent foreign policy.

In terms of its concern with foreign policy matters, the regime of Major-General Johnson Thomas Umunakwe Aguiyi-Ironsi was too fleeting for it to warrant any serious consideration in our analysis. What was more, throughout its life span - which was just a little over six months - the regime was preoccupied with domestic problems of political instability and national integration. Ironsi hardly had time for any meaningful foreign policy initiative. The termination of Ironsi's government in July 1966 brought to power Lt.-Col. Yakubu Gowon. It was to be the longest serving government in the history of post-independence Nigeria. In his government's foreign policy outlook Gowon, who assumed the military title of Major-General, was poised to continue in the patterns already established by the First

Republic Government, i.e. conservative, pro-West, anti-Communist policies. This was until the rude shock of 1967. Gowon, like Ironsi before him was faced with the problems of national political instability and the prospects of the country breaking up into different parts. This culminated in the 1967-70 civil war. Much has already been said in the literature of the impact of the civil war experience on the orientation and direction of Nigeria's foreign policy. The initial reluctance displayed by the British Government to supply to the Federal Military Government much needed arms and ammunition, the tacit support for the secessionist cause by France which also encouraged its client states in Africa including Gabon and Cote d'Ivoire to give more open support, and the activities of several so called human rights organizations in various parts of the Western world at the same time chastising the Federal Government and supporting Biafra, all served to open the eyes of the Federal Government to the need to reconsider its relations with the West. Contrasted with the Western attitudes was the open support which the Soviet Union gave to the Federal Government. The Soviets did not waste time to fill the vacuum created by Western abandonment of their erstwhile friend at the hour of need. The Soviet Union flew in tonnes of arms and ammunition and fighter planes and brought in their Egyptian friends to supply pilots for the planes. When the dust of the civil war settled, Nigeria was poised to embark on a re-evaluation of the orientation of its foreign policy. Nigeria naturally became more accommodating of the Soviets Union, more cautious of its relations with the West and generally a little more balanced in its claim to pursuing the policy of non-alignment.

While we agree with the main submissions on the changes in the orientation of Nigeria's foreign policy occasioned by the civil war, we would like to believe that the changes were not as fundamental and far reaching as had been attributed to it by most scholars. For one, it was not as if the Gowon government had completely eliminated the earlier suspicions of Soviet intentions and the government's own orientation which was to the right of the centre, which had ensured the existence of certain prejudices against left of centre ideas and

values. The government was aware that the Soviet were exploiting the Nigerian situation to gain a foothold in the country which they had for long been denied and which they so badly needed. This awareness coupled with some not-so-charitable activities of the Soviets which included sending anti-aircraft missiles by air and the missiles launchers that should accompany them by sea, served to ensure the persistence of suspicions of Soviet intentions.

More importantly, however, the difficulties of the Gowon government to chart a more radical course, or even an openly different orientation, had a lot to do with the regime's own orientation. The orientation of the leadership is a crucial factor in deciding the outlook of a country's foreign policy particularly in developing countries where permanent structures for the conduct of foreign policy are just about getting stabilized and foreign policy like most other government policies, is personalized in the country's leadership. A fundamental overhauling of the country's foreign policy system was necessary if it was to change the orientation of its foreign policy to reflect a more balanced relationship with both East and West. But as Bolaji Akinyemi opined, "Gowon abhorred taking major decisions, especially those that might lead to fundamental consequences."¹⁶ It was not just in foreign policy; it was in the general nature of the Gowon government to shy away from taking quick decisions on most issues. And, in foreign policy, Gowon avoided taking decisions on issues considered controversial until it was clear which way the African majority was going. It refrained largely from staking out positions and fighting for them; he was a conciliator rather than an innovator in foreign affairs.¹⁷ Gowon was not exactly burdened by history, but by his own orientation and the outlook of his advisers. He had all the opportunities to change the outlook of Nigeria's foreign policy and free it from the shackles of conservatism. Blessed with oil wealth and power, wealth beyond his wildest dreams, Gowon was unable to seize and utilize the opportunities to make Nigeria a truly non-aligned state. Suspicions of Soviet intentions remained and the romance with the West continued culminating in the extravagant state visit to Britain and a planned state visit to Nigeria by Queen

Elizabeth II. Mercifully, Nigeria was spared the latter when the same guns that brought Gowon to power in 1966 eased him out of office nine years later in July 1975.

The inauguration of the Murtala Muhammed/Olusegun Obasanjo regime ushered in a fundamental overhauling of the processes and policies of government including, in particular, foreign policy. The two Generals had always shown interest in foreign policy matters as manifested in their membership of the Nigerian Society of International Affairs as early as 1972. General Muhammed's personal disposition no doubt influenced his perception of what policies to pursue in foreign affairs and in what direction. Muhammed, an idealist and ebullient personality had an equally ebullient Foreign Minister in Joseph Garba, then a Brigadier in the Nigerian Army. Muhammed and his Foreign Minister had no patience with the West. If it is remembered that these were men who fought the civil war and were aware of the duplicity of the West, then their impatience should not be much of a surprise. The government chose to make Africa the centrepiece of its foreign policy and actively pursued its quest for regional leadership in the continent. Undoubtedly, Muhammed was able to free the country's foreign policy direction from its Western moorings; he was quite ready to take on the West particularly the super power, United States. The government's decision not to welcome the US Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, who had proposed a visit to the country over the Angolan crisis, as well as Muhammed's decision to publicize President Gerald Ford's letter to African Heads of State, were a reflection of the extent to which the government was ready to go to prove that the days of romanticism with the West were over. The government's activist outlook was quite popular with the citizenry but a deeper reflection would cast doubts on the extent to which Muhammed's policies represented a successful pursuit of the national interest. The Angolan experience is the most obvious example. In spite of its extensive financial and moral commitments to the MPLA cause in Angola, the government did not as much receive a 'thank you' note from that country's leadership. While Joseph Garba maintains that the government pursued policies it believed in at the time

and that it was right to do so, he too has not failed to note that the Angolan response was not the least compensation for Nigeria's efforts.

But it is difficult to understand Murtala Muhammed or the force of his leadership fully by merely describing him as courageous, energetic, decisive and charismatic. And less still do these adjectives tell us convincingly why Murtala Muhammed's memory continues to impress itself upon our collective imagination. Perhaps one answer is that he seemed to embody for the brief moment he was at the helm of affairs the unrealized possibility of national power and greatness.

The assassination of Murtala Muhammed in February 1976, barely seven months after assuming power, brought his erstwhile deputy, General Obasanjo, to power. A generally more sober and reflective man, Obasanjo encouraged the pursuit of what obviously was a more pragmatic foreign policy. Although he retained Joseph Garba as Foreign Minister, the control which Dodan Barracks now exercised on the direction of foreign policy was a lot firmer and the impetuosity of the country in the foreign policy arena was put in check. The foreign policy goals of the country remained essentially the same and the government could not be accused of changing course. The government deliberately allowed the demonstration of anger against the British government by the citizenry as it made noises about Gowon's complicity in the attempted coup that resulted in Muhammed's death and the British government's refusal to extradite Gowon. The government could not have claimed ignorance of certain regulations on extradition procedure. While the Obasanjo government publicly maintained its non-aligned posture, it continued to work efficiently and quietly towards the maintenance of solid relations with the West, particularly the United States. The Nigerian government was assisted by the inauguration in the United States of a government more accommodating of Africa. Both Jimmy Carter and his Ambassador in the United Nations, Andrew Young, displayed an interest in African affairs and its struggles particularly in Southern Africa, an interest unparalleled in the country's history. The culmination of this convergence of views on the part of Nigeria and the

United States was the state visit which Obasanjo paid to the U.S. in 1977 and Carter's return visit to Lagos the following year. We have no hesitation to say that such a rapprochement with the United States would have been impossible, in spite of the orientation of the new government in that country, if Murtala Muhammed had remained in power. By the time the Obasanjo government handed over the reins of power to Alhaji Shehu Shagari, there was little doubt that the country was free to pursue a truly non-aligned foreign policy, if it wanted to.

That the orientation of the leadership is a great constraining influence on the country's foreign policy outlook was further confirmed by the civilian regime presided over by Shehu Shagari. A largely conservative man in the mould of Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa Balewa - the only civilian head of government before him - Shagari was at the head of a band of men with little or no interest in foreign affairs. Little wonder that the government pursued a lack-lustre foreign policy reflective of its internal policies. Like the man himself and his Foreign Minister, Ishaya Audu, Shagari's foreign policy lacked colour and vigour. A man given to much vacillations and indecisions, Shagari was unable to initiate any strong foreign policy action. For the most part, Nigeria reverted to responding to rather than initiating policies. He failed to provide leadership when it was most crucial and even refused to move. The 1982 OAU Summit provided the country with one of the most golden opportunities to exert its claims to leadership in Africa. The body had been divided over the controversial admission into its fold of Western Sahara. The matter was not helped by the fact that the summit was to hold in Tripoli, Libya, a country whose radical leadership had put it in the black book of Western leaders particularly the US and France, both of whom had lobbied their African 'friends' not to attend the summit. Reflecting the tardy way in which the government had always pursued its affairs, President Shagari had failed to attend the summit when it was first convened in August, and a quorum could not be formed. When a second attempt was made in November and Shagari finally attended, he was unable to persuade his recalcitrant colleagues to attend, many of whom he

telephoned personally. Some of these were recipients of Nigerian aid.¹⁸

For the most part the Shagari government continued to lay rhetorical claims to an activist foreign policy and pursuit of those ideals laid down by its predecessors. The Shagari government was never burdened by history, it was just that by the general nature of its leadership, it was incapable of doing any better. It is true that the government began to run into serious economic crisis barely into its second year in office; but it is doubtful, given a more solid revenue base, if it would have been done any better. The successor government, that of Major-General Muhammed Buhari, like that of Ironsi, hardly had time for foreign policy matters. Its preoccupation with domestic economic problems and its paranoia about the intentions of the civilians it displaced from power hardly left it with much time for things beyond domestic policy. On several occasions, the government proclaimed that it had uncovered plots to unseat it by ousted politicians. But the government displayed a disciplined determination to pursue its policies to logical conclusions. It had little time to waste and most things were done with characteristic military despatch. While its foreign policy initiatives were not many, the manner of its recognition of Western Sahara was a manifestation of its need to assert vigour and introduce credibility to foreign policy positions. The Shagari government had vacillated on the matter. While he attended the second OAU Summit in Tripoli, he refused to grant recognition to the Polisario government of Western Sahara. But recognition was necessary in a situation where other African states needed to know on which side the country was. Shagari preferred to wait to know where the wind was blowing. Rather than wait for the African opinion, Buhari acted to recognize the Polisario government and thus injected some credibility into the country's claim to leadership in Africa. The general outlook of the government was businesslike and its foreign policy was poised to continue in that direction.¹⁹

I would like to make a point at this stage. From the discussion so far it is clear that while there were historical considerations that constrained the foreign policy making process, there is equally little doubt that a government's own orientation is an important considera-

tion in determining the outlook of its foreign policy.

Every historian is a product of his generation. It is impossible given the complexities of existence for a historian not to have his own prejudices. His perception of events is coloured by his appreciation of the ethnics, values, norms and philosophy, which guide his general approach to life. Thus, when the historian passes judgment on issues, it is usually his own experience. But the task is not made any easier for the contemporary historian who on occasions has to pass judgment on contemporary events. The facts and the appreciation of the situation are subject to change, and when they do, the judgment will have to, if only to reflect the new reality. Since individuals perceive existence in different ways, their appreciation of particular issues are likely to be different even when the objective reality is the same. This makes it rather difficult to pass judgment on a regime that's still in power, particularly a military government. Thus, we will like to proceed with caution on passing any judgment on the foreign policy outlook of the present government and its successes and/or failures.

The greatest inherited constraint that confronted the Babangida regime was the depleted nature of the federal economic base. President Ibrahim Babangida came to power with a promise to review policy directions. The new administration derided its predecessor's foreign policy initiatives as being characterized by "inconsistency and incoherence" and guided by a policy of "retaliatory reactions" and "vengeful considerations".²⁰ But saddled with an economy that cannot sustain any claim to radical or adventurous foreign policy initiatives, the government was forced to tread carefully. As events began to unfold in the subsequent months and years, it became clear that economics rather than politics dominated the declaratory and operational aspects of the Babangida era's foreign policy particularly in the years following the exit of Professor Bolaji Akinyemi as Foreign Minister. Two major developments of the era are however worth noting. The first, consequent upon the enhancement of economics as an input into the formulation of foreign policy, is the adoption of "Economic Diplomacy". A second development, also to some extent,

a consequence of the parlous state of the economy, was an obvious tilt of the focus of foreign policy initiatives to the West African sub-region.

At the domestic level, the Babangida government responded to the economic quagmire in which it found itself by launching a programme of structural reforms of the country's economic base, a package titled "Structural Adjustment Programme", (a.k.a. SAP). For our purposes, we only need to point out that the attainment of the objectives of SAP required substantial external input. In particular, attaining the objective of diversifying the export base of the economy through the promotion of non-oil exports, is heavily dependent on synchronizing the Nigerian economy with the international capitalist economic system. This, in turn, necessitated diplomatic initiatives specifically formulated to achieve objectives in this regard, hence the adoption of "economic diplomacy". Similarly, achieving the objective of enhanced trade promotion and debt relief to enable the nation's economic managers focus on problems of economic development, both required substantial external input and cooperation of the country's economic partners. Essentially, therefore, through the adoption of economic diplomacy, the government was putting the weight of foreign policy machinery in support of domestic economic objectives. This should not be considered strange since the totality of a state's domestic and foreign policies are meant to serve the interest of the people of the state.

Our second major observation is the apparent emphasis which the West African sub-region came to assume in the country's foreign policy during the Babangida era. Babangida assumed power when relations between Nigeria and its neighbours in the West African sub-region were at their lowest ebb. The Buhari regime had used the excuse of a currency exchange exercise carried out between 25th April and 6th May, 1984, to close all of Nigeria's land borders on 23rd April, 1984. In spite of various promises and negotiations, the borders remained closed until the regime itself was removed from office. This had inflicted great suffering on the neighbouring countries whose economies were greatly dependent on that of Nigeria. Buhari

had complicated matters when barely a year later the government ordered the expulsion of illegal aliens resident in the country. Under the circumstances, those most affected by the expulsion order were fellow West Africans. For Buhari, the national interest was paramount and took precedent over good neighbourliness. Babangida promised an early review of relations with the neighbours. But developments on the economic front were to force an enhancement of the importance attached to the sub-region in the foreign policy calculations. In its pursuit of economic diplomacy, the Babangida government was forced to attach more importance to West Africa. If it was ever to make any headway with the promotion of non-oil exports, it had to penetrate the West African markets. The constraints imposed on the importation of manufactured products of developing countries into the markets of the developed economies have already ensured that Nigeria could hardly expect to penetrate the developed economies. Thus, the promotion of intra-regional trade and economic cooperation at the West African level became imperative for Nigerian policy makers. **But trade promotion and economic cooperation could only be realized in an atmosphere of generally cordial relations. Hence, a conscious effort to promote good neighbourly relations in West Africa.**

But this is not to deny the Babangida government's initiatives on the global state. It is true that the government was forced to conceive its leadership aspirations in the international system in sub-regional terms, but it still managed to record some significant initiatives on the world stage. For instance, in 1986, it led the successful massive boycott of that year's Commonwealth Games holding in Edinburgh, Scotland, to protest the United Kingdom's policies in South Africa particularly the Thatcher government's crusade against the imposition of sanctions. In 1990, it managed to secure the election of Nigerians to prominent positions in international organizations. First, Joseph Garba as president of the United Nations General Assembly, and Emeka Anyaoku as Commonwealth Secretary-General. Nigeria remained a frontline state in terms of the liberation struggles in Southern Africa and it committed enormous resources to the cause

of the SWAPO liberation movement in Namibia. Indeed, some credit must be given to the Nigerian government for Namibia's ultimate attainment of independence. Furthermore, the government's initiative on toxic waste dumping, although initially focused on the West Africa sub-region, culminating in the setting up of a dump-watch to monitor and campaign against nuclear waste dumping in the sub-region, eventually received international recognition. This initiative which had the effect of raising awareness about the danger of toxic waste dumping and a possible deterrent effect, was later adopted by the OAU.

The final judgment on Babangida's foreign policy is still left for history. The historian of the day, in spite of whatever claims to detachment and objectivity he might have, is still too close to certain events to render a dispassionate judgment. The Babangida era is still unfolding and is too fresh in memory; as such, its foreign policy still has to await the verdict of history.

Conclusion

For us to appreciate the need and urgency for direction in foreign policy, we have to develop a new consciousness of our collective inheritances as a people and as a nation. These have continued to condition our thinking and our perception of our national interest and the instruments to employ to achieve it. Understanding is very crucial to any informed judgment on issues. A good grasp of history and development can give us that understanding. For us to create a solid foundation, it would be necessary to review existing facilities meant to provide the acquisition of the necessary knowledge. As a first step we would like to suggest the setting up of a Centre for Diplomatic and Strategic Studies. The National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies, Kuru, had achieved a deserved, well-earned stature in the preparation of men and women for the serious task of participating in the policy formulation process. But the proposed Centre for Diplomatic and Strategic Studies (CDSS), which should be based in one of the existing universities would complement and extend the services being rendered by Kuru to a community wider than Kuru is meant to handle or provide for. It is in the universities that cross-fertilization of ideas and more effective cross-cultural con-

tacts, can be greatly enhanced. There is a further advantage since the study of diplomacy and strategic studies can best be accomplished within a multi-disciplinary context available, naturally in the universities.

I have a firm conviction that this nation's current commitment to evolving a new socio-economic and political order can benefit from a positive consciousness of its past. An appreciation of the forces that have shaped our nation's development can help us make intelligent choices in our efforts to build a more virile and dynamic nation, prosperous at home and respected abroad.

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