Conceptualising Multilateralism in the Foreign Policy of Regional Power: a Case Study of Nigeria

OladimejiTalibu

(M.Hsc) Ph.D Candidate, School of International Studies, Universiti Utara Malaysia.
E-mail:otalibu@yahoo.com

Mohammad Zaki bin Ahmad

(Ph.D) Deputy Dean and Senior Lecturer, School of International Studies, Universiti Utara
Malaysia. E-mail:mohdzaki@uum.edu.my

ABSTRACT

The article explored the multilateral policy of one of the most important regional powers in the global south. It seeks to provide basic elements underlining the involvement of Nigeria in the international organisations. AsNigeria conducts most of its external relations through multilateral diplomacy, it is imperative to provide a conceptual basis upon which such role can be defined. Most of the literatures on Nigerian foreign policy have not properly dealt with this and this may be the first attempt at conceptualizingNigeria's multilateral diplomacy in its 54 years of corporate existence. In doing this we present the contemporary case study of Nigeria's involvement in Mail to buttress our claim. Because of the scanty literature on the subject, we rely majorly on newspapers, textbooks, speeches, archival records, articles in journals and internet sources. In utilizing all these data sources, we employed the use of latent content analysis and textual mining in interpreting and analyzing the data.

Keywords: Multilateralism; Foreign Policy; Regional power; Nigeria; West Africa

Introduction

Multilateralism is an instrument of diplomacy which helps in solving global problems by collective action of states in the international system. One of the basic principles of Nigeria foreign policy is multilateralism (Chibundu, 2003:10; Adeniji, 2005:1). Nigeria's huge human and natural resources endowments have bestowed on her the need to play a leading role in the continent since independence. In terms of population, military clout and economy Nigeria stands out of all its contemporaries in Africa. Presently it is the largest economy on the continent followed by South Africa and Egypt. Nigeria's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) at present is 522 billion dollars according to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) estimates of 2014 while its population of 170 million constitutes 60% of West Africans.

Nigeria relates to the outside world through some means and methods. Some of these are unilateralism, bilateralism, plurilateralism, bandwagoning, and multilateralism. Nigeria got its independent in 1960 during the heyday of Cold War tension which left no opportunity for the new state to claim neutrality in the global political issues. It was in the midst of this global tension that Nigerian government at the time resulted to multilateral diplomacy as the main hallmark of Nigerian foreign policy. As one would be expected, Nigeria at the time of gaining independence did not have much experience

about the conduct of external relations and in this case British official was invited by the first Nigerian Prime Minister, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa (Snelling, January 19, 1959). It should be noted that Nigeria's invitation of British official did not compromise the independent foreign policy of Nigeria as the first Prime Minister opposed the imposition and perpetuation of western colonial presence in Africa. Thus, decolonization, racism, apartheid and economic underdevelopment in Africa became major issues for Nigerian government (Adoghame, 2008:8). The position of Nigeria in Africa, resulting from human and natural resources endowment, made Nigeria to pursue African-centred foreign policy. In this quest, the only viable option available was multilateral diplomacy. Therefore, Commonwealth of Nations, Nonaligned Movement, the UnitedNations (UN), and Organisation of African Unity (OAU) became the earliest medium with which Nigeria pursued its national and African interests. To properly delve into conceptual clarification therefore this article is divided into four sections. Section one discussed Nigeria's multilateral policy and legitimacy while section two delved into essence of Nigeria's multilateral diplomacy. Section three also assessed the basis features of Nigeria's multilateral diplomacy and the last section dealt with Nigeria's multilateral involvement in Malian case.

Nigeria's Multilateral Policy and Legitimacy

The concept of legitimacy has rarely been assessed vis-à-vis Nigeria's multilateral policy. What the concept really portends in relation to Nigeria's foreign intervention is shrouded in confusion. Some scholars of internationalist orientations assert that the intervention of Nigeria abroad is legitimate if it is sanctioned by the UN or other regional bodies (Okeke, 2007:5). Others are of the view that the Nigeria's foreign adventure needs to be legitimated from domestic political machinery. In terms of domestic legitimacy, Adeniji(2005:1) states:

> As far as Nigeria is concerned, the relevance of the UN has never been in doubt. The seemingly high profile of the global body in the conduct of the country's diplomacy is premised on the principle of multilateralism to which the Nigerian state has historically attached great importance.

This wake-up call on Nigeria's legitimacy in continental multilateral organization was evoked to argue against Nigeria's apathy to the US's bombing of Libya in 1986. It was argued that Nigeria should have condemned the US's bombing of Libya insofar it contravened one of the objectives of Nigeria's foreign policy: Promotion of African unity. Although, Nigeria did not have the political and economic will to threaten the US but its condemnation of the bombing would have sent a wrong signal to the US when considering the political weight of Nigeria in the OAU. Also, in terms of external legitimacy of Nigeria's multilateral intervention, Article 42 of the UN Charter provides for the intervention of state in the internal affairs of other state for the sole purpose of restoring peace and security (Omach, 2000:76). In essence, both Nigerian Constitution and UN Charter are readily available to provide legitimacy for Nigeria's multilateral intervention in such instance.

However, the argument is that foreign intervention is burdensome and as such should receive the blessing of domestic forces before it is taken. Both endogenous and exogenous approbation of intervention may be seen as complementing each other, not conflicting. Thus, the legitimization of intervention abroad needs to consider some important variables which are peculiar to Nigerian position in the

global system. Before delving into this, there is a need to explore briefly what the concept of legitimacy means in the practice of international relations. Legitimacy is an act of being lawful. It is a process by which an action is deemed right or legal. According to Inis Claude, legitimacy is a critical aspect of politics together with power; and that power which is central to politics needs legitimacy to proof its legality (Claude, 1966:368; 1994:193). Thus, the concept of legitimacy is so widespread that most states called upon it to justify their actions within the global system. In fact, within the domestic political milieu, legitimacy dichotomizes the military rule from civilian administration and the electorates in most cases provide the basis for democratic governance in a state. The concept of legitimacy is even sought after by the dictatorial regimes in order to provide legal basis for their action.

The above discussion therefore seems to equate legitimacy with rule of law and no wonder some states in the global politics try as much as possible to invoke the concept to justify their intervention. Claude asserts that "rulers seek legitimacy not only to satisfy their consciences but also to buttress their position" (cited in Luck, 2002: 48). National leaders, regional hegemons, global hegemons, judiciary and international institutions are the entities that do regularly employ the concept of legitimacy to justify their action, Nigeria is no exception.

Legitimatizing of Nigerian actions in the international organizations and global politics is provided for in the Nigerian Federal Constitution which stipulates multilateralism as one of the basic principles of Nigeria's foreign policy as quoted earlier. Since independence, various Nigerian governments seek legitimacy for their foreign intervention through constitution and National Assembly approval. But one thing that is missing here is the role of other domestic actors in legitimating Nigerian foreign adventurism. Since foreign intervention is financed by people's tax, other domestic actors like press, public opinion, pressure group and Non-GovermentalOrganisations (NGOs) need to give their input in the process. In this case, legitimacy is sought through domestic consensus. Also, the international organization through which Nigeria acts must also has the legitimacy to intervene in the domestic affairs of a certain state. Such legitimacy need to be provided by all parties making up the international organization. In this way it is assumed that mutual consensus among the parties concerned can provide legitimacy for the action of the international organization and the corollary of this is that any state that wishes to act through such organization is automatically considered having legitimacy. The prominent illustration in this scenario was the intervention of Nigeria in Mali in 2013. The legitimacy to intervene was provided by both Nigerian National Assembly and members of ECOWAS (Nwankwo, 2013:217).The Nigerian National Assembly and ECOWAS were of the view that the Tuareq strike in the northern Mali, if not immediately attended to, portends a significant threat to the security of the entire West African region.

However, it needs to be stated here that most times, the interest of a particular actor in certain issue may dictate the nature of legitimacy that will be sought. Legitimacy may be tacit in some cases especially if the actor concerned feel threatened by the event taking place in another state. In such a case, the concerned state may consider acting through multilateral organizations a delay tactics and acting unilaterally in concert of friendly states may be a viable option. In such a circumstance, legitimacy is implied through the intervention of friendly countries. A prime example of such a case was the intervention of the US in the Gulf War in 1991(Luck,

2002:59). Thus, the issue of legitimacy has to do with accountability and democratization of state action in the global politics which in turn provide the basis for intervention. This view may appear moralistic as it guides against unwarranted intervention of the powerful against the weak. In Nigerian case, the basis for intervention is examined internally by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, think tanks like Nigeria Institute of International Affairs and National Institute of Policy and Strategic Studies, National Assembly, National Assembly Committee on Foreign Affairs and thePresident and his Cabinet (Ojo, 1983:65).

Externally, depending on the issue at hand, Nigeria legitimatize its foreign intervention mainly through UN, OAU/AU, ECOWAS and other multilateral institutions of which Nigeria is a member. Besides all these internal and external source of legitimacy, national and international expediency may force a state like Nigeria to intervene in a foreign country. Sao Tome and Principe intervention by Nigeria under President Olusegun Obasanjo is a prime example. The elected government of Sao Tome and Principe was overthrown by military junta who was at ECOWAS meeting in Abuja, Nigeria (Durotoye, 2014:27). Nigeria unilaterally issued a warning to the military regime to leave within 24 hours. It was such ultimatum that forced the military regime to flee and the civilian government reinstated.

Although, Nigeria acted unilaterally in such a case and did not need any legitimacy to interfere in the issuebut one needs to recognize the fact that it may appear that Nigeria acted unilaterally; it did not. It was part and parcel of ECOWAS Declaration that no government ever seize power by force will be recognized by the member states and such declaration in itself can be invoked to provide a legitimacy for Nigeria's action in Sao Tome (Omach, 2000:79). Thus, the ECOWAS Declaration has provided the basis for Nigeria's intervention which was tantamount to multilateral diplomacy in disguise.

Essence of Multilateralism in Nigeria's Foreign Policy

Whether Nigerian multilateral policy receives its legitimacy from external or internal sources remains a future intellectual debate. What is clear is that its multilateral policy has important role to play in foreign policy making. Globally, states have resulted to multilateral policy for one reason or another. Nigeria at the point of independence realized the danger of acting alone in the anarchical global environment without the support of friendly states. Given the state of Nigerian politics at the point of independent, it was natural that the state adopted multilateralism as one of the cardinal principles of Nigerian foreign policy (Chibundi, 2003:2). The question one should ask at this point is: What is the essence of multilateralism in Nigerian foreign policy?

The essence of multilateralism in Nigerian foreign policy could be grouped into the following: One, multilateral policy as construed by various Nigerian leaders, has been regarded as window of opportunity for economic development (Pogoson, 2011:47; Ojo, 1980:573).In the early years of Nigerian independent, the federal government could see the sign that a state cannot be island onto itself if economic advancement is to be accomplished within the spate of time. It was the pressure of having to raise the standard of living at home and to make sure that Nigerian economy are well integrated into world economy that spurred the urge for multilateral undertakings. It was the need to align to financial and economic powerhouse like the US, Britain, the Soviet Union, Japan, and other developed countries in the IMF, GATT, and World Bank that necessitated the multilateral policy at the time of independent.

Similarly, Nigeria also sees cooperating with other states in the multilateral organizations as a strategy to contain the threat of great powers, especially France, in the global politics (Ojo, 1980:580). This prophetic assumption came to the fore during the Nigerian civil war. Again, multilateralism is seen as means to boost image of Nigeria in the global society (Shaw, 1984:395). The consideration of Nigeria as the most important single element in African politics endeared the leaders to pursue multilateral policy in order to safeguard the interest of Africans anywhere in the globe. Second, security challenges have been seeing as something that cannot be effectively addressed without the cooperation of other political entities in the global politics.

Thus, the first attempt on the part of Nigerian leader to achieve this noble objective was to join the UN in its effort at curbing the state collapse in the Congo in the early days of independence in 1960. Nigeria was so embroiled in the Congolese debacle that the Prime Minister of Nigeria at the time questioned the degree at which the Congolese people was consulted before the declaration of independence by the colonial master. Balewa asserted that:

> The recent tragic events in the Congo must be uppermost in all our minds…I frankly admit that there are many features of this seemingly intractable problem which remain obscure to me. I am in some doubt as to the exact manner in which the constitution granting independence to that country was drawn up by the colonial power…and as to the degree of consultation there was with the Congolese peoples themselves, and at what level that consultation was carried out (Balewa, 1960).

This is one of the instances of Nigerian leader's carefully-worded message that exemplifies their concern to African problems. Because of the need to ensure safety and security of Congolese people were guaranteed, the Nigeria government was compelled to act through the UN. In sum, the factors of security and economy as enumerated above are regarded as the essence of Nigeria's multilateral policy.

Features of Nigeria's Multilateral Policy

The practice of any policy by a state normally follows certain pattern which may distinguishes it from the practice of other state. This may be attributed to the peculiar characteristic of a state. The adoption and practice of Nigerian foreign policy has been consistent since independence and the pattern seems to remain the same over decades. As such, some features are identified which are peculiar to Nigeria's multilateral policy.

One of such features is leadership focus. Since independence in 1960 until2015, various leaders of Nigeria have been exhibiting consistency in the policy of multilateralism, a consistency that is very rare in the domestic realm (Barika, 2014:54). What is remarkable about Nigeria is its consistent multilateral policy since independence. No Nigerian leader has abandoned multilateral policy in its 54 years of independence and the zeal is shown in global, regional and sub-regional multilateral institutions. Another feature is the recognition of institutional power by Nigerian government. The Nigeria's 'manifest destiny' in African places it at the centre-stage of African and global politics (Adebajo, 2003:66). In order to discharge its responsibility as a regional hegemon in Africa, Nigerian leaders recognize the role multilateral institutions can play to legitimate its position in Africa. In this quest the advocacy for regional and sub-regional organizations has been central to Nigerian

foreign policy since independence (Adebajo, 2003: 65). The mere recognition of the danger of acting alone in the continent might be responsible for Nigeria's multilateral zeal in global political atmosphere.

Norms is also central to the Nigeria's multilateral policy. The norms of international politics endeared Nigeria to multilateral policy and since independent deviation has not been recorded. The most important feature of multilateral institutions is its normative principles which tend to control the behaviour of states in the international system. This approach seems to toe the liberal view in international politics. Nigeria by independence realized the danger inherent in colonialism which Balewa was prepared to champion. It needs to be stressed that the idea of hasty decolonization of Africa did not occur to Nigeria under the Balewa government because he did not want the case of Congolese to repeat itself in Africa (Saliu, 2007:1). Rather, Nigeria opted for gradual decolonization of African territories based on the internal integration of the state. It thus may be wrong to assert that the first Nigerian Premier did not promote decolonization of Africa; it advocated systematic and functional decolonization. Another cardinal normative principle of international organization which Nigerian found attractive during the heyday of independence is the equality of all member states of the UN. This golden theoretical principle did not only affect Nigeria's membership in the UN, it also dictated the direction of Nigeria's behaviours towards itsneighbours (Adeniji, 2005:2). It was based on this principle that Nigeria severed Anglo-Nigerian Defence Pact in 1962 as Nigeria did not want to set a bad precedence in Africa (Nwokedi, 1985:198). Such Defence Pact might propelled some other countries, especially the Francophone, to enter into defence alliance with their erstwhile colonial master, a step which Nigerian leader regarded

as a threat to the African territorial integrity. It was also based on the principle of equality of member states that Nigeria denounced the testing of Atomic Bomb by France in the Sahara Desert in 1962(Chibundi, 2003:3). The conviction of such a reaction was the idea that no state should be subservient to another as long as they are all member of the same international organizations, the UN, which preaches the normative principle of equality.

Another normative principle is that of Atlantic Charter jointly declared by the US President, Franklin Roosevelt and British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill which was laterincorporated into the UN Charter in 1945. The Charter, which was drafted by the duo in 1941, declared that all colonial territories should be independent and no territories should be forcibly occupied outside the intent of the colonized people. Such a declaration was capitalized on by Nigeria through its decolonization campaign in Africa and other colonized territories in the world (Fafowora, 1997:52). Although it took decades before such agitation could be materialized but such normative principle provided a basis upon which Nigerian leaders reacted to colonization in Africa after independence.

Another component of Nigeria's multilateral policy is soft and high politics. The conduct of Nigerian multilateral policy is rest on the assumption of cooperation at both high and soft political level. Such high politics like war, peace, foreign affairs, defence, domestic security, and regional security have occupied the minds of policy formulators in Nigeria since independence (Barika, 2014:53). The idea is that for such sensitive issues to be resolved the multilateral institutions could be a reliable mechanism that could be employed to suppress the incidence both in Africa and the globe. All the above features are important to give a preliminary guide to the direction of Nigeria's multilateral policy. It is therefore imperative at this juncture to provide a case

study to buttress Nigeria's multilateral diplomacy since independence. The currency of Malian issue makes it a readily available case in our discussion.

Nigeria's Multilateral Peacekeeping in Mali

The Nigerian multilateral peacekeeping efforts continued in Mali in 2012. The case of Mali is a complex one as the involvement of terrorist groups is glaring. According to This Day, the roles of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Al-Shabab, Tuareg Rebels Force and Ansar al-Din should not be underestimated in the Malian case (This Day, November 23, 2012). The Mali case became an issue in 2012 with the fall of Libya's leader, Colonel Gadaffi (Ireogbu, 2012). Most of these Tuareg rebel groups were part of forces that fought under Gadaffi in Libya. They fought to rescue Gadaffi from the Arab Springs that radiated nearly all the political landscape of the Arab world (Obayuwana,, 2012). With the fall of Gadaffi, the weapons that were used in the revolution in Libya by the Tuareg were not surrendered. This gave them ample chance to use the weapons to launch attacks on Malian government. They declared separate region in the northern part of Mali which was imminent for the entire region. Because of the reluctance of the UN to intervene, Nigeria led ECOWAS forces into Mali to nip the war in the bud before it went out of hand (This Day, November 21, 2012).

With the intensity of AQIM onslaught in the northern Mali in 2012, it became increasingly clear to the Malian government in Bamako that they needed foreign assistance (This Day, November 23, 2012). It was based on this realistic assessment that the Bamako government requested Nigeria to lead ECOWAS troop into Mali in November, 2012 (Oyedele, 2012). Nigeria needed to debate this in the National Assembly before any response was made. Senator David Mark, the Senate President, discussed the issue with the senate

members, after which there was unanimous agreement that Nigeria should intervene in Mali. Thus, $34 million was approved in January 2013 for such operation and Nigeria led ECOWAS members into Mali (Adigbuo, 2013:18). Apart from regional approval, the UNSC Resolution 2071 of 2012 also authorized Nigeria to lead ECOWAS intervention in Mali (Adigbuo, 2013:17). During the intervention, the Nigerian president, GoodluckJonatahan, addressed the African Union (AU) at the Donors' Conference organised at the end of the 20th Ordinary Session of the AU Summit in Ethiopia (Adigbuo, 2013:17)). The session identified raping, plundering, and assaults on the civilian as the most heinous crimes committed by AQIM all of which could not be controlled by the Malian government. Thus, Nigeria led ECOWAS into Mali with the approval of the UNSC and the AU in 2012 and subsequently brought the conflict to condition of relative peace (UNSC, 2012).

Conclusion

The adoption of multilateral policy in Nigeria's external relations has been consistent since independence. As shown in the last section of the article, Nigeria as the sole regional power in West African region has been championing the regional order through multilateral diplomacy. It has been trying to ensure that it legitimatize its intervention in the internal affairs of other countries in the region through multilateral organisations. Nigeria does abhor unilateral action in West Africa so as to avoid mutual suspicion from other states within the West African region. Form the conceptual clarification above, it also reveals that Nigeria also shows its regional power status throughout the continent. The dismantling of apartheid regime in South Africa and the Angola independence are cases in point. Despite Nigeria's multilateral diplomacy, the presence

condition in the Sahel region may need Nigeria's proactive policy that will eventually remove the security threat from the region. Boko Haram and AQIM insurgence may prove intransigence to multilateral action; and if this is true then Nigeria needs to act fast, possibly without any need for legitimacy, before the insurgent groups align themselves with terror group in the Middle East.

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