

# Obasanjo's Personal Diplomacy, The Liberian Civil War and Charles Taylor's Asylum in Nigeria

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## Abstract

Charles Taylor became elected President of Liberia in 1997 after a ruthless civil war that left an estimated 250,000 Liberians dead and thousands more seriously wounded. Once in power, Taylor was accused of actively aiding the RUF rebel leader Foday Sankoh in Sierra Leone thereby destabilising the West Africa sub region. Taylor was also confronted by rebels who had seized about two thirds of Liberia. By 2003, removing Taylor from Liberia had become the first step towards restoring peace in Liberia and West Africa. In August 2003, a deal was struck that Taylor should resign and go into exile in Nigeria. Nigeria's President Olusegun Obasanjo's offer of asylum to Taylor which brought about some measure of peace to Liberia and the sub region became a butt of criticisms both in Nigeria and in the international community. Obasanjo's critics were reluctant to credit the accuracy of his vision or the correctness of his policy regarding the asylum given to Taylor. Be that as it may, Nigeria delivered on all fronts on the issue of Charles Taylor without compromising her national integrity. Obasanjo's personal diplomacy ensured the successful termination of the Liberian war and by extension the Sierra-Leonean war. This paper took an actor specific approach in examining the personal diplomacy of Obasanjo vis a vis the Liberian civil war and Charles Taylor's asylum in Nigeria, how Obasanjo deftly navigated through the asylum saga in a way that did not rubbish Nigeria's diplomacy and standing in the international community. How was Obasanjo able to balance the different interests at play to ensure that peace was restored to Liberia and the West Africa sub-region and at the same time that Taylor did not go unpunished for his war crimes? We will conclude that Obasanjo's personality and leadership traits came handy in resolving Charles Taylor's saga. It is the position of this paper that a less experienced leader could have handled the issue differently.

**Keywords:** Diplomacy, Personal Diplomacy, Leadership Traits, Charles Taylor, Liberia, Obasanjo, Nigeria

## 1. Introduction

Charles Taylor became elected President of Liberia in 1997 after a ruthless civil war that left an estimated 250,000 Liberians dead and thousands more seriously wounded. Once in power, Taylor did not only plunder the country's diamonds and timber resources but also provided aid to RUF rebel leader Foday Sankoh in Sierra Leone. Back at home his government was faced with civil war from two major rebel groups financed by Guinea and Ivory Coast. Taylor was perceived as a major destabilising force in West Africa. By 2003, removing Taylor from Liberia had become the first step towards restoring peace in Liberia and West Africa.

In August 2003, a deal between the United Nations, the United States, the African Union, and ECOWAS (the Economic Community of West African States) was struck to get Taylor out of Liberia. Taylor then went into exile in Nigeria.

As laudable as Nigeria's president Olusegun Obasanjo's gesture of hosting Taylor was which brought about some measure of peace to Liberia and the sub region, Taylor's stay in Nigeria did not go unchallenged both locally in Nigeria and internationally. The civil society in Nigeria, and the international community led by the US challenged Taylor's asylum and sought to have him extradited to the Special Court for Sierra Leone to face justice. Obasanjo's critics were reluctant to credit the accuracy of his vision or the correctness of his policy regarding the asylum given to Taylor.

Be that as it may, Nigeria delivered on all fronts on the issue of Charles Taylor without compromising her national integrity. Obasanjo's personal diplomacy ensured the successful termination of the Liberian war and by extension the Sierra-Leonean war by negotiating Taylor's exit from Liberia at a most critical moment. Second, Nigeria, through Obasanjo's dexterity helped to ensure that a democratic government was enthroned in Liberia, and third, without necessarily accepting responsibility, Obasanjo finally helped to ensure that Charles Taylor did not evade justice. All these were attributable to Obasanjo's leadership and personal diplomacy.

This paper took an actor specific approach in examining the personal diplomacy of Obasanjo vis a vis Taylor's asylum in Nigeria, the different push and pull scenarios that greeted the asylum, and how Obasanjo deftly navigated through the Asylum saga in a way that did not rubbish Nigeria's diplomacy and standing in the international community. How was Obasanjo able to balance the different interests at play to ensure that peace was restored to Liberia and the West Africa sub-region and at the same time that Taylor did not go unpunished for his war crimes? We will conclude that Obasanjo's personality and leadership traits came handy in resolving Charles Taylor's saga. It is the position of this paper that a less experienced leader could have handled the issue

differently. This paper will fill the academic vacuum that has existed since this matter broke in 2003. The few academic works, as will be shown later, did not give credit of the resolution of this saga to Obasanjo's leadership and personal diplomacy. Rather, they either focused on the legality or otherwise of the Asylum (Agwu, 2004), or on the trend of public opinion that greeted the Asylum (Ojione, 2008).

The outline of the paper is as follows: Starting with a clear definition of the concept of diplomacy, and Personal diplomacy, we proceed thereafter to a literature review, then theoretical framework, followed by a brief overview of Charles Taylor and the second Liberian civil war, after which we focused on Charles Taylor's asylum in Nigeria. Finally, Obasanjo's personality and his handling of the imbroglio were examined.

## 2. Methodology

Apart from employing actor specific approach, we will also do a critical content analysis of available primary and secondary materials on the subject. How important are Obasanjo's personality and leadership style in handling this matter? How was Obasanjo able to resolve the contest between Nigeria's honour by making its word its bond, and reneging on its word by handing Charles Taylor over for prosecution? To wriggle out of this predicament, Taylor's escape may have been staged. Even at that, it would have taken the ingenuity of Obasanjo and his advisers to achieve that.

## 3. Diplomacy as a Concept

Diplomacy has been variously defined. A definition sees diplomacy as "the art and practice of conducting negotiations between representatives of states". It is usually the conduct of international relations through the intercession of professional diplomats with regard to issues of peace-making, trade, war, economics, culture, environment, and human rights" (Barston, 2006:1)

It is also defined as the "Art of conducting relationships for gain without conflict" (Britannica Concise Encyclopedia: Diplomacy).

Another definition of Encyclopaedia Britannica (Page 472, Vol. 7) defines Diplomacy as "A conduct and management of relations between sovereign states, in accordance with established rules and usages, with a view to obtaining maximum advantage for the diplomat's own state, and with minimum friction or resentment." The limitation of this definition is that "the exercise of diplomacy is no less valid for being conducted between two antagonistic power blocs than between sovereign states" (Akadiri, 2003:9). Besides, the definitions above may have left out multilateral diplomacy involving several states and actors in the international milieu.

Also, Diplomacy has been defined as "The application of intelligence and tact to the conduct of official relations between governments of independent states, extending sometimes also to their relations with vassal states, or more briefly, the conduct of businesses between states by peaceful means." (Satow:1958).

This definition is deficient in that some seemingly diplomatic engagements may be devoid of "the application of intelligence and tact", (Akadiri, 2003:9).

I will simply define diplomacy as the art and science of conducting international relations. This definition in my opinion is all inclusive of different actors and different means, peaceful (Negotiations, conferences, arbitrations and mediations) and violent, of conducting international relations.

Diplomacy is from the Greek word (DIPLOMA) referring to formal and official documents generally conferring specific duties, rights and privileges on the bearer folded in two. The word has its sociological roots in the need for collective survival and security of isolated communities against more powerful adversaries. Other reasons such as marital needs, commercial exchange and promotion of cultural affinities contributed to the birth of diplomacy.

Different brands of diplomacy have been identified (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diplomacy>).

Preventive diplomacy is defined as action to prevent disputes from arising between parties, to prevent existing disputes from escalating into conflicts and to limit the spread of the latter when they occur.

Public diplomacy refers to the exercise of influence through communication with the general public in another nation, rather than attempting to influence the nation's government directly, through the use of propaganda, or individual interactions between average citizens of two or more nations made possible through technological advances and the advent of digital diplomacy which allows instant communication with foreign publics through all kinds of social media like Facebook, twitter etc.

Monetary diplomacy or Dollar diplomacy is the use of foreign aid or other types of monetary policy as a means to achieve a diplomatic agenda.

Gunboat diplomacy is the use of conspicuous displays of military strength as a means of intimidation in order to influence others.

Multilateral diplomacy is the conduct of international relations through multilateral institutions like the UN, NATO, ECOWAS and so on.

Personal Diplomacy is the idea of having a face-to-face discussion with those one is seeking to persuade. (MeeseIII,2004).

Some have used shuttle diplomacy interchangeably with personal diplomacy. While they may not be too far from each other, their objectives are slightly different. While the objective of personal diplomacy is usually to persuade someone either for personal or national interests, shuttle diplomacy is usually to persuade a nation on behalf of a third party. "Shuttle diplomacy is the action of an outside party in serving as an intermediary between (or among) principals in a dispute, without direct principal-to-principal contact. Originally and usually, the process entails successive travel ("shuttling") by the intermediary, from the working location of one principal, to that of another". ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shuttle\\_diplomacy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shuttle_diplomacy)).

#### 4. Literature Review

Many political leaders have resorted to personal diplomacy in the conduct of their international relations. Ronald Reagan was a strong believer in personal diplomacy - the idea of having a face-to-face discussion with those he was seeking to persuade.

Writing about Reagan's personal diplomacy during the cold war, Edwin Meese III credited Reagan's personal diplomacy for the end of the Cold War. Referring to Margaret Thatcher's statement that Reagan "won the Cold War without firing a shot.", Meese III stated that "While Ronald Reagan stood firm in his opposition to Communist expansion and imperialism, his personal diplomacy and his relationship with Gorbachev were major factors in shaping the forces that ultimately led to the end of the Cold War - with victory for the cause of freedom" (Meese III, 2004).

George W. Bush is another leader that believed so much in personal diplomacy. According to him "I place a high priority on personal diplomacy. Getting to know a fellow world leader's personality, character, and concerns made it easier to find common ground and deal with contentious issues. That was a lesson I had picked up from Dad, who was one of the great practitioners of personal diplomacy." ([bushcenter.org/special-exhibits/art-of-leadership](http://bushcenter.org/special-exhibits/art-of-leadership)).

Writing about Winston Churchill, Klaus Larres (2002) traced Winston Churchill's political career from his early positions in the British government starting in 1908 to his resignation as prime minister in 1955 and argues that Churchill actively pursued personal diplomacy while in office. Churchill's personal diplomacy was "an imaginative and perhaps even visionary policy through which he attempted to reverse his country's declining fortunes and prevent or undo major catastrophes before the First World War, in the course of the Second World War and during the Cold War years" (p. xx). While Churchill was not always successful in his efforts, Larres asserted that recognizing his continuous pursuit of personal diplomacy provides a lens through which to understand his policies and actions

Obasanjo's commitment to personal diplomacy has been well documented as well. According to Cyril Obi (2012:198), "President Obasanjo's active personal diplomacy featured prominently in Nigeria's foreign policy. In his second coming as a head of State, Obasanjo proved instrumental to ECOWAS success in bringing peace to Sierra Leone and Liberia, as well as the international endorsement of the NEPAD".

A few academic articles have also been written about Charles Taylor's asylum in Nigeria. Writing about the legal implication of Charles Taylor's asylum, Frederick Agwu (2004) contended that Nigeria was not obliged to grant asylum to Charles Taylor because he was an accused in a war crime trial. Charles Taylor's asylum in Nigeria is, therefore, "illegal", (p.27). According to Agwu, the asylum granted Charles Taylor contradicts the UN General Assembly's Resolutions 2312 of 1967 and 3074 of 1973 which prohibit asylum to persons with respect to whom there are serious reasons for considering that they have committed crimes against the peace, humanity or war crimes.

Ojeh Ojione, in his contribution to the subject, identified the bases of public opposition to the asylum offer, which involves principally a general disdain for the person of Charles Taylor, given his antecedents. Regardless, the Nigerian government went ahead and provided asylum to Charles Taylor, putting what it considered Nigeria's interest first. The government adopted, therefore, a mode of moral judgment that was antagonistic to that of the people whom it is ideally supposed to stand for.

The article concludes that the dynamics which characterise the art of statesmanship, in which the primary responsibility is the survival of the nation-state, overpowered the potential of public opinion to exert decisive pressure, since the bulk of the public is believed to be largely inarticulate or uninformed. Ojione further sought to analyse the reaction of Nigerians to the granting of asylum to Charles Taylor in Calabar, Nigeria. Specifically, seven units of analysis were generated, four opposed to the asylum offer and three in support. The various arguments against the asylum offer were grouped into the four following broad categories:

"(i) An objection to the asylum project due to Taylor's antecedents including unfriendliness to Nigeria and Nigerians.

(ii) The involvement in Liberia had constituted a huge drain on Nigeria's economy, and similar gestures by Nigeria in the past were not appreciated by Taylor and his countrymen.

(iii) Taylor was sought for trial by the UN Crimes Court, and there were fears of reprisals from the international community or a possible threat to Nigeria's security.

(iv) The asylum offer flew in the face of public opinion and lacked consultation.

The supporting items were grouped into three main arguments:

(i) The offer of asylum was in consonance with Nigeria's big brother role in the ECOWAS sub-region and Africa as a whole; Nigeria has done it before; and should do it again.

(ii) The offer was in Nigeria's national interest and boosted its status as a regional and continental power.

(iii) Taylor's exit due to the offer of asylum was synonymous with peace in Liberia and in the entire ECOWAS sub-region". (P.81-82).

He concluded that even though those which endorsed the asylum on the grounds that it was in Nigeria's national interest and capable of boosting its status as a continental power generated the least number of referential issues, the Nigerian government went ahead with the project "because expert judgment based on dynamics has taken precedence over public opinion". (p.92-93).

Writing on the same subject was a former Nigeria's foreign Affairs Minister, Professor Bolaji Akinyemi (2004). Making reference to statements by the then Governor of Abia state, Orji Kalu, and US Secretary of State, Colin Powell, he asserted that the decision to grant Taylor a safe landing in Nigeria had the consent of the US and some other powers.

"Apart from this categorical evidence, there is supportive evidence. As of the time when President Bush visited Nigeria, it was very well known that the offer of asylum to Taylor was on the table. Knowing the American system as I do, if the Bush Administration was opposed to the asylum offer, Air Force One would have switched from touchdown mode to take-off mode even at the last minute. Not only did no such thing take place, there were no on-record or off-record briefing to indicate disagreements with the Obasanjo administration both during and after the visit. There were also on-the-record remarks by high officials of the Bush administration welcoming the developments in Liberia, after the exit of Taylor. Not only that, there was a close and warm relationship between Nigerian troops and United States marines for the short duration of the stay of the marines in Monrovia. I have no doubt in my mind that there was a clear understanding between the United States and Nigeria on the asylum issue" (p.14).

He further stated that "The European Union was also supportive of the move. A spokesman for the European Commission welcomed the asylum "it is a decision that seems to go in the right direction to stop the violence and reach a solution for Liberia". (p.14).

"I can also prove that Nigeria was working in tandem with ECOWAS and the African Union on the project. At the Monrovia International Airport, to witness the exit of Charles Taylor were Thabo Mbeki, President of South Africa, Joachiqim Chissano, President of Mozambique and Chairman of the African Union, John Kuffor, President of Ghana and Chairman of ECOWAS, and Mohammed Ibn Chambas, the Secretary-General of ECOWAS". (p.14). Akinyemi's proposition therefore was that the asylum decision was not a unilateral one by Nigeria.

## 5. Theoretical Framework

Leaders who embark on aggressive personal diplomacy like Bush, Obasanjo, Reagan and Churchill were leaders who believed in their personal ability to control situations. This leads us to the core of foreign policy analysis.

Foreign policy analysts have contended that the personality of Leaders has been a core of foreign policy analysis. At the top of every government sits a leader, or leaders, who have the authority to make foreign policy. Characteristics of leaders are generally more important when they have significant latitude in shaping policy and the situation is ambiguous, uncertain, or complex. Under these conditions, which occur frequently in foreign policy making, a leader's personality and beliefs may shape what the state does. (Levy, 2003).

Leaders' decisions may be shaped by their own personal history, their childhood, career and early political experiences building in them certain values and ways of handling problems.

Leaders have also been categorized into seven types of personalities depending on what drives and motivates them. (Hermann, 1980). Some leaders may be motivated by a need to dominate therefore practising conflictual policies while some may be more concerned with being accepted, and therefore be more cooperative.

Leaders' decision-making style and how they manage information and the people around them can also be important. Some leaders like Obasanjo choose to be quite active in foreign policy making. (Garba, 1987). They are less open to advice. Others are interested in keeping power or bridging conflicts. They are more open and sensitive to advice and are reluctant to make decisions without consultation.

Hence, the personal characteristics of the individual leader can become central in understanding foreign policy choice- (Herman, 2005).

Among the most prominent in the study of the application of personality trait to foreign policy choices is Margaret Hermann's Leadership Trait Analysis framework, an approach which focuses upon politically relevant personality traits. Leadership Trait Analysis conceptualizes personality as a combination of seven traits: belief in ability to control events, conceptual complexity, need for power, distrust of others, in-group bias, self-confidence, and task orientation. An individual's score on these variables is measured through a content analysis

of their verbal output. More specifically, an assumption is made that the more frequently leaders use certain words and phrases in their interview responses (and other verbal behaviour) the more salient such content is to them. (Hermann, 2005).

Using this technique, Hermann and others have studied the personality and leadership style of a wide range of individual including political leaders and presidents. (Hermann 1980, Dyson, 2006). Individual characteristics have been linked to factors such as the degree to which a leader challenges or respects constraints in the international environment, their openness to information, their motivation for leading, and their preferences over the structure and operation of advisory systems and decision processes (Hermann, 2005).

Some of the traits identified by these scholars are as follows;

**High Belief in Ability to Control Events:** indicates the individual's subjectively perceived degree of control over the political environment. Leaders higher in this trait believe themselves to be efficacious in relation to the political environment on a personal level, and perceive that their state is an influential political actor. A higher belief in ability to control events leads to a more proactive policy orientation, and a perception that the barriers to successful action are surmountable. In applications of this trait to foreign policy outputs Hermann (2005) found that, when combined with need for power, belief in ability to control events predicts the extent to which a political leader would challenge constraints within the international system.

**High Need for Power:** individuals higher in the need for power require greater personal control and involvement in policy, and have an increased concern that the policy output reflect their preference, rather than be a consensual group decision. By contrast, the lower the need for power, the greater the willingness to delegate and to accept an outcome contrary to the individual's desire. Hermann, (2005) suggests that individuals high in the need for power will acquire a great degree of expertise in sizing up situations and people, such that they will be very skilled in ensuring that outcomes reflect their preferences.

They tended to concentrate debate and decision within tight "inner circles" of advisers who did not necessarily occupy positions of formal authority, but were of like mind and personally dependent upon the leader. By contrast, individuals lower in the need for power exhibit less activist leadership styles, and were more comfortable with delegating responsibility and working through regularized structures that diffuse authority to others.

While this paper relies on Margaret Hermann's Leadership Trait Analysis framework, as recapped above, it deviates from her methodology. Her "at-a-distance" technique is dependent on content analysis of a leader's verbal behaviour to reach conclusions about the leader's personality trait. Rather, this paper will rely on comments made by acquaintances and subordinates about President Obasanjo's personality trait. I will rely on content analysis of two books written by two of Obasanjo's ministers when he was a military Head of State and a civilian president. Obasanjo's foreign minister when he was military Head of State between 1976 and 1979, Joe Garba in his book titled *Diplomatic Soldiering* gave a picture of Obasanjo's personality trait as follows;

- **Courageous and decisive:** According to Joe Garba (1997:11) Obasanjo, "had strong anti-colonial credentials. In 1974 he had written a thesis at the Royal College of Defence Studies contrasting the paucity of British economic assistance to Nigeria with what the British were gaining from Nigeria economically. His courageous and decisive approach to asserting Nigeria's interest over foreign convenience had dramatically emerged in May 1975, when as Federal Commissioner for Works, he forcibly took over a building occupied by the Us Embassy"
- **Intellectual and Energetic:** "With the death of Murtala in February 1976, most people thought that our foreign policy would lose its dynamism. But that did not happen. Indeed, Obasanjo to my mind was particularly impressive in applying his intellect as well as his energy to our international interests." (p.15).
- **Keen Interest in and Control of Foreign Policy:** "However, like many Heads of State who have a keen interest in foreign policy, Obasanjo developed his own machinery as a counterpoise to the Ministry of External Affairs. This took the form of the Political Division of the Cabinet Office". (P.15).

In another well-articulated book written by Nasir Ahmad El-Rufai:(2013), Obasanjo's Minister of Federal Capital Territory, identified Obasanjo's personality trait as follows;

- **Dual personality:** "I always had difficulty understanding Obasanjo how Obasanjo could sit with us and preach about sacrifice and transparency one moment and then the next, sit with Gaius Obaseki, the GMD of NNPC, about how to get some payments to the PDP from some oil or LNG deals. I never understood how a person could do this and sleep well. How can one have Obasanjo's complex personality and sleep well at night? Studying Bismarck, De Gaulle and the rest helped me make sense of this duality in leaders." (p.389)
- **Astuteness:** "Obasanjo was a very hand-on president who wanted to know everything. Anything that ought to concern the president, Obasanjo wanted to be briefed on, and he worked 20 hours a day to make sure he did not miss anything". (P.374).
- **Obasanjo's personalisation of power:** "...for many people like Obasanjo, loyalty means you do

everything that they want or demand; that you are on their side all the time with little regard to other objective values. Accordingly, Obasanjo and his capricious views and opinions are the benchmarks of one's patriotism. The constitution and the law are the secondary, not the primary standards." (p. lviii).

- National Interest Substituted for Personal Interest: El Rufai spoke of Obasanjo's "consistency in putting his personal interest before that of the nation". (p.460).
- Obasanjo's Intelligence: "In spite of all these deficits, President Obasanjo is an intelligent, hardworking, dedicated and competent leader." (p.460).
- Obasanjo's Control Freak personality: "my boss (Obasanjo) is uncomfortable with anyone he is not absolutely certain he could control"-(p.367).
- Mood Swing: Obasanjo is "capable of ... quick changes in demeanour"(p.368).

At a meeting with the then US Ambassador, Robin Sanders to discuss his removal from the Anti-graft agency, EFCC, Nuhu Ribadu told the US ambassador that Obasanjo was good at covering his tracks. Obasanjo, According to Ribadu really knew how to play the game. For instance, Obasanjo created the EFCC (Anti-Corruption Agency) and understood its importance for him with the international community but in reality, Ribadu explained, that by far and even more than the Abacha days where he was the sole thief, corruption under Obasanjo, eight years rule was far worse, because everyone stole. He added that Obasanjo was a political machine and knew how to play the game for the international community. (Wikileaks, 2011).

Deconstructing Garba, El Rufai and Ribadu's theses using Margaret Hermann's Leadership Trait Analysis, one can conclude that Obasanjo displayed "High Belief in Ability to Control Events", and "High Need for Power".

## 6. Charles Taylor and the Liberian Civil War

According to Wikipedia, Charles Taylor was born in Arthington, a town near Monrovia, Liberia, on 28 January 1948 to Nelson and Bernice Taylor. His mother was a member of the Gola ethnic group while his father was an Americo-Liberian. In 1977, Taylor earned a degree at Bentley College in Waltham, Massachusetts, USA.

Taylor supported and served in the Samuel Doe government which toppled and murdered President William R. Tolbert, Jr. Taylor was the Director General of the General Services Agency (GSA), where he was in charge of purchasing for the Liberian government. He fell out with Doe and was sacked in May 1983 for embezzling almost \$1,000,000.

Taylor fled to the United States but was arrested on 21 May 1984 on a warrant for extradition to face charges of embezzling \$1 million of government funds. Citing a fear of assassination by Liberian agents, Taylor fought extradition. While awaiting the conclusion of the extradition hearing, Taylor was detained in the Plymouth County House of Corrections.

On 15 September 1985, Taylor and four other inmates escaped from the jail having reportedly sawed through a bar covering a window in a dormitory room, a claim Taylor refuted later during his trial at the International Crimes Court and said his escape was aided by US Security Agents. In July 2009, Taylor himself claimed at his trial, at the UN-backed Special Court for Sierra Leone in the Hague, that US CIA agents had helped him escape from the maximum security prison in Boston in 1985. The US Defence Intelligence Agency did confirm at the trial that Taylor started working with US intelligence in the 1980s.

Taylor fled the United States after his miraculous escape from prison and shortly thereafter went to Libya, where he underwent guerrilla training under Muammar Gaddafi, after which he traveled to the Ivory Coast, where he founded the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL).

In December 1989, Taylor launched a Gaddafi-funded armed uprising from the Ivory Coast into Liberia to overthrow the Doe regime, leading to the First Liberian Civil War. By 1990, his forces controlled most of the country. That same year, Prince Johnson, a senior commander of Taylor's NPFL, broke away and formed the Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia (INPFL). In September 1990, Johnson captured Monrovia, depriving Taylor of outright victory. Doe was later captured and tortured to death by Johnson and his forces. The civil war turned into an ethnic conflict, with seven factions fighting for control of Liberia's resources (especially iron ore, diamonds, timber, and rubber).

With the intervention of the international community especially the Nigeria-led ECOMOC, the civil war subsided in 1996, and Taylor ran for president in the 1997 general election. The elections were overseen by the United Nations' peacekeeping mission, United Nations Observer Mission in Liberia, and representatives of the Economic Community of West African States. Taylor won the election in a landslide, garnering 75 percent of the vote in an election adjudged to be free and fair by international observers although Taylor was said to have had a huge advantage having already taken over the state radio station before the election coupled with widespread fear that Taylor would resume the war if he lost.

Barely two years into Taylor's presidency, numerous allegations began to surface concerning his involvement in the Sierra Leone Civil War. He was accused of aiding the rebel Revolutionary United Front (RUF) through weapon sales in exchange for blood diamonds. He was charged with aiding and abetting RUF

atrocities against civilians that left over 250,000 dead and many thousands mutilated as well as of assisting the RUF in the recruitment of child soldiers. In addition to aiding the RUF in these acts, Taylor reportedly personally directed RUF operations in Sierra Leone.

At the home front, a rebellion against Taylor began in northern Liberia, led by a group named Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) in 1999. This group was believed to have the backing of the government of neighbouring Guinea signalling the beginning of the Second Liberian Civil War.

LURD made appreciable inroad into Liberia and by 1999 had gained control of northern Liberia. Another rebel group, Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL), emerged in southern Liberia supported by Ivory Coast. By the end of 1999, Taylor's government controlled only Monrovia and the central part of the country representing about a third of Liberia.

In June 2003, the prosecutor to the Special Court for Sierra Leone (SCSL) announced that Taylor was charged with war crimes. The indictment asserted that Taylor created and backed the RUF rebels in Sierra Leone, who were accused of a range of atrocities, including the use of child soldiers. The Prosecutor also said that Taylor's administration had harboured members of Al-Qaeda sought in connection with the 1998 bombings of U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania.

The indictment was released to coincide with Taylor's official visit to Ghana, where he was participating in peace talks with MODEL and LURD officials organised by the then-South African president Thabo Mbeki, Ghanaian President John Kufour, and Nigerian President Obasanjo.

With the indictment, and the ongoing bloody battle for the soul of Liberia between the LURD, and Taylor's forces, U.S. President George W. Bush insisted that Taylor "must leave Liberia" on two occasions in July 2003. After a series of diplomatic manoeuvres, Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo offered Taylor exile on 9 July 2003 on the condition that Taylor stays out of Liberian politics.

On 10 August, Taylor appeared on national television to announce that he would resign the following day and hand power to Vice President Blah insisting that the Bush administration's insistence that he leaves the country would not augur well for Liberia.

## **7. Charles Taylor's Asylum in Nigeria**

On 11 August 2003, Taylor resigned as President of Liberia and handed over to his deputy, Vice President Blah at a function attended by Ghanaian President John Kufuor, South African President Thabo Mbeki, and Mozambican President Joaquim Chissano, all representing ECOWAS and African Union. Taylor then flew to Nigeria in a private jet provided by President Obasanjo. He was accompanied by Presidents John Kufuor of Ghana, Thabo Mbeki of South Africa, and Joaquim Chissano of Mozambique.

Apparently, the Asylum was a result of Obasanjo's personal diplomacy when he made a trip to Monrovia in early July, 2003 to make the asylum offer to Taylor. Obasanjo had stressed that the asylum was a necessary step to end the bloodbath in Liberia. This was part of a deal brokered by the trio of Obasanjo, and Presidents Thabo Mbeki and John Kufuor of South Africa and Ghana respectively. Obasanjo's personal diplomacy to persuade Taylor to resign and accept asylum in Nigeria therefore was a smart diplomatic move to avert another civil war which would not only have devastated Liberia but also the neighbouring countries of Sierra-Leone and Guinea. (Adeniyi, 2006).

This action in itself was at a great political risk to Obasanjo as many Nigerians could not understand why a man who murdered thousands of Nigerians could end up enjoying Nigeria's hospitality.

Prior to Taylor's Asylum, Nigeria was already hosting two other former Liberian warlords, Prince Johnson and Roosevelt Johnson, who lived in exile in the cities of Lagos and Jos respectively.

The good gesture of Obasanjo which succeeded in bringing sanity to Liberia and the sub-region culminating in a democratic election in Liberia that brought Johnson-Sirleaf to power soon turned sour as international and domestic pressure mounted that Taylor should be surrendered to the SCSL for trial. Locally, the Nigerian Union of Journalist (NUJ), whose two members, Krees Imodibie and Tayo Awotusin were killed by Taylor's forces and two Nigerian amputees from Sierra Leone approached the courts separately praying that Taylor's asylum in Nigeria be declared illegal. Even members of Obasanjo's party in the National Assembly disagreed with him on Taylor's asylum, while two former Nigeria's foreign minister, Olisemeka and Tom Ikimi declared that the decision for asylum was lacking in consultation. (Okhomina, O., 2003:1).

Internationally, there were pressures from the US which had placed a \$2 million ransom on Taylor's head, Human Rights watch which sent a letter to Obasanjo to extradite Taylor to the SCSL, and a host of others.

Obasanjo said that his government would "not be harassed by any person, organization or country for offering asylum to Taylor.

His foreign minister, Ambassador Oluyemi Adeniji, a former UN diplomat restated the government position more bluntly. "Nigeria will not be harassed by anybody about the indictment, and that is final". "You give somebody asylum on humanitarian grounds in order to save the Liberian people from fighting, in order to save the peace process... and three days later you hand him over to somebody else? That is not what a sovereign

country would do," he said. (Onah, 2003).

Nigerian foreign ministry officials were quoted as saying privately that the need to take in Taylor formed part of the discussions between Obasanjo and President George Bush during the Nigerian stop of his African visit.

Taylor was given stringent conditions for his stay in Nigeria to ensure he does not continue to foment trouble at home from his exile. "Not only is Taylor required to travel out of Calabar only with the permission of his hosts, he is also barred from commenting on Liberian affairs and can only grant interviews with the permission of the Nigerian government. Neither the former Liberian president nor members of his family will enjoy any immunities or special privileges while in Nigeria. In particular no form of arms or ammunition must be found in his possession or that of any member of his entourage." (Adeniyi, 2006).

Despite the myriad of attacks on Obasanjo over Taylor's asylum in Nigeria with very few statements and articles in support, the position of this paper is that as far as the priority was ending the bloody conflict in Liberia and preventing it from infecting the rest of the West Africa region, Obasanjo's personal diplomacy worked perfectly well.

"Amidst pressure to extradite Taylor to the ICC, Obasanjo said Nigeria cannot be harassed by anybody for whatsoever reason as far as the Taylor issue was concerned. For some of us, that was a bold and courageous move by an African leader. The implication is that; we have come of age and that; the problems of Africa can be handled by Africans" (Adeniyi, 2006).

On March 25, 2006, Associated Press broke the news that Nigeria had agreed to hand over Charles Taylor to the newly inaugurated Liberian President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf who had requested that Taylor be turned over during her visit to Washington. Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo agreed to hand Taylor over after he had discussed the request with African regional leaders. This was in line with Obasanjo's earlier position that he would only turn Taylor over to a democratically elected government of Liberia upon a request.

But before the Government of Liberia could complete the arrangement to take Taylor into its custody, Charles Taylor was said to have escaped from Calabar where he had lived for 2 years. His escape also coincided with Obasanjo's visit to the US for a pre-arranged meeting with President Bush.

While in the US and before his meeting with Bush, Obasanjo had addressed a World press conference in Washington where he explained his position in the Charles Taylor's asylum saga; "As the peace negotiation was progressing in Accra in 2003, it was agreed that Mr. Taylor had to be persuaded to resign as President of Liberia and to voluntarily leave the country to give peace a chance and for the successful implementation of the Agreement up to the stage of democratic election of a new President. Nigeria and other African Leaders took it upon themselves to persuade Mr. Taylor to accept to resign and to voluntarily leave his country. Nigeria offered to host him on behalf of West Africa and indeed Africa following due consultation with the UN and our development partners including the United States. Without rescinding the earlier indictment, everyone turned a blind eye to get Mr. Taylor to peacefully leave Liberia. In fact, the then Chairman of ECOWAS, President John Kufuor, the out-going Chairman and incoming Chairman of the AU (African Union), Presidents Thabo Mbeki and Joachim Chissano escorted him to Nigeria in August 2003. With the democratic election completed in Liberia and with President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf coming into power, it would seem that the Accra Peace Agreement had been fully and successfully concluded. President Johnson-Sirleaf formally requested to take custody of Mr. Taylor. After consultation in the manner that preceded his being hosted in Nigeria, a positive response was given to President Johnson-Sirleaf on Saturday 25 March 2006. To the utter dismay of the Federal Government of Nigeria and in abuse of our hospitality, Mr. Charles Taylor, former President of Liberia was discovered to have disappeared from Calabar, where he had lived for more than two years". (Allafrica.com, 2006).

Obasanjo denied any personal relationship with Taylor and said that he "took great political risk in offering to host Mr. Taylor on behalf of the international community and humanity to avoid continued bloodshed in Liberia even in the face of allegations of his complicity in the death of some Nigerians in his country".

"I will return home after my meeting with President Bush and my engagement in New York to ensure that the issue of the whereabouts of Mr. Taylor is relentlessly and vigorously pursued to its logical conclusion. I strongly believe that Taylor cannot escape from the watchful eyes and alertness of the Nigerian security agencies if he is alive and within Nigeria's borders". Just as Obasanjo was to enter into the meeting with Bush, Taylor was reported to have been taken into custody by Nigerian security agents who apprehended him at the Nigerian border with Cameroon.

## 8. Conclusion

This paper set out to examine the personal diplomacy embarked upon by Nigeria's president Olusegun Obasanjo in 2003 to resolve the Liberian situation by offering asylum to the then Liberia's President Charles Taylor in order to bring about peace to Liberia and the West African sub region. Obasanjo succeeded in achieving this. Through Obasanjo's personal diplomacy, Nigeria was true to all her obligations on the issue without

compromising her national integrity. He ensured the successful end of the Liberian war by negotiating Taylor's exit from Liberia, He helped to ensure that a democratic government was put in place in Liberia and succeeded through “diplomatic manoeuvres” that Taylor did not evade justice ad infinitum.

Even though Taylor’s attempted escape from Nigeria was believed to have been staged to justify Taylor’s extradition, one could rely on a “similar case evidence” to say that since Taylor had “escaped” from jail in the US once, he could do it again and again without being prompted. The other argument that the Taylor issue was resolved according to the whims and caprices of the United States is a topic for another paper.

Rather, we will conclude that Obasanjo’s personal diplomacy was a result of his leadership traits as earlier identified in this paper, which played a major role in resolving the Liberian civil war and Charles Taylor’s asylum saga.

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