

Nigeria in the Global System, 1960-1975: Exploring the Foundation of an Emergent African State's International Relations

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Abstract

The interplay of colonization and attainment of independence as a critical element of inter-state relations in the contemporary international system has manifested in the nature and character of the relationship between African states (as former colonies) with other members of the global system particularly their former colonial masters. The Nigerian experience in terms of membership, status and activities within the international system, which largely typifies the African story, can be better understood and appreciated in that context. The 1960-1975 period remains a very critical phase in Nigerian history as an emergent African state given that, it was in the period that the first two regimes (civilian and military) ruled the country and provided the foundational architecture of governance upon which successive regimes built. It is against this backdrop that this article explores the Nigerian membership of the international system between 1960 and 1975. Adopting the analytical method of historical reconstruction as a valuable perspective for its discussion, the study is qualitative as it depends moderately on primary source materials, and largely on secondary source materials. The study found that some of the foreign policy decisions of the two regimes were not sufficiently well-thought out particularly in an atmosphere of international power rivalry, which represented a wide gate of multilateralism. Such decisions eventually ended as abysmal strategic failure, which has, for a long time, haunted the Nigeria's drive for improved status and increased influence on, and prestige in, the international system.

Keywords: Membership, Foreign policy decision, Status, International influence

1. Introduction

It is commonly acknowledged that an understanding of the past is fundamental to effective management and workings of the present. The analysis and interpretation of history provides an essential context of evaluating and appreciating contemporary configuration of institutions, cultures, political systems and economies among others. Beyond this, history also provides unique insights into human nature and human civilization; helps us develop a sense of context and coherence while recognizing complexity and ambiguity, thus enabling us confront the records of both human achievements and failures. In essence, history provides us with richly textured substantive framework for understanding the human condition and grappling with moral questions and problems. In view of the foregoing, this paper examines the working of Nigerian diplomacy and implementation of its foreign policy between 1960 and 1975. This period is a deliberate choice to cover two distinct regimes (civilian and military) that laid the foundation for contemporary (independent) Nigerian State. Also, each of the regimes represented the longest in the two divides of civilian and military regimes in Nigerian political history¹ before 1999, and most of the nuances of internal and international pressures affecting the direction of Nigerian diplomacy and foreign policy were set during the period of study. The Ironsi regime (January-July 1966) was, more or less a brief interlude that did not record any major achievements/failures different from what preceded it. Thus, it commands no serious consideration here beyond a cursory mention.

Since 1999, Nigeria has been at a democratic juncture of its history when its foreign policy has had to respond to some democratic forces of different interests usually of sectarian nature as manifest in ethno-religious persuasions. Internal dynamics as well as reaction to external situations are usually the determinants of any country's (including Nigeria's) foreign policy. This study is, therefore, an attempt to understand the present working and position of Nigerian diplomacy and foreign policy through the eyes of its history under the first two major regimes. Osuntokun has aptly justified this in his argument that "Foreign policy cannot be considered in a vacuum without taking into consideration the historical genesis and development on the country".² Hence, the contemporary realities of Nigerian external relations in terms of state behaviour, failings and successes can be understood in the context of the historical foundation offered by the two successive regimes in Nigeria between 1960 and 1975. The provision of that understanding is the chief objective of this study.

In addition to this brief introduction, some terms used in the study are defined. The foreign policy implication of attainment of independence is also discussed as a background platform for the study, while the aims and objectives of Nigeria's foreign policy as articulated in 1960 are also outlined. The study proceeds to discuss the country's international relations under the two regimes. It concludes with an analysis of the period of study in the history of Nigeria's foreign policy and international relations, as well as suggestions for improving the Nigerian status in the contemporary international space.

2. Definition of Terms

For clarity of exposition, the three concepts of foreign policy, international relations and state behaviour have to be defined. Foreign policy entails all those policies a country formulates towards the protection of its interest in the international system. Kolawole sees it as the instrumentality of making friends and of creating enemies.³ Rosenau as quoted by Kolawole defines foreign policy as “the authoritative actions which governments take - or are committed to take – in order to preserve the desirable aspects of the international environment or alter its undesirable aspects”.⁴ Pratt sees it as comprising “the objectives that a nation seeks in its international relations and the means and methods by which it pursues them.”⁵ In essence, a nation articulates its foreign policy to serve as the blueprint which guides the conduct of its international relations. It is usually a reflection of how a country’s leadership perceives or understands the international community. On the other hand, international relations, as a concept, encompass all forms of formal relationship among nations of the world, which may be between two countries (bi-lateral) or among several countries (multi-lateral). That is, it is the relationship conducted between or among countries of the world otherwise known as the international system.⁶

Kolawole maintains that “the behaviour of a state (in the international system) is nothing but the behaviour of its decision-makers”.⁷ He quotes Richard Synder *et al.* that, “state action is the action taken by those acting in the name of the state”.⁸ In a similar vein, Osuntokun opines that “The foreign policy of a country is essentially designed to protect its national interest. Even though this national interest is permanent, the way to achieve it will depend on the methods adopted by whoever is head of government or head of the country”.⁹ This implies that the conduct of any nation’s international relations and the nature and structure of its foreign policy are a reflection of the personal idiosyncrasies of the country’s decision-makers. This is not to deny the influences of other variables particularly those external to the country in question, which according to Idang, may be real, imagined and contrived.¹⁰

3. Independence: Implication and articulation of Foreign Policy Principles

In the international system of our contemporary time, a country of Nigeria’s geographical size, population and vast national resources is expected to be a major player in the game of international relations with considerable freedom of action. In Africa where Nigeria was (and still is) unequalled in most of these trappings of power and influence, the country was looked up to becoming a *de-facto* leading player in both the inter-state politics within the Continent and in Africa’s relationship with the rest of the world. Following her attainment of independence on October 1, 1960, Nigeria discarded the toga of its hitherto tutelary external relations in which Britain was the overseeing authority, without a mark of sovereignty.¹¹ Indeed, Nigeria became a recognizable member of the international system like other African countries that gained independence in the 1960s. However, in view of the unfolding politics of the Cold War (1945-1990), Nigeria entered a global system that was enmeshed in the whirlpool of two opposing power blocs; one headed by the United States of America and the other by the former USSR. As an independent country, it was possible for Nigeria to take her stand within this intricate system. Consequently, Nigeria considered it more expedient “to stay out of military blocs and pursue political and ideological neutrality...”¹²

As has been hinted, a number of variables determine the foreign policy of a given nation. In the case of Nigeria, like other African countries, its foreign policy and the style of conducting its international relations under successive regimes have been, in part, determined by the country’s colonial history. Through what came to be known as ‘Partition of Africa’ as well calibrated in the 1884-1885 Berlin Conference in which the map of Africa was re-drawn by some European powers, Nigeria became an integral part of the administrative sphere of Britain.¹³ Akinyemi has identified four domestic structures which Britain bequeathed to Nigeria at independence, and which “have profoundly influenced the determination and conduct of its foreign policy objectives and action”¹⁴ and by extension, the nature of its international relations (emphasis is mine). These include the political, military, economic and socio-cultural structures, which in various ways have entrenched British values and ideals in the foreign policy structure of Nigeria. For example, the Nigerian economic structure since independence has remained largely tied to the British system. The arrangement is a skewed relationship which strengthens British international trade position in terms of the value of currency and transfer of economic surplus from Nigeria.¹⁵ Britain handed over to the Nigeria leaders at independence a kind of stereotyped economic blueprint, which was a marked extension of its home system. The financial system for example was tailored after the British model. The Nigerian currency was tied to the British sterling exchange market while “the Nigeria’s external reserves were not only largely in sterling but the exchange rates were also determined in London”.¹⁶

Through all these bequeathed structures, the perpetuity of colonial legacy and marks in Nigeria’s domestic environment and by extension her foreign policy, became a settled matter. The whole arrangement appears to a discerning observer as a well orchestrated action by Britain to ensure a relative absence in post-colonial Nigeria of a coherent and inclusive national ideology on which to base its overall foreign policy. It was in that mould that managers of Nigerian foreign policy at independence articulated the fundamental aims and principles of her foreign policy.

Wolfram Handrieder's position is instructive here. As quoted by Gordon Idang, Handrieder sees foreign policy as "a coordinated strategy with which institutionally designated decision makers seek to manipulate the international environment" in order to achieve certain national objectives".¹⁷ Makers of foreign policy are to articulate the national interests of their country and relate those interests to those of other countries in the international system. Usually, an effective way to perform this role is hinged on a number of widely accepted general principles. These principles can be seen as certain basic standards or conditions upon which foreign policy initiation, articulation, and eventual implementation are, of necessity, based. Principles provide a sound basis upon which widely accepted policies can be formulated and styles of conducting international relations are fine-tuned. On the other hand, aims, which are inextricably fused with principles, are those goals a country hopes to achieve in the course of its international relations. The close nexus between aims and principles explains why a change in one leads to a change in the other.

Sir Tafawa Balewa, Nigerian Prime Minister at independence, made the first official statement on Nigeria's foreign policy on August 20, 1960 in the Federal House of Representatives. In what Idang describes as "a brief but strongly worded policy statement"¹⁸, Sir Abubakar tried to state the major elements of the general principles that would guide the style of the country's relations with the outside world and the thrust of her foreign policy. One of such principles was that of "independent policy which would be founded on 'Nigeria's interest', and would be consistent with the moral and democratic principles on which our constitution is based".¹⁹ He further articulated the aims and principles of Nigeria's foreign policy in his address to the United Nations' General Assembly on October 7, 1960 when Nigeria was admitted as the ninety-ninth member of the United Nations. These aims and principles²⁰, are as follows:

- a) The defence and promotion of Nigeria's sovereignty, territorial integrity and national independence.
- b) The creation of the necessary economic and political conditions to secure the government, territorial integrity and national independence of other African countries and their total liberation from imperialism and all forms of foreign domination.
- c) Creation of the necessary conditions for the economic, political, social and cultural development of Africa.
- d) Promotion of the right of all black and oppressed peoples throughout the world.
- e) Promotion of African unity.
- f) Promotion of world peace built on freedom, mutual respect and equality for all peoples of the world.
- g) Respect for the territorial integrity of all nations.
- h) Non-partisanship in East-West ideological disputes and freedom of association and action in the international system.

From the foregoing principles, it is noticeable that Africa occupied the central stage in Nigeria's foreign policy thrust at independence. These principles have over the years remained the major base of the country's conduct of international relations with not – too – fundamental modifications. In the words of Otubanjo, the principles "have retained their vitality and remained virtually unedited through the changes of regimes and the vagaries of domestic policies" He adds with emphasis that not even the Adedeji Foreign Policy Review Panel, set up by the regime of General Muhammad Muritala could assemble a more comprehensive or radically different set of objectives.²¹ In a similar vein, General Joe Garba calls those principles "a thought-out and forward looking prescription for Nigerian's foreign policy". He adds that while listening to the tape that contains the October 7, 1960 speech of Balewa, "I have been struck by how durable are the goals he enunciated. Despite the catchy phrases carried by successive foreign ministers – "Afro-centrism", "concentric circles", "medium powers", "economic diplomacy" and the like – the continuities in Nigeria are there".²²

However, while Africa has continuously remained at the centre of foreign policy thrust in Nigerian, it should be noted that the various regimes have not always shared the same perception of the intricacies of the international system. Neither have they conceptualized Nigeria's role in the system or the strategies for attaining the country's goals in the international environment in the same fashion. This is in spite of the fact that they have been guided by the same set of principles.

4. An Overview of Nigerian Foreign Policy under Balewa

The above principles were articulated by the Balewa regime, it did not always act in accordance with spirit and letters of the principles. For example, despite the declared principle of non-alignment in the Cold War, the Balewa administration was largely pro-Western and demonstrated thinly-veiled aversion towards the Eastern bloc. Balewa's perception of the contemporary international system was that it was a terrain where Nigeria could survive only by cautious tread and by remaining friendly only with the trusted friends while discouraging relations with others. This was a clear negation of the afore-noted principle of non-alignment. Balewa showed his preference by declaring that "we shall never forget our old friends, and we are proud to have been accepted as a member of the Commonwealth". He added a contradiction that,

One great advantage which we new nations have is that the accession to

independent (sic) makes a clear break with our past and presents us with the opportunity to enter into the field of international relations untrammelled by prior commitments.²³

While the first remark was a clear testimony that Nigeria was still to continue her tutelary relationship with Britain in particular, and extended that tutelage to her Western allies, the latter signaled policy somersault that eventually followed. Implicitly, Nigeria was not going to engage with any other country not endorsed by Britain. It demonstrated further that there are contradictions in the professed principles of external relations and the actual practice of such principles in the conduct of foreign relations. It showed further that Balewa and his close lieutenants had only poor understanding of the binary options of opportunities that the realities of the Cold War offered Nigeria, while they had no good mastery of the famous dictum “No permanent enemy or friend in international politics, but there is permanent interest.”

From the shoddy manner of packaging the Anglo-Nigerian Defence Pact of 1958²⁴ through which Britain was to gain uncontrolled access to Nigerian internal environment, to the nomenclature of Nigeria’s ministry of external affairs as Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Commonwealth Relations, and Balewa’s decision to personally man the ministry between October

1960 and July, 1961²⁵, it was very clear that the Balewa regime was keen on maintaining a kind of special relations with Britain²⁶, even after the abrogation of the defence pact in 1961. Also, in July 1961, the freedom of Nigerian foreign policy action was called to question during the Bizerte crisis in Tunisia. The crisis broke out when the Tunisian authority imposed a blockade on the French naval base at Bizerte, Tunisia, hoping to force its evacuation. The crisis culminated in a three-day battle between French and Tunisian forces that left some 630 Tunisians dead and 1,555 others wounded, and 24 French dead, with 100 others wounded.²⁷ As a leading African nation, expectations were high on Nigeria to, at least, issue a statement condemning the French overbearing attitude in an African nation that had gained independence in 1956. But sadly, the Balewa regime chose to contact London before taking a firm decision, apparently, to seek the directive and endorsement of the British authority so as not to act contrary to the entrenched Western stance.

From all indications, the tone and dimension of relations with the international community during the Balewa years, were determined on the basis of prejudice rather than on strategic calculation of advantage. A clear demonstration of this is that the Soviet Union was not allowed to open an embassy in Lagos until 1961 ostensibly because ‘Nigeria could not afford to reciprocate such in Moscow’. However, the real reason was that British tutors had indoctrinated Nigerian leaders with strong anti-communism sentiments. For a long time, communism related literature was banned from circulation in Nigeria while USSR – trained Nigerians were not employed into the civil service. It has been said that prior to the civil war, Nigeria and the Soviet Union maintained what can be called a zero and minimal relationship.²⁸ As if Nigeria had not really been ‘hatched out of the shell of colonial rule’, Balewa could hardly take any major foreign policy without first consulting the British government.

Despite the professed interest of the Balewa regime in Pan-Africanism, its cautious and functional approach drew the ire of articulate Nigerians. Balewa had declared that “We belong to Africa and Africa must claim first attention in our external affairs”²⁹. He buttressed this further by pleading to the UN gathering in 1960 that;

Please do not think that we are not interested in other regions, and we hope to be allowed to assist in finding solutions to them through this organization. But, being human, we are naturally concerned first with what effect our immediate neighborhood.³⁰

But what came up as the African thrust of Nigerian external relations fell short of the expectations of the people. Neither could it inspire national pride. Enahoro once declared that “A policy which advocates functional cooperation instead of organic (political) union of Africa cannot inspire anybody”.³¹ Tafawa Balewa conceived of Pan-African union as a long term evolution process. To him, it was too early to be thinking of an organic political union for the whole continent. He advocated continuous prolonged contact to serve as a base for possible future political fusion. Balewa and those that thought like him diplomatically felt strongly that economic and cultural cooperation would be more useful to the African cause than political union. Balewa detested any adjustment to the existing boundaries which grew out of the 1884-1885 Berlin Conference. This was clearly unveiled thus;

.....I must say that I do not rule out the possibility of eventual union. But for the present, it is unrealistic to expect countries to give up their sovereignty which they have so recently acquired, and I am quite sure that it is wrong to imagine that political union could of itself bring the countries together. On the contrary, it will follow as a natural consequence of cooperation in other fields.³²

However, the position of Balewa on external relations may be justified after all. Idang has articulated six reasons for this. One, Nigeria could not help projecting into the building of her foreign policy, the same caution and verbal compromise that characterized her domestic politics. Two, any formula to create a supranational unity of Africa would, by tipping the balance of power against some tribal or cultural groupings, intensify tribal jealousies and inter-group tensions in Nigeria. Three, the history of Nigeria's march to independence is replete with a culture of dialogue in terms of discussions, constitutional conferences and meetings. From this, the foreign policy managers have learnt of the importance of dialogue and negotiations in inter-group relations. Four, due to the pressing need for economic and political development, any move that could shift the leaders' focus on attaining these goals was tactically avoided. Five, the political turbulence of first republic did not give the Nigerian ruling elite the leverage to focus fully on external affairs. Six, unlike other African states (particularly the Francophone states), the manner and atmosphere of Nigeria's attainment of independence was less bitter and elicited little anti-European feelings in the minds of the leaders.³³ This was why the professed non-alignment policy was more of an alignment policy.

5. Nigerian Foreign Policy in the Gowon Years, 1966-1975

Unarguably, the longest regime in Nigeria's political history so far, the Gowon regime came up after the short regime of Aguyi Ironsi³⁴ and appeared to have a clearly different view and perception of the international system. This has been explained as due to the prevailing circumstances under which the Gowon regime operated.

Given the imperatives of domestic politics and the opportunities of a more relaxed international system, it was not surprising that Gowon's foreign policy attitude and orientation, as well as the perception of Nigeria's interest and the means on attaining them, were significantly different from those of Balewa.³⁵

There were two fundamental developments during the Gowon regime which might reasonably form the background against which the country's external relations of the period could be analyzed. These were the civil war and the oil fortune. During the civil war, uncertain future was very glaring in the Nigerian horizon and there was a big question on the National Interest. The national interest then was to maintain national unity and to take all appropriate means and measures to prevent the territorial disintegration of Nigeria. But, it is interesting to note that apart from condemning the Federal blockade against the waters of Eastern Nigeria as against international law, Britain laid embargo on sale of arms to the Federal Government. This was followed by similar embargo by the United States, France, Holland and Czechoslovakia. In such instance, the Gowon regime had to have a more relaxed, flexible and all-embracing world view. Gowon therefore embraced the Eastern block (particularly the Soviet Union)³⁶ without severing relationship with the West. This was in view of the growing demand for weapons and international support to prosecute the war to a successful end. As a matter of fact, other things followed the new Nigeria-Soviet diplomatic romance. Apart from arms supply, the Soviet Union secured a billion naira contract to build Nigeria's first steel plant and gained other contracts to lay oil pipelines for the distribution of Nigeria's oil products.³⁷ Indeed, the civil war spurred Nigeria into taking up new demands and changing its attitude in the international environment.

Following the outburst of the oil wealth from the late 1960s to the early 1970s, Nigeria's foreign policy and membership of the international system assumed a new dimension. As Otubanjo notes;

Oil wealth strengthened the opportunity for positive non-alignment and provided the impetus for a more expansive role in Africa; an active presence in world politics and indeed a radical role in regional economic relations and the search for distributive justice in the international system.³⁸

Gowon did not fail to explore the spinal strength gained by Nigeria through the oil wealth. No sooner had the Civil War ended than the Federal Government unveiled its plan to take over a controlling share in the operations of the various multi-national oil companies. This was to compensate Nigeria for its loss of a natural resource. Between 1973 and 1974, the government proceeded to buy 55 percent of the total shares of these companies, excluding Shell – BP. Negotiation over the Shell- BP was not concluded until after Gowon's visit to London in 1974 after which only 35 percent of the company's share was bought by the government.³⁹

After the war, Gowon embarked on what can be called operation 'win-back-former friends'. It will be recalled that for diverse reasons⁴⁰, during the war time, professionals (career diplomats) as against political appointees were in charge of external relations. This trend was to change after the war as Gowon himself assumed full responsibility of driving the architecture of the nation's external affairs. Nigeria's image in the international arena then was, according to Joe Garba, "based on two things; the former Head of State himself - because he toured extensively- and oil"⁴¹ As a matter of fact, in its desperate need to successfully implement the post-war reconstruction programme and given the dynamics of that period, the Gowon government needed to win back its old friends both within and outside Africa. In this vein, Adeniran opines on the Anglo-Nigerian

relations then that, “A dependent country such as Nigeria needed a country like Britain before, during and after the civil war to ensure national survival and a diplomatic breakthrough on all fronts”⁴²

Two things are crucial to be noted at this juncture. One, in the heat of the confusion that followed the July 1966 counter-coup⁴³ in terms of selecting a national leader among the armed forces top brass, Britain, through her High Commissioner to Nigeria: Francis Cunnning-Bruce (1963-1966), played a significant role in picking then Lt. Col. Yakubu Gowon and ensuring the country’s corporate survival. Two, despite the embargo on arms supply to the Federal Government during the war, Britain was not categorical on whether to offer outright support either to the seceding Biafran side or the Federal Government. Britain cautiously watched the trend of events, and the guess can be hazarded that Britain seemed confused given its interest in the corporate survival of Nigeria. Apparently when it appeared that the Federal side would win the war, Britain resumed arms shipment to the Federal Government and this continued throughout the war. The concession granted Shell – BP by the Gowon government has been seen as a period of trial.⁴⁴

In the post-war years of Gowon regime (1970-1975), the Anglo-Nigerian relationship was reverted back to its former position of cordiality while the Soviet Union was pushed back to her position of pariah where she was kept in safe distance. That Nigeria did not significantly further relations with Soviet Union after the war was a testimony to the dictum that ‘no permanent friend or enemy in international politics, but there is permanent interest’. It also demonstrated the extent of the neo-colonial grip of Britain on her former colony – a grip that had been perfected through the multi-national companies operating in the diverse sections of the nation’s economy. There was though, no permanent damage to Nigerian – Soviet relations, what remained of the relationship was that Soviet Union was recognized as a respectable and useful superpower to relate and be dealt with whenever the need arose, and to be accepted and welcomed when she came around.

5.1. Gowon’s Post-War Diplomacy – A Brief Survey

As has been noted earlier, after the war, Gowon was faced with the herculean task of winning back old friends both within and outside Africa, the war had ended in January 1970 and post-war reconstruction programme had begun almost immediately. Nigeria drew closer to Britain, from which she hoped to obtain the greatest assistance, and the European Economic Community – a regional body through which the support and favour of countries like France and Germany could be curried. Nigeria went ahead to award to France and Germany the contracts to establish car assembly plants (Peugeot and Volkswagen respectively) in Nigeria. Basking in the euphoria of oil wealth which she could flaunt, Nigeria committed ₦19.5million to the expansion of the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation. This was aside from earlier bi-lateral agreements on technical aid the country had entered into with Canada, India and Britain. Gowon, on behalf of Nigeria, also paid the salaries of civil servants of Granada in 1975.⁴⁵

In the home fronts (in Africa), Nigeria renewed relations with Tanzania and Zambia.⁴⁶ Joint enterprise negotiations were also concluded with Guinea for the exploitation of iron ore in that country, and with Togo and Republic of Benin for cement processing. By 1974, Nigeria agreed to supply crude oil to Ivory Coast⁴⁷ (Cote d’Ivoire) refineries. This was followed by the establishment of the Chad Basin Authority which embraced Nigeria, Niger and Chad. The Gowon regime turned eastward to ‘finally’ resolve the lingering conflict over the northern section of the former British Cameroun.⁴⁸ What is arguably the major achievement of Gowon in his post-war diplomacy was the almost singular establishment of ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) by Nigeria. The terms and instrument of establishing ECOWAS was finally ratified and agreed to by all the states involved in 1975.⁴⁹ The institution of ECOWAS, as Gana notes, “brought into fruition the first functional organization that united the Francophone and Anglophone groups of countries since the abortive union of Ghana, Guinea and Mali in 1958”.⁵⁰ The treaty was to be effective upon its ratification by seven states. It was to be deposited with the Nigerian Government, thus implying that “Nigeria diplomacy had triumphed over regional particularism”.⁵¹

It is crucial to note, at least cursorily, what prompted Gowon into the idea of ECOWAS despite the existence of a regional body similar to ECOWAS in West Africa then.⁵² This Nigerian penchant for a new body might not be unconnected with the triumph of the Government in the civil war and the stupendous oil wealth that eminently put Nigeria in a vantage position in the African state system. To further demonstrate the leading status of Nigeria, the Gowon regime might have deemed it expedient to evolve a regional platform not only to sustain that status but also to protect and further brighten the country’s image. Apart from this, economic consideration might have also explained the formation of ECOWAS. Immediately after the war, Nigeria was faced with the herculean task of reconstruction, and since the nation’s economy was closely tied with the western capitalist economy, it had to improve ties with Britain particularly and other western nations in general. But, the entry of Britain into the European Economic Community (EEC) was an issue of grave concern to the Gowon regime. As Adeniran argues;

It would mean free trade between European countries to the detriment of Nigeria; it would raise some barriers between Britain and Nigeria and the

pursuit of certain policies that could affect Nigeria – British (trade) nations as well as some policy implications for the free movement of labour and capital, which could adversely affect the Nigerian leadership and its type of capitalist orientation.⁵³

He adds that “Thoughts about these prompted Nigeria to pursue more vigorously the idea of a regional or sub-regional economic association”.⁵⁴ However, despite this seeming brawl in the Anglo-Nigerian relations, both countries still demonstrated their willingness to remain in close tie with each other. The visit Gowon made in Britain in June 1973 has been labeled “One of the steps taken to assure Britain of Nigeria’s loyalty”.⁵⁵ On the other hand, “Britain, indeed, made some moves after the war to ensure that Nigeria was not lost as a major ally”⁵⁶ while the post-war reconstruction programme of Gowon regime was also fine-tuned in London⁵⁷. Okolo argues in this vein that;

Under Gowon, relations with the West soon reached their pre-war level of cordiality. Relations with Britain even seemed to have hit the “special relation” mark of the Balewa era with Gowon’s highly publicized state visit to Britain and reception at Birmingham Palace.⁵⁸

This trend of diplomatic shuttle with its accompanying unguarded granting of concessions was also extended to the Soviet Union at least once in 1973 when Gowon paid a state visit to Moscow. On return from the trip, Gowon announced that “Nigeria’s most ambitious industrial undertaking, the iron and steel complex at Ajaokuta was to be built by the Russians into Nigeria and hundreds of Nigerian engineers began to be trained in the Soviet Union in steel technology”.⁵⁹ Gowon also visited China in September 1974 as a follow-up to the preliminary contacts preparatory to commencement of formal Sino-Nigerian diplomatic ties from 1971. The much-publicized visit earned for Nigeria a joint communiqué assuring friendly ties and bi-lateral agreement on economic and technical cooperation, and trade as well as China’s pledge for support for liberation struggles across Africa. Earlier on, China had opened embassy in Lagos on April 6, 1970 while Nigeria reciprocated that gesture in Moscow in October the same year. Nigeria had also openly supported the People’s Republic of China’s bid to regain its seat in the UN Security Council following the crisis between PRC (Mainland China) and the Republic of China (Taiwan).⁶⁰ While this style of personalized diplomacy, which smacked of undue special relationship with Britain, unguarded concessions, and squandering of national resources as instruments of statecraft and diplomacy, won for Gowon a major acclaim from the international environment, it was to, among other factors, lead to the ouster of his regime by a new set of military coup plotters in August 1975. Garba attests to it that, “One of the things that had bothered us increasingly about Gowon’s style was his personalization of Nigerian diplomacy”, and that;

I kept remembering that one of our reasons for removing Gowon from office had been the squandering of Nigeria’s resources in such far-away Grenada and Guyana paying civil service salaries and balancing recurrent budgets with no return, economic or political, for Nigeria. Now, here was twenty million dollars in cash going to Angola without even a discussion of what Nigeria might gain, or even what uses it would be put to. Indeed, at the first appearance of the MPLA Government at the OAU summit in Mauritius in July 1976, Nigeria’s name was conspicuously absent from the list of countries to which they publicly paid tribute for assistance in achieving their Independence.⁶¹

On July 29, 1975, the Gowon’s military government was overthrown and General Ramat Murtaga Muhammed became the new head of state, thus ending the long reign of Gowon, and opening a fresh chapter in the unfolding chequered history of nation building in Nigeria.

6. Conclusion

The two regimes considered in this paper represent two distinct epochs in Nigeria’s political history. The Balewa regime (1960-1966) was, though a civilian, an evidently conservative government which brooked no opposition from the more radical progressive forces. This conservatism was clearly demonstrated in the foreign policy and style of external relations of the government. It showed an unveiled commitment to be pro-Western in practical external contact. As has been shown thus far, the country’s relations with other non-Western countries are indicative of a government that constituted itself to a willing appendage to Britain and other Western nations. It was such a ridiculous state of things that any external contact not approved in London was never undertaken. The political economy of the period indicated that the Balewa regime was transitional only in symbolic terms as Nigeria attained flag independence in 1960. But the country was bereft of all trappings of a politically and economically independent sovereign nation. The economy of Nigeria, which had been integrated to the international economic system in a skewed relationship to the benefit of the imperial capitalistic economy of the West since the years of slave trade, still remained so subsequently tied under Balewa. The government maintained the pattern of production, trade, foreign investment, foreign aid, and international monetary

transactions inherited from the colonial period, which were designed in the interest of the Western powers.⁶² What came to be economic diversification was the multilateralization of private Western European commercial firms within the country. The whole hue about independence was therefore a mere transition from colonial rule to neo-colonialism.

What was expectedly the historic role of Nigeria's foreign policy in 1960 was to define, organize and direct the external aspect of a determined and well-coordinated struggle against foreign economic exploitation, control and domination, dictation and subservience. It was also to procure foreign resources at low cost and high profit to offset the shortfall in local resources (if any). But a critical scrutiny of the foreign policy goals of Balewa government would show that those goals were reflective of a foreign policy bereft of clear-cut, well defined ideology or that they were external relations programme of myopic focus, irrelevant details, empty and trivial rhetoric. The so-called national interest as conceived was without any coherent content. The whole blueprint lacked any guidelines for demarcating on conflicts between interests and ideals. At an auspicious time when the foundation of national foreign policy was being laid, the conservatism of foreign infrastructural relations, which had been indoctrinated into the ruling elite, contrasted with the progressive and radical policy of economic independence and outright decolonization. Western capitalist interests foisted on Nigeria slavish and subservient politico-economic policies at an astonishing degree, and with impunity. The resultant effect was that, instead of fraternizing in the economic plain with the entire world harnessing accruable advantages therefrom, Nigeria merely shifted trade from only Britain to Western Continental Europe and the United States.⁶³

Under Balewa, the subservient and structurally slavish economic dependence on the West adversely affected Nigeria's national interests in the international system. Even the so-called political independence meant nothing without the much – needed economic independence. Nigeria could not confidently flaunt her identity as an independent nation because the national economy which constituted the 'spinal cord' of any nation was being controlled from outside.

On the other hand, the Gowon regime appeared to be different as there was a kind of radical departure from the established *status quo*. It would be recalled that some policies of the short-lived Ironsi regime had radically altered the British-imposed political formula.⁶⁴ Gowon came to the saddle with the task of calming some frayed nerves both within and outside Nigeria. The seed of the civil war that broke out in 1967 had been sown before Gowon came on board. In essence, the circumstances that surrounded the regime of Gowon prompted him to court the friendship of countries from both divides of the international system. The stance of Britain and other Western nations not to supply arms to Nigeria during the early period of the civil war left Gowon with no choice than to shift to the waiting hands of the Soviet Union. The Soviet-Nigeria romance continued throughout the war.⁶⁵

Gowon took a number of fundamental steps to show that his own foreign policy was global and not sectional. For example, on April 24, 1973, a contract was awarded to a Bulgarian firm; Messrs Technoexportstroy, to build the National Arts Theatre in Lagos.⁶⁶ In March 31, 1971, Gowon also declared in his budget speech that licenses would no longer be required for imports from China, North Korea, Vietnam, Albania, Japan, East Germany and Hong Kong.⁶⁷ The Indigenization Decree was also promulgated in 1972 with the belief that "the operation and control of an independent nation's economy should mainly be in the hands of the government agencies and citizens of that nation or country".⁶⁸ The above indicate that the Gowon regime marked a shift from the pro-Western position of Balewa government. However, the extent to which all these official statements were converted into realities remained something else. As Ajayi observes, "This (the above shifts) notwithstanding, the bulk of Nigeria's external trade, economic and cultural links remained firmly with the Western capitalist countries".⁶⁹ The indigenization policy was merely a suggestive signpost of Nigerians' partnership with foreigners. The indigenized enterprises still carried with them foreign influences as their modes of production, values and ethics still continued to be offshoots of imperatives of foreign exploitation of local resources for foreign capitalist interests.

In the years of oil boom, which brought huge wealth to the national coffers, Gowon pursued a 'personal diplomacy' in which he embarked on donation spree across the globe. He traversed many parts of the world in diplomatic shuttles and hunted after image laundry in the West. It was then that he was given the sobriquet 'Jack' by the British press. Apart from frittering away national resources at a time that the country needed a serious economic turnaround, Gowon failed to learn that the Western countries were only concerned with their interests in Nigeria, which explained their careful procrastination during the civil war. Almost immediately after the war, Gowon renewed ties with the West (particularly Britain), leaving USSR in the lurch once again. The lesson is that if USSR had not aided the Federal Government and the Biafran side had won the war; the West would have unhesitatingly supported Biafra because of their (Western) economic interest. The West retraced their step only when it was becoming clear that the Federal side would triumph and Nigeria might be lost to the Eastern bloc. That period was a most auspicious movement for Nigeria to negotiate for a more formidable status in the international system. But unfortunately, Gowon did not do this. He brought Nigeria back to the web of neo-colonialism. Perhaps, Gowon was infected by the illusion of national grandeur having prosecuted the war

successfully without any war debt. The war was said to have been financed at the cost of £375m without recourse to external borrowing.⁷⁰

Rather unfortunately, the historical experiences under colonial rule (before Balewa's regime) and under the civil war (during Gowon's regime) have not transformed the style of external relations and foreign policy formulation in Nigeria. There have since been no fundamental structural changes but mere reinforcement. The impact of professed governmental changes has been isolated, limited only to super-structural relations and reflective of mere lip service. Hence, there were no radical, deep-rooted and fundamental changes between the pattern of external relations of the Balewa's regime and that of Gowon. In both cases, it was a reflection of abstract formalism. There was also a clear demonstration that both Balewa and Gowon were not interested in struggle for economic independence as a linchpin for foreign domination and neo-colonialism. No meaningful attempt was ever made to employ foreign policy to advance economic independence. It would have been expected that given their experiences for which they could not have passed for diplomatic neophytes, both leaders would have learnt that the intention of the Western capitalist countries was to condemn Nigeria to the realm of imitative rather than innovative technology. The integration of Nigeria into the international capitalist system was actualized in a manner that destroyed self-reliance, increased external dependence, stunted development and encouraged foreign control of local economy. In such system, Nigeria should have used what she had to get what she wanted particularly in the 1970s when the nation was at a vantage position to exercise greater freedom of expression and action on the international environment.

Thus, the Nigerian membership in the international system in the period 1960-1975 was largely pro-Western, when official statements merely served the purpose of calming the frayed nerves of radical, progressive elements in the country. Therefore, the lesson of this paper is that it is gravely expedient for Nigerian leaders, foreign policy makers and managers of her external relations to realize that there should be a general overhaul of Nigeria's relations with other countries. There should be what Nnoli calls "a thorough-going reorganization of the country's relations with the rest of the world, as well as the nation's domestic relations".⁷¹ Such reorganization must, of necessity, accommodate a clear identification of the country's nation interest on the basis of a well defined ideology which will serve as a framework for pursuing external relations. While it is a truism that Nigeria, through its military and police forces, has, over the years, earned accolades for outstanding participation in peace-keeping operations and other similar efforts for sustaining global peace in different climes of the world, it is also certain that, given her enormous resources (as critical elements of diplomacy), which have made her the 'irresistible beautiful bride', the country has all it takes to be in a better pedestal of, at least, the unquestionable giant (not necessarily an hegemon) of Africa. But, some unpleasant internal dynamics, particularly the scourge of corruption, which more often leads to wrong policy choice, have dwarfed such hope.

This scenario makes it compelling for the new government of General Muhammadu Buhari to mindfully reorganize the entire architecture of Nigerian foreign policy, particularly in the aspects of appointing genuine minds who are versed in the arts and science of diplomacy into critical positions in the management of Nigerian external relations; and also in pursuing liberalized foreign policy, which will accommodate friends on the basis of equal partnership from all regions of the global system. Also, a buoyant economy is a necessary tool for quick and expeditious attainment of national goals in the international system. Therefore, the Nigerian ruling class must embark on a patriotic struggle for economic independence by courting the friendship of progressive forces in the international environment as well as working very hard to stamp out all manifestations of corruption in public life. On the whole, the economy must be re-jigged and better managed to serve as a launching pad for freedom of actions in the external environment, and to detach the country away from the apron-strings of imperial powers and neo-colonial interests as there is no free lunch in international relations and diplomacy.

Notes and References

1. The Balewa regime lasted October 1, 1960 when Nigeria gained independence and January 15, 1966 when it was supplanted through a military coup. On the other hand, General Gowon was Nigeria's Head of State between August 1, 1966 and July 29, 1975 when he was overthrown.
2. Osuntokun, A. (2013), *Domestic and foreign dimensions of Nigerian politics*, Ado Ekiti: Ekiti State University Press, p. 1
3. Kolawole, D (1997), "International Relations", in Dipo Kolawole, (ed.), *Readings in Political Science*, Ibadan: Dekaal Publishers, p. 272
4. Ibid., p. 273
5. Pratt, J. W. (1965), *A history of United States Foreign Policy*, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, p. 1
6. See details in Kolawole, "International Relations", pp. 262-271
7. Kolawole, D (1998), "Nigeria's foreign policy after Abacha and the prospects for democracy in Nigeria", in Dipo Kolawole, (ed.), *Issues in Nigerian Government and Politics*, Ibadan: Dekaal Publishers, p. 191
8. Ibid.

9. Osuntokun, *Domestic and foreign dimensions...*, p. 2
10. Idang, G. (1973), *Nigeria: Internal Politics and Foreign Policy 1960-1966*, Ibadan: University Press, p.1
11. See Dudley, B.J. (1982), *An Introduction to Nigerian Government and Politics*, London: Macmillan Press, p. 278. To reflect that sovereignty is paramount to mounting external relations, Dudley notes that in 1958, when the first conference of Independent African States was held in Accra (Ghana), Nigeria was not invited.
12. Ajayi, A.I. (1985), "Non-Alignment and Nigeria's Foreign Policy: 1960-1979, An Historical Perspective", Department of History, University of Ife, Ile Ife, M.A. Thesis, p. vii.
13. See Crowder, M. (1968), *West Africa under Colonial Rule*, London: Hutchinson, pp. 45-64 for explicit details on the scramble for and partition of Africa by the European colonial powers.
14. Akinyemi, B. (1989), "The colonial legacy and major themes in Nigeria's Foreign Policy" in A.B. Akinyemi et al., (eds.), *Nigeria since independence. The First 25 Years, volume X International Relations*, Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books, p. 12
15. For details, see Ihonvbere, J. and Falola. T. (1987), "International Colonialism and Exploitation" in Toyin Falola (ed.) *Britain and Nigeria: Development or Exploitation?* London: Zed Books, pp. 8-12, 16
16. Akinyemi, "The colonial legacy.....", p.14
17. Idang, *Nigeria: Internal Politics*, pp. 5. Idang adds that this definition is suggestive because it insists not only on the interpenetration of national and international political systems, but also on the fact that decisions are usually made on behalf of the state concerned by the incumbents of policy making positions.
18. Ibid, p. 6
19. Ibid, pp. 7-11 for details
20. Otubanjo, F. (1989), "Introduction: Phases and Changes in Nigeria's Foreign Policy" in Akinyemi, A.B. et al., eds., *Nigeria since independence: The first 25 Years volume x, International Relations.....*, p. 4. See also, Balewa, A. T. (Prime Minister of the Federal Republic of Nigeria), (1960), "Maiden General Assembly Statement at the United Nations", New York: 7th October, in <http://redesign.nigeriaunmission.org/maiden-speech-at-the-un/>. Accessed on Tuesday 24th March, 2015.
21. Ibid.
22. Garba, J. (1991), *Diplomatic Soldiering the Conduct of Nigerian Foreign Policy, 1975-1979*, Ibadan: Spectrum Books Ltd., 1991, p. xiv.
23. Balewa, "Maiden General Assembly Statement at the United Nations", Accessed on Tuesday 24th March, 2015.
24. The pact was abrogated in 1961 when scathing criticisms against it from articulate Nigeria public came to a head.
25. Mr. Jaja Wachukwu was the first substantive Nigerian Minister of Foreign Affairs and Commonwealth Relations. He was appointed in July 1961.
26. A deep statistical and analytical insight into the Anglo-Nigerian special relationship is provided in Ajibola, W.A. (1978), *Foreign Policy and Public Opinion*, Ibadan: University Press, pp. 18-24
27. Details of the crisis can be gleaned in "Bizerte Crisis" in http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bizerte_crisis, September, 2014. Accessed on Tuesday 24th March, 2015
28. For details on Nigeria's relations with the Eastern bloc, Dudley, *An Introduction to Nigerian Government and Politics...*, p. 279. See also Amechi, O. (1989), "Nigeria and the Superpowers" in Akinyemi, et al., eds., *Nigeria since Independence*, pp. 47-70.
29. Idang, p. 14
30. Balewa, "Maiden General Assembly Statement at the United Nations", Accessed on Tuesday 24th March, 2015
31. Idang, p. 16
32. Balewa, "Maiden General Assembly Statement at the United Nations", Accessed on Tuesday 24th March, 2015
33. Idang, p. 16
34. Following the first military coup in Nigeria on January 15, 1966, Major General Agunyi Ironsi, the most senior Nigerian officer in the Army, of Eastern Nigerian extraction, became the Head of State. In the bloody counter coup of July, 1966, Ironsi and some other top brass of the military were killed alongside some politicians.
35. Otubanjo, "Introduction; Politics and Changes", p. 5
36. Dudley claims that from being a country to be dealt with cautiously, the Soviet Union became an ally, seemingly overnight. See his *An Introduction to Nigerian Government and Politics.....*, p. 285
37. Ibid.
38. Otubanjo, "Introduction: Phases and Changes....", p. 5
39. See Dudley, *An Introduction to Nigerian Government and Politics.....*, p. 291 for more details on other

- dimensions of Gowon diplomacy immediately after the war. It is crucial to note, however, that this decision of Gowon prepared the ground for the Murtala/Obasanjo regime's economic diplomacy. In 1976, the regime took over 55 percent of Shell –BP shares and fully nationalized the company in 1979.
40. Such reasons were the exigencies of war, which kept the executive burdened with issues more than anything else and the usual practice of military regimes to rescind old appointments in search of legitimacy and acceptance.
 41. Cf. Dudley, *An Introduction to Nigerian Government and Politics*...., p. 288
 42. Adeniran, Tunde. "Nigeria and Great Britain" in Akinyemi, et.al. (eds.), *Nigeria since Independence*...., p. 35. This need perhaps helps to explain why Nigeria acquired only 35 percent of Shell-BP shares in 1974 as against 55 percent it acquired in other companies.
 43. See Dudley, *An Introduction to Nigerian Government and Politics*...., p. 291. The period of no leadership in Nigeria has been tagged three "dark days". This was between July 29 and July 31, 1966. Gowon assumed leadership on August 1, 1966. See Ajibade, *Foreign Policy and Public Opinion*...., p. 29 for details on the events that followed this three-day interregnum. There was however a strained relationship between Nigeria and Britain during the early period of the war. It was this strained relationship that the Soviet Union exploited by allying with the Federal Government. This Nigeria-Soviet alliance might help to explain among other pressures, the subsequent change of posture by Britain. See Adeniran, "Nigeria and Great Britain....", p. 37
 44. Ibid, pp. 37-38. More information on post-war Nigerian-Soviet relations can be gleaned from Amechi, O. "Nigeria and the Superpowers", pp. 60-61
 45. For a clearer and critical exposition of this national generosity which has been tagged Gowon's personal diplomacy, See Dudley, *An Introduction to Nigerian Government and Politics*...., pp. 289-291. See also Garba, *Diplomatic Soldiering*...., p. 12
 46. Both countries had recognized and supported Biafra against the Federal Government during the civil war years.
 47. This was in spite of the fact that the country was harboring the Biafran rebel leader; Col Ojukwu.
 48. This is the much-talked-about Bakassi Peninsula, which, in spite of the World Court judgment, still remains a knotty issue in Nigeria-Cameroun relations to date. It will be recalled that, that part of Cameroun was excised from Cameroun in 1961 following the decision in a plebiscite of the inhabitants to be identified with Nigeria. It was discovered that the Bakassi Island is stupendously oil-rich. Ever since, the Cameroonian authorities have consistently maintained that the 1961 decision had been upturned by a bi-lateral agreement between them and the Gowon regime in the 1970s.
 49. These states were Nigeria, Togo, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Ivory Coast (now Cote d'Ivoire), The Gambia, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Upper Volta (now Burkina Faso), Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal and Dahomey (now Benin Republic).
 50. Gana, Aaron T. "Nigeria, West Africa and the Economic Community of West African States" in Akinyemi, et.al. (eds.), *Nigeria since Independence*...., p.117.
 51. Ibid., p.127
 52. That body known as Communante Economique de l'Afrique de L'Ouest (CEAO) had its membership among Francophone West African countries like Senegal, Mali, Upper Volta (now Burkina Faso), Ivory Coast (now Cote d'Ivoire), Mauritania, Niger. It has a functioning central bank in Dakar, Senegal and a mini-secretariat.
 53. Adeniran, "Nigeria and Great Britain"pp.37-38
 54. Ibid., p.38
 55. Ibid., p.37
 56. Ibid.
 57. Amechi, O. "Nigeria and the Superpowers", p.60
 58. Ibid.
 59. Garba, *Diplomatic Soldiering*...., p. 175
 60. Owoeye, J. (1986), "Nigeria and China", in G. O. Olusanya and R. A. Akindele, (eds.), *Nigeria's External Relations: The First Twenty Five Years*, Ibadan: University Press Limited, pp. 294-305
 61. Garba, *Diplomatic Soldiering*...., pp. 4, 6
 62. See Okwudiba, Nnoli "Nigeria's Foreign Policy and the Struggle for Economic Independence" in Akinyemi, et.al. (eds.), *Nigeria since Independence*...., p. 257
 63. It has been said that between 1960 and 1967, over 80% of Nigeria's exports and re-exports was concentrated on the West while over 90% of foreign investments in the country came from the West. However, this would obtain until the recent phenomenal rise of China's interest in Africa.
 64. For example, the Ironsi regime turned Nigeria into a unitary state through the 1966 Unification Decree, clearly truncating all the established structure of parliamentary democracy.

65. The partnership of both countries in the iron and steel project has been observed as "... a reflection of the excellent relations between Russia and Nigeria, and a measure of the confidence which the Federal military government reposes in the government of the USSR". See Ajayi, "Non- Alignment and Nigeria's Foreign Policy....", p. 59
66. See Vanguard Newspaper, Lagos: Vanguard Media Limited, April 9, 2013
67. Ajayi, "Non- Alignment and Nigeria's Foreign Policy....", pp. 59-60
68. Ibid., p. 60
69. Ibid.
70. Aluko, O., (1981), *Essays in Nigeria Foreign Policy*, London: George Allen & Union Ltd., p. 121.
71. Nnoli "Nigeria's Foreign Policy....", p. 268.