

# The Contours and Depth of Nigeria's Foreign Policy under Goodluck Jonathan

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## Abstract

Foreign policy is an essential and important part of any government. Inevitably, the manner a country relates with the outside world will always be a topic of interest, both domestically and internationally. President Jonathan has ruled Nigeria for almost six years and in that time, has tried to make his imprint on Nigeria's foreign policy. This paper examines just how much he has managed to do that, his achievements and shortcomings, and also makes some comparison between his foreign policies and past governments were appropriate

## Introduction

Foreign policy, from observance of its practice is a country's pursuit of national interests in its relations with external parties, be it states, a comity of states or even non-state actors. To fully appreciate this paper, an initial contextual understanding of *contours* and *depth* is essential. Here, *contours* mean outlines and distinctively marked forms of foreign policy approach, while the strategies and techniques employed to achieve Nigeria's foreign policy objective is what is referred to as *depth*. Nigeria's foreign policy had since independence up until the turn of the twenty first century focused on eliminating colonialism and apartheid in Africa. Lamentations about incurred losses in Nigeria's fight against colonialism and apartheid in various parts of the continent, and changing realities in the global scene inspired a paradigm shift in Nigeria's foreign policy. Between 1999 and 2007 under President Olusegun Obasanjo, the country's foreign policy objectives focused on enhancing Nigeria's image and improving her cooperation with Africa and the rest of the world by way of shuttle diplomacy. President Umaru Yar'adua's government espoused citizen diplomacy as Nigeria's foreign policy.

However, in the last three years, *trade and economic cooperation* have characterized Nigeria's foreign relations. In continuation of the foreign policy approach championed by former Foreign Minister Ike Nwachukwu during General Ibrahim Babangida's military regime, President Goodluck Jonathan's administration adopted a policy that is intricately tied to Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). This foreign policy is termed economic diplomacy, and is believed to be an extension of Nigeria's domestic policy to alleviate poverty, create jobs and diversify the economy. The outlines of this current foreign policy can be seen in the government's attempt to make the country *investment friendly*. The importance of achieving this goal is illustrated in the various bi-national commissions instituted; the new role of diplomatic missions; the relaxation of visa restrictions on foreign investors; and the involvement of the Organized Private Sector (OPS) in trade and investment initiatives. The *principle of reciprocity* is also a feature of the indicated foreign policy. The federal government has adopted reciprocity in both its positive and negative aspects, proposing that where countries unnecessarily delay or deny Nigerians visa applications without just cause, the Nigerian consulate will retaliate, and where visa applicants are attended to without being subjected to indignities, Nigeria will return the favor. Also, where Nigerians are being maltreated, citizens of defaulting countries will bear the brunt, as in the case of deportations between Nigeria and South Africa in 2012. In addition to the already existing Nigeria-South Africa and Nigeria-United States bi-national commissions, Jonathan's administration established bi-national commissions with Canada and Germany to strengthen commercial relations and boost development cooperation among other things; an Australia-Nigeria Trade and Investment Council, and a Nigeria-China Joint Commission that will be upgraded to a bi-national commission that will further improve economic cooperation.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) not only revised the basis for the appointment of diplomats, but also ascertains that Nigeria's representative missions abroad have knowledge of the economies of their stations of duty. These career diplomats as opposed to the ones previously nominated by virtue of political alliances are also now tasked primarily with marketing Nigeria as an investment destination in order to promote business and trade, and to bring in FDI. The former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Late Ambassador Olugbenga Ashiru also announced that foreign investors coming into Nigeria would be granted visas on arrival. This is to encourage foreign investors to do business in the country. Furthermore, the present regime is confident that the Organized Private Sector, in synergy with the Missions and government, can contribute to the inflow of FDI and boost Nigeria's economic interests. Another indication of the new foreign policy initiative is the increasing level of investments being made by the Chinese in particular, through the areas of infrastructure and construction; and of course the usual investors from the United Kingdom, United States and France (Ashiru, 2013). Notwithstanding Nigeria's hardline stance on international political matters in places such as Guinea-Bissau, Cote d'Ivoire, Mali and Libya in the last few years which underscores the government's will to remain a defender of peace and

justice, and retain its leadership role in Africa, the fact remains that economic interests lie undoubtedly at the heart of Nigeria's foreign policy.

### **Nigeria's Domestic Environment**

Foreign policy at its best is an extension of a state's domestic policy and national interests and the incumbent administration has since sought to capture that in Nigeria's foreign policy. Deplorable living standards at domestic level, and economic might as a determinant of influence at the global level make Nigeria's economic development goal apropos. Difficulties prevail in a myriad of forms that include homelessness, unemployment, poverty and generally abysmal living standards, however the government's economic diplomacy as an approach to foreign policy, in theory, promises to be a solution to Nigeria's problems. Economic development demands a redress of the aforementioned issues, and the country will be closer to being among the 20 largest economies of the world by the year 2020. The latter ambition is captured in Vision 20:20:20. The Jonathan administration predicts that making FDI the hub of Nigeria's foreign policy will remedy unequal distribution of wealth, encourage the trickle down of the nation's wealth, and ensure that Nigerians' welfare mirror the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of \$510 billion. Victoria Ojeme (2011) of Vanguard Newspaper in Nigeria reported that Ashiru emphasized, "Nigerians must benefit directly from our [Nigeria's] foreign policy. It is in consideration of this that Nigeria's foreign policy is being repositioned to support the domestic programmes and priorities of government, improve the living standards of Nigerians, including the creation of jobs and reduction of poverty." The late Foreign Minister added that investments mean better quality of life for all. While the thrust of Jonathan's foreign policy is pertinent to the needs of Nigerians, the question of its *efficacy* is one that will be looked into after analysing the foreign policy strategies that have been employed.

### **President Jonathan's Foreign Policy Techniques and Strategies**

For every objective or goal, it is imperative to define means and plans intended for the achievement of the specified objective. In the same vein, Akinterinwa (2014) averred that, "strategy and technique may be likened to two inseparable sides of a foreign policy coin" (p. 255). He further explained that, "...a technique...is a method adopted to achieve a specific objective", while "a strategy on the other hand is generally considered as a long-term plan, comprising various integral components and designed to ensure the achievement of a broad set of goals" (p. 255). This is not to say that techniques and strategies are mutually exclusive. In fact, Akinterinwa (2014) opines that some of the listed foreign policy objectives in the Nigerian constitution can be regarded both as strategies and techniques.

Bola Akinterinwa, Director General of the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs (NIIA) wrote a whole chapter on Nigeria's Foreign Policy Strategies and Technique in *The Jonathan Presidency published in 2014 by University Press of America*. The first technique employed by the Jonathan administration in pursuance of economic diplomacy was the *overhaul of the Foreign Service*. The emergence of civilian rule ushered in corruption of meritocracy hitherto practiced in the Foreign Service. With the aim of ensuring expertise and experience in Nigeria's foreign missions, Ashiru made efforts to reverse the politicization of positions within the Foreign Ministry. The new set of envoys would be no less than career diplomats or professional diplomats, of which Ashiru was a paragon, having spent decades in service of the MFA. Having said that, it would not be enough to simply be a veteran in the field of diplomacy as "only officers with the requisite experience in certain experience in certain regions and skills relevant in the emerging economic trends of such regions are appointed and posted to such places" (Akinterinwa, 2014, p. 268). In addition, the role of Nigerian diplomats abroad primarily, is to advertise Nigeria as investment friendly so as to improve trade, secure investments, – particularly FDI, which is a driving force for economic development – and ultimately promote economic cooperation. To fulfil economic diplomacy, the MFA has moreover been charged with the training of diplomats in the fields of finance and commerce. Kudos should be given to the president, and Ambassador Olugbenga Ashiru. They have encouraged the appointments of career diplomats to Ambassadorial posts, and reduced the number of political appointees. 56 of the 88 candidates who were nominated by Jonathan for senate approval were professional diplomats. Appointments are now mostly based on merit, qualifications and suitably than on political ties and affiliations. This undoubtedly is a feather in the cap of the Jonathan administration.

The second technique is forging of *partnership with specialized institutions and government bodies*. The MFA would partner with relevant institutions like the NIIA, the Institute of Peace and Conflict Resolution and the Presidential Advisory Council on International Relations (PAC-IR) to hold "participatory processes, such as conferences, briefings, seminars, lectures, and topical discussions" to strengthen the foundation on which foreign policies are formed and to aid in achieving the overall objective of the MFA (Akinterinwa, 2014, p. 269). This partnership involves a critical assessment of Nigeria's foreign policy formulation and implementation. The benefit of such a partnership can be seen in the foreign policy recommendations made at the seminar for the review of Nigeria's foreign policy that was held in August 2011 at the behest of the President. There is absolutely no reason for Jonathan's administration to take special pride in this. Partnership with specialized

institutions is not a novel or unique idea. It has been a necessity of every government's foreign policy. The ministry of foreign affairs cannot work in isolation. It has always sought the help, advice and assistance of specialized institutions and government agencies, such as the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs, and the others listed above. This has never been the problem. The issue is actually implementing the suggested policies and taking the advice of these specialized institutions. This present administration has not particularly shown it is any different from the previous administrations in this regard. Many times, the recommendations and advice of these specialized institutions are often not implemented on time, or disregarded totally.

Capitalizing on *strategic partnerships* is the third technique in utilization. The realization of economic diplomacy partly depends on deepening of ties with countries which we have trade relations, marketing indigenous goods and encouraging other economies to invest in the various industries.

The fourth technique is *collaboration with the Organized Private Sector (OPS)*. The government increasingly seeks the viewpoint of the OPS in attaining its foreign policy objectives. Again, this technique isn't entirely novel as the Babangida administration tried a similar practice "where the business class and the government rubbed minds after the budget" and the opinions of the former group were taken into consideration in policymaking (Omoh, 2011). The OPS often serve as advisor or consultant to the government and Foreign Service. In other words, the OPS gives insight into government's economic initiatives and policies. The Nigerian Association of Chambers and Commerce, Industry, Mines and Agriculture (NACCIMA); Nigerian Association of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (NASME); Manufacturers Association of Nigeria (MAN); Nigerian Employers Consultative Association (NECA); and the Nigerian Association of Small-Scale Industries (NASSI) are all representative bodies of the OPS. These formally recognized bodies are in positions to identify strategic opportunities, and their input is invaluable.

At least 4 million Nigerians live outside of the country, and as such their contribution to Nigeria could be significant. The penultimate technique of the economic diplomacy is to *mobilize the Nigerian diaspora* community to support development in Nigeria. Akinterinwa (2014) writes, "the official estimates about the amount of money sent back annually by expatriate Nigerians range from \$10 billion to \$20 billion" (p. 285). Nigerian diaspora communities have been set up to raise awareness about issues concerning Nigeria, encourage the return of compatriots home where they can contribute to development, and to make investments in Nigeria.

The final and major strategy employed by the Jonathan administration to ensure the success of economic diplomacy is known as the *Transformation Agenda*. As earlier stated, a state's foreign policy is an extension of its domestic policy. The *Transformation Agenda* is a comprehensive initiative launched by the Nigerian government to address Nigeria's economic underdevelopment, as well as review the role of the legislature and the judiciary within a period of four years (2011-2015). Chaired by President Jonathan himself, and coordinated by the Minister of Finance, Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, the *Transformation Agenda* covers the following key sectors: "job creation, education, health, power, transportation, Niger Delta, labour and productivity, foreign policy and economic diplomacy, legislature, governance, judiciary and justice delivery, public expenditure management, and information and communication and technology (ICT)" (Gyong, 2012, pp. 100-105). The facilitation of trade and commerce by diplomats and ambassadors is again stressed in the *Agenda*. In addition, the appointment of Iweala, a reputable Economist, clearly illustrated the main thrust of the agenda; the economy. So far, the administration has not recorded much in the way of success of the lofty aims of the agenda. Internal challenges constitute more of a problem to sustaining the vision of our foreign policy. The purpose of the transformation agenda is rendered useless with the problems of poor governance and mismanagement of funds. Corruption in the public service is also a major contributing factor. Femi Otedola, a member of the Economy Management Team was involved in a bribery scandal. This reflects very negatively on President Goodluck Jonathan and the transformation agenda as a whole. Undoubtedly, President Jonathan has scored some positive points. Privatization of the power sector remains a glowing achievement of his administration. However, on the whole, it has to be said that the foreign policy techniques employed under his administration have not in any monumental way made the country better off than it was.

### **President Jonathan's Leadership Qualities vis-à-vis Nigeria's Foreign Policy**

Drawing from Hogan and Kaiser's *What We Know About Leadership* (2005), Oviasogie & Shodipo (2013, p.196) explain that, "the traits of good leaders include good decision making ability, vision, charisma and competence." They also paraphrased Byman & Pollack (2001) arguing, "the goals, abilities and foibles of individuals are vital to the intentions, capabilities as well as strategies of the state" (p. 196). It is in light of this that the progress and or shortcomings of Nigeria's foreign policy and the strategies and techniques that attend it, must at least in part, be attributed to President Jonathan. On the one hand, the foreign policy strategies and techniques are a testament to the President's intelligence and good intentions, while his manner of execution on the other hand, shines him in a contrary light. The exhaustive recommendations resulting from the assistance of his many aides and collaboration with technocrats attest to President Jonathan's thoroughness, vision and direction. The company the President keeps, however, is worrisome. Serving in his administration and affiliated to him are the likes of

Farouk Lawan, a parliamentarian seen collecting bribe on tape, and his former boss and Governor Diepreye Alamieyeseigha, “convicted of money laundering in 2007, after admitting massive embezzlement of state funds” (PM News, 2013). Such leadership does not inspire confidence, and even more inimical to Nigeria’s development is the impunity enjoyed by elite criminals. Alamieyeseigha received a presidential pardon, which fetched Nigeria backlash from the United States (PM news, 2013). Farouk Lawan has, despite his arraignment, retained his position in the House of Representatives. More so, while several ex-governors, ministers and commissioners have been arraigned, not a single one has been brought to justice since 1999 (Kolawole, 2014). These incidents tarnish the country’s image and portray President Jonathan as a promoter of corruption. Cognizant that this is a democracy, and due process is paramount, the President can still ensure that justice is meted out accordingly without overstepping, even if a public office holder is the subject. It is his responsibility to see to it that he has credible individuals in his government. As demonstrated in the immediate aftermath of the kidnapping of schoolgirls in Chibok, Borno, Jonathan exhibits a dangerous degree of passivity. There is an old proverb about silence being tantamount to consent and so the President’s inaction was translated as a lack of regard for Nigerians’ lives. To say and do nothing about the abductions for over two weeks shows neither compassion nor competence nor good decision making ability. Oviasogie & Shodipo (2013, pp. 196-197) posit, “... effective foreign and domestic policy aimed at all round transformation can be influenced by the personality make up and decision making style of the leader.” It has hitherto been established that foreign policy reflects domestic policy. Therefore, this recount of President Jonathan’s behaviour towards domestic events is to highlight that his manifested strengths and weaknesses can be transposed to the foreign scene. The manner in which the President manages foreign relations will almost invariably be the same as the way he handles home affairs – as explicated.

### Concluding Remarks

President Jonathan’s techniques and strategies are clearly ambitious, nevertheless how effective have they been? The Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary (2014) defines effectiveness as, “producing the result that is wanted or intended.” It is not possible to definitively adjudge the foreign policy techniques and strategies a success or failure, as there is no expressed progress index, but one can discern where there has been improvement or otherwise. While the first four techniques (overhaul of the MFA, partnerships with specialised institutions and government bodies, capitalization on strategic partnerships and collaboration with OPS) have yielded positive results to a certain extent, inconsistency remains.

Foreign Direct Investment into Nigeria in 2011, when Jonathan took office, increased from \$6.5 billion in the previous year to \$8.9 billion (Umejei, 2014). However, the figure has since been plummeting. In 2012 and 2013, FDI was \$7 billion and \$5.5 billion respectively (Umejei, 2014). The Jonathan administration observed that “lack of continuity, consistency and commitment (3Cs) to agreed policies, programmes and projects...” is the reason why growth and development of the Nigerian economy does not correspond with “the overall welfare of Nigerian citizens, rising unemployment, inequality and poverty” (Akinterinwa, 2014, p. 275). We know the administration has not changed its policies between 2011 and now, but perhaps its level of commitment has diminished, and it is not consistent in its efforts. Contributing to the decline of investments is the situation of insecurity and instability in the country. Attempts to mobilize the diaspora community to either return to Nigeria or make investments in the economy have come to naught. The prevalence of unemployment, corruption and insecurity is discouraging. Expatriates are unconvinced that Nigeria has anything to offer them. Even the Federal Government’s claim of diversifying into agriculture has been exaggerated. Kolawole (2014) reported that former Minister of Agriculture, Adamu Bello cited information from the websites of the Central Bank of Nigeria and the National Bureau of Statistics proving that agricultural growth has, as a matter of fact, slumped under the current Minister, Dr. Akinwumi Adesina. The *Transformation Agenda* was drawn up for the purpose of rectifying the problems hindering development in Nigeria yet Gyong (2012) articulated – in *A Social Analysis of The Transformation Agenda of President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan* – what he considers to be “Challenges to the Attainment of the Transformation Agenda” (p. 107). The challenges – some of which remain unattended to – include inadequate funding, lack of cooperation between public servants and political office holders. Another is untrustworthy leadership as can be seen in the person of Femi Otedola, a man who was allegedly complicit in bribery and is now a member of the Economic Management Team of the *Agenda* (Gyong, 2012, p. 108). Again, insecurity: destruction of lives and property is a great encumbrance to the achievement of the Transformation Agenda. In clear and succinct sentences, Akinterinwa (2014) argues that, “the most persistent problem that has impeded an effective utilization of Nigeria’s foreign policy techniques and the successful realization of its foreign policy strategies is political. People’s perception of the Nigerian political structure is negative due to the numerous revelations of financial mismanagement and misappropriation of public funds. Weak and ineffective governance structures and lack of transparency and accountability have had a detrimental impact on the socio-economic development of Nigeria” (Akinterinwa, 2014, p. 287).

In what could be described as a vicious cycle, it seems the issues, which the Transformation Agenda

seeks to address, serve as a serious impediment to the realization of the *Agenda*, to national development, and consequently, Nigeria's foreign policy approach. The extant *Agenda* was drawn up to resolve the problems of mismanagement of funds, corruption of the legal system, subpar governance, lack of power and skilled labour, however these very problems are obstacles to the realization of the *Transformation Agenda*. In fact, most of Nigeria's ills arise as a result of venality and profiteering. Corruption is the root cause of Nigeria's underdevelopment therefore an anti-graft war must be fiercely fought to the very end. Only then will the ensuing problems start to abate, and Nigeria's national development and foreign policy initiatives yield positive results.

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