Determinants of Nigeria’s Foreign Policy during the First Republic and Impact on External Relations

This paper analytically examines the determinants of Nigeria’s foreign policy during the First Republic and its impact on her external relations under the Abubakar Tafawa Balewa administration from 1960 – 1966. It analyzed the determinants of Nigeria’s foreign policy to encompass the domestic environment, external environment and the psychological (perception) threshold. In her commitment to promote and uphold her foreign policy objectives of global peace and security, and the progress and unity of African States, Nigeria under Balewa’s regime contributed Military and Police Force to the United Nations (UN) peacekeeping operations in Congo from 1960 – 1964 as well as played a pivotal role in the coming into being of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1963.

In terms of military strength, the Balewa administration depended on the Western countries, especially, Britain for training of her military personnel and supply of military equipments. Even in her international trade engagements, education, political and socio-cultural international relations, Nigeria mostly romanced with her colonial masters and the Western bloc. They barely, but had little of such external relations with the Communist bloc in terms of cooperation in foreign policies. Although the Balewa’s regime declared non-alignment with any of the power blocs, but yet the regime pursued pro-Western foreign policies.

Keywords: Foreign Policy, Colonial, External Relations, Independence , Cooperation.

Introduction

Foreign policy is essential a set of goals and course of action a nation wishes to pursue or pursues in respect to the demands or interactions of the internal and external setting as perceived by the decision makers (Mbachu, 2011:2-3). Furthermore, foreign policy is a goal of a State being pursued in her interest in international interactions. It is by nature the international objectives of States. They are export oriented polices. They go through formation, evaluation and execution. It is both an act performed as well as a process. It is therefore, a link between one State and another. Foreign policy has a source and some purpose or specific targets. Foreign policy is pursued in the national interest. It is expected to be used to secure those things which are presumed to be in the interest of the nation. Three factors are discernible in the definition. First, foreign policy is a function of the domestic environment or setting. Second, the external environment is equally a variables of a foreign policy. Thirdly, however significant both the internal and external factors are, the psychological factor (or the images of the decision makers) is very important in a dynamic foreign policy. A dynamic foreign
policy must as of great necessity be moderated by the three valuable of internal setting, external environment and the psychological or perception threshold. These variables moderate the actions of States and ‘non-State’ actors in the international system (Mbachu, 2011:3).

Equally, according to Akindele (1996:91-96) foreign policy may be conceived as a set of carefully articulated goals and objectives which a nation - State seeks to realize and actualize in the conduct of its relationships with other States. In the conduct of foreign policy, the ultimate purpose is to protect the security of the State, enhance the social, economic and political welfare of the citizens, and maintain peace, without which development is hardly possible. Therefore, the conduct and management of any country’s foreign policy must recognize that international politics is a struggle for power, influence and prestige in a competitive international arena. Again, to Abagen and Tyona (2018b:41) foreign policy must adequately pay absolute attention to domestic issues which are very essential for image-building. It must be directed towards national security and welfare as well as encompasses economic, cultural, technical and scientific cooperation with countries in the international arena. From the above explanations therefore, foreign policy can be define as the promotion and protection of a country’s national interest in the international arena.

Therefore, according to Gubak (2015:633) the foreign policy of every country deals first, with the preservation of its independence, sovereignty and security and second, with the pursuit and protection of its economic interest. Since independence in 1960, Nigeria has continued to play a strategic role in fostering global and continental peace through its foreign policy framework and principles which defines Nigeria’s relations with other countries. For academic purposes, the paper is divided into four parts, the introduction which is currently running, the determinants of Nigeria’s foreign policy, Nigeria’s foreign policy during the First Republic and its impact on her external relations and draws a conclusion.

Determinants Of Nigeria’s Foreign Policy

To Mbachu (2011:64-65) the world “Determinant” of foreign policy strikingly shows that whatever the personal limitations of policy makers, foreign policy is supposed to follow a careful consideration of the dynamics in the domestic setting, external setting and the perception threshold (psychological setting). Furthermore, Mbachu (2011:65-72) assessed each of these variables as follows:

1. **Domestic Environment**

On the internal or domestic environment, we shall consider three significant variables of economic, military and political factors. This is important because the internal stability and security of a nation depends greatly on the real and organic relationship between the economy and politics:

a) **Economics of nigeria’s foreign policy**
A good understanding of Nigeria’s political economy is probably the only basis to understand the political and organizational process of Nigerian society. Nigeria at independence in 1960 inherited the “power status” called “political power” without “economic independence”. This was as a result of colonial domination and exploitation of both Nigeria’s natural and human resources without any real development capable of rural-urban integration type of economy. This ignored the development of the productive forces which resulted in the distortion, disarticulation of the Nigerian economy. Nigeria, thus, depended on mono-cultural primary producing economy which did not make for autonomous development, but rather a dependent economy. This situation demands that Nigeria’s underdeveloped economy was closely tied to the dictates of the developed economies of the Western world. Up, till 1970, 75 percent of Nigeria’s revenue came from agricultural products such as cocoa, cotton, groundnut, palm produce and kernels, etc.

b) The military factor and Nigeria’s foreign policy

The military factors is an important factor of a nation’s foreign policy, as it concerns efforts towards safeguarding the country from external threat or aggression or in a danger of being attacked and defeated. Although, the military in Nigeria is concerned with external defence, the relative peaceful phases of Nigerian history have drawn it into external politics. At independence, Nigeria inherited British trained Army. Britain also reserved the monopoly of supplies of military hardwares and logistics. It is important to stress that Nigeria got her independence free from any form of violence. Nigeria’s military has not been conceived as a powerful instrument of foreign policy, although Nigeria played an important role in the UN Peace Operations in Congo crisis (1960 – 1966).

c) The political factor of Nigeria’s foreign policy

Nigeria’s political structure and political relations greatly affect how Nigerian society is organized, managed and reproduced. At the political independence of Nigeria, the ruling elites of Balewa administration inherited political power in a structurally dependent economy and polity. Logically, since the neo-colonial State was not a “captain” of industry, it only used the State power at its disposal for capital accumulation to compete for political power rather than to transform the economy. The net result was that politics was highly commercialized as economic power. The ruling elites in control of the State power actively collaborated with the multi-national corporations to deepen and sharpen Nigeria’s dependence on external economies for our needs. Again, the problem of a commercialized politics combined with regionalism to sharpen political conflicts, especially as tribal and ethnic loyalties became solidaristics ties for intense class struggle. Thus, politics became normless and hostile. It was largely because of
the political conflict and crisis as well as cases of bureaucratic
corruption which accounted for the fall of the First Republic which
threw the nation into the civil war between 1967 to 1970.

2. **External Environment of Nigeria’s Foreign Policy**
External environment refers to the place of other actors or events in the
international system. Here, the issue to be considered include (a) Nigeria’s
relations with the concentric circle; say, Economic Community of West
African States (ECOWAS) sub-region in terms of political, economic,
military or bilateral – multilateral terms. (b) relations with African continent
in terms of the sum total of relations with member States of the
Organization of African Unity (OAU): Nigeria’s relations with the OAU in
respect to its continental socio-economic and political needs, and the
decolonization of Southern Africa; (c) relation on a global level which
include patterns and forms of relations with super power in terms of cold
war and non-alignment, the UN, the Commonwealth etc. The fundamental
point is that a nation’s internal security climate, its economy and polity
cannot be divorced from its interdependent patterns and forms in the
international environment. Hence, the external setting has been as log in
the wheel of Nigeria’s foreign policy. This is not only by the reason of the
nature of the domestic economy, but to the extent it affects Nigeria’s
images or perception threshold of the actors or events in the international
politics.

3. **Psychological (Perception) Threshold.**
Foreign policy of a nation is not just only the interplay of forces between
the domestic and external setting. A nation is perplexed by the image of
friendliness or hostility, and this is not easily interpreted. Misinformation
or misperception of actors or events in the external setting is politically
disastrous. Hence, perceptive powers of Nigeria primarily depends on:
a) Its historical background which include, education, legal system,
colonial heritage, and ideological learning;
b) Orientation and personal values, preference or interpersonal relations of
decision makers;
c) The availability of adequate and timely information, because
information is very important to be dangerously left unchecked; and
d) Its image of itself in terms of domestic capabilities, hence, Nigeria has
maintained the leadership syndrome in African affairs because of its
size, population, natural and human resources, as well as its considered
military potentials, its highly decadent, corrupt and vulnerable society
notwithstanding.
Nigeria’s Foreign Policy during the First Republic And Its Impact On Her External Relations

Nigeria gained her independence on October 1, 1960 and was admitted as the 90th member of the United Nations (UN) on October 7, 1960 at the Plenary Session of the UN General Assembly in New York where the country’s Prime Minister, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, acknowledged that peace and security are very vital to Nigeria’s foreign policy. His address further asserts: (a) It is the desire of Nigeria to remain on friendly terms with all nations and participate actively in the work of the UN. (b) Nigeria a large and populous country of over 35 million has absolutely no territorial or expansionist intention; (c) We shall not forget our old friends and we are proud to have been accepted as a member of the British Commonwealth. Nevertheless, we do not intend to ally ourselves as a matter of routine with any of the power blocs. We are committed to uphold the principles upon which the UN is founded; (d) Nigeria hopes to work with other African States for the progress of Africa and assist in bringing all African territories to a State of responsible independence (Abagen and Tyona, 2018a:282 – 283; Abagen and Tyona, 2018b:43).

Thus, in supporting the foregoing assertion, Adeniji (2005:27) notes that:

In this first phase, the catch phrase of ‘Africa as centerpiece of Nigeria’s foreign policy’ was evolved. The reason is not far-fetched. Unlike in other parts of the world, Nigeria obtained independence on a platter of gold without violent armed struggle. She therefore had the lee-way to concentrate not only on consolidation of her independence, but also on frontline participation in the quest to liberate the entire African continent from colonization and racism in all their manifestations. As this could better be achieved through peaceful co-existence with all neighbours, there was emphasis on cooperation with the rest of Africa. Thus began the ideals of pacifism and Afrocentrism in Nigeria’s foreign policy.

Nigeria’s commitment to further promote the central tenets of her foreign policy objectives of peace and security was in the forefront of the establishment of a continental body, i.e, the OAU formed in May, 1963. Nigeria also contributed Military Forces and Police to the UN peacekeeping operation in Congo (ONUC) from 1960 – 1964. Nigeria did not only contribute troops, but also had Major General J. T. U. Aguiyi – Ironsi as the Commander of the UNOC operation. The Congo operations in 1960 marked the first time Nigeria’s Police participated in peacekeeping with the deployment of the first ever contingent of Individual Police Officers (IPOs) to UN mission in the Congo led by ACP Louis Edet (Abagen and Tyona, 2018a:283-284).

In another development, going by military dimensions and matters, Nigeria, under Balewa, was dependent on the countries of the West for military equipment and training of officers and men. Britain, provided a more elaborate assistance to
Nigeria. The origin of the Nigerian Army, in the first place is traceable to the many forces formed by the British in the second half of the nineteenth century, to implement their conquest of the part of Africa now known as Nigeria. Accurate records have shown that the foremost of these forces to be raised was by Lt. John Glover of the Royal Navy (RN) in 1883. Britain’s influence on the Nigerian military forces was enormous. It was when in October 1, 1963 Nigeria became a Republic that the title: “Queens own Nigerian Regiment” was dropped from the names of all the five Battalions and the title: “Royal” was dropped from the Army too, and became known as the Nigerian Army. All these jettisoned titles were British phrases. The Nigerian Army continued to be under the British scheme of things until 1965 when the remnants of her colonial master’s military authority faded away. That year, the last British General Officer Commanding (GOC) the Nigerian Army, Welby Everard, returned to Britain. Major General J. T. U. Aguiyi-Ironsì a Nigerian, took over as the first indigenous GOC of the Nigerian Army (Mbachu, 2011: 93-94).

Another strand of Nigeria’s foreign policy which sprouted its roots in the Balewa administration is the policy of non-alignment. It was the cold war era which saw a polarized world, the East pitted against the West, in a confrontation played out in the rivalry at the political, military and ideological levels between communism and democracy, between the Warsaw pact and Nato and between socialism and capitalism. Most Third World countries became independent during this era and had to make ideological choices. Nigeria, like Pakistan and others chose to be guided by a policy of ‘positive neutrality’ in the pursuit of their foreign policy objectives. As opposed to passivism, this policy entailed a vibrant and unequivocal role in world affairs, especially on matters affecting the country’s national interest, like the African continent and world peace without taking sides with ‘East’ or ‘West’. In term of dividends, this policy was supposed to earn the country friendship from both the East and West at a time she need development and consolidation assistance (Adeniji, 2005: 27 – 28).

It is an ironic sidelight of the event of history on Balewa, that after declaring his government’s non-alignment stance, he went on to pursue a vigorous and extensive pro-Western foreign policies of all the Western nations. Britain led the list of Nigeria’s external relations partners. The united states followed, with West Germany, Canada and France, coming behind. Earlier, on the eve of independence, Nigeria’s foreign office was created in Britain. This provided a broad avenue for tight relations between the newly emergent nation and her colonial master. As a matter of economic interest, Balewa’s government sought to maintain close relations with Britain and other Western nations, for this was a key factor in enhancing greater domestic integration. From 1960, even till two years after the end of Balewa’s regime, Nigeria received 273 million in technical and capital assistance from Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries which included Western Europe, the United States, Canada and Japan. Nigeria was the biggest recipient of OECD fund in Africa (Mbachu, 2011:91-92).
With this, Western foreign aid and investment contributed significantly to the 5.7 percent annual rate of economic development and growth in real terms attained during the early 1960s. Therefore, in her international trade activities, and in the area of trade and commerce, Nigeria under Balewa was dependent on Britain and the Western bloc on a high percentage. In addition to foreign aid, 85 percent of Nigeria’s export were sold to OECD countries, and close to 75 percent of Nigeria’s imports came from that group. Economic dealing with the Communist bloc by comparison with the West, remained remote and negligible throughout Balewa’s six year regime. Little development assistance was sought or forthcoming, and only about 6 percent of Nigeria’s imports came from the Soviet Union, China and Eastern Europe combined (Mbachu, 2011:92-93).

According to Aluko (1981:24) although, under the Balewa government, Nigeria had already been concerned with African unity. She had seemingly been content if her stand was supported by a majority of OAU member States, especially by those belonging to the former Monrovia group. Sometimes indeed it would appear that she was unperturbed to find herself opposed even by a majority of OAU members. For example, Nigeria was almost alone in opposing the exclusion of Moise Tshombe, the then Congolese Prime Minister, from the OAU summit in Cairo in 1964. On a number of further occasions in 1964 – 5 she continued to support the Tshombe government, even going so far as to defend the American – Belgian rescue operation in Congo (Zaire) when this was attacked by twenty – two Afro-Asian countries in the Security Council of the United Nations. Similarly, at the meeting of the OAU Defence Commission in Freetown, Sierra Leone, in February 1965, Nigeria strenuously opposed the majority of the Commission on the proposal to set up an African Peace Force which was subsequently adopted by the Commission. Whatever is the case, the fact cannot be denied that during this period, Nigeria emerged as a key player in the international system (Adeniji, 2005: 28). In 1961, she broke diplomatic ties with France, over the testing of nuclear weapons in the Sahara desert. It also supported the expulsion of South African from the Commonwealth in 1961 (Abagen and Tyona, 2018b:43). In another dimension, there were few strains, under Balewa, between Lagos and London, as Nigeria went on pursuing pro-British foreign policy. For instance, when Ian Smith unilaterally declared the independence of Southern Rhodesia on November 11, 1965 Nigeria under Balewa discouraged other African Governments from breaking diplomatic relations from Britain. The OAU Ministerial Council, had earlier passed a resolution, asking, Britain to quell the rebellion, where upon Britain’s refusal OAU members would severe diplomatic relations with her. In return, British Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, agreed to devote the major portion of the January, 1966 Commonwealth Prime Minister’s Conference to the Rhodesia question. The meeting was held in Lagos, and was the first time the Heads of Government had convened outside London (Mbachu, 2011: 95).

On socio-cultural aspect of international relations, the Balewa regime had a deep national commitment to a free enterprise system, a wide-spread admiration for Western democracies, where many of the Nigerian elite were educated,
particularly Britain. There was a ban on Soviet literatures in Nigeria, which heightened a suspicion of Soviet intentions in Nigeria. This feeling of suspicion was more rife among Northern Nigerian elements and Region, where communism was considered synonymous with atheism (Mbachu, 2011:93). Mbachu, maintained that, this awareness was reflected in the Balewa’s government’s decision to delay opening an Embassy in Moscow until 1963. When the Soviet Embassy was established in Lagos in 1961, the number of its diplomatic staff was limited to ten, whereas no such restriction was placed on the diplomatic missions of Britain and United States. While only five diplomatic cars plates were allocated to the Soviet Embassy, one hundred each were given to the British and Americans. Consequently, the movement of Soviet Embassy officials were restricted to Lagos only, and under the surveillance of Nigeria’s security agents. Furthermore, in as much as the Soviet Union was admitted for its science and space achievement, but because of her system was Communist and totalitarian, Nigeria under Balewa, censured Soviet scholarships which could have in no small way opened a road for Nigerian youths to be trained in the Soviet Union for technological skill acquisition.

To Mbachu, (2011:95-96) Nigerian romance with Britain in terms of cooperation in foreign policies, no doubt gained momentum under the regime of Balewa. In education, and cultural dimensions, this warm relations between the two countries deepened. Nigerians continued to school in the various institutions in Britain and in the mid-60s, Nigeria recorded the highest number of students from the Commonwealth. Academics of British nativity who had earlier besieged the University College, Ibadan, Nigeria’s premier University (now University of Ibadan) helped to established the numerous faculties in University of Nigeria Nsukka at its inception in 1960. With this, the educational institutions of Nigeria were designed on the British pattern.

In addition, a challenge to Nigeria’s views of what would constitute a desirable and feasible level of regional political cooperation was thrown by Kwame Nkrumah, then President of Ghana. He has preached the establishment of an African Military High Command and Continental Union Government. It became clear that Nkrumah’s aggressiveness of his policy produced a mixture of contempt, envy and occasional apprehension within Lagos. Balewa and his lieutenants were never in doubt of Nkrumah’s vibrant realism, but they considered his actions to be a threat to international peace and stability to Africa and as well as Nigeria’s own international security and prestige. The main concern of Nigeria’s diplomacy in Africa during the early 1960s was thus, to isolate Nkrumah, and make certain that his initiatives did not shatter the emerging regional consensus or directly subvert the fragile federal coalition in Lagos (Mbachu, 2011:97 – 98).

Therefore, in 1962, revelations spelt Nkrumah’s links with Nigeria’s opposition party, some of whom ran to him for asylum in Accra and the widespread suspicion that he was linked somehow to the assassination of Togolese President, Sylvanus Olympio, nearly brought an end to Nigeria’s diplomatic relations with Ghana. Balewa’s government organized African diplomatic
opposition to Nkrumah, and this earned it the respect and confidence of many prospective members of the OAU who shared Nigeria’s vulnerability to subversion, and believed Nkrumah had a hand in Olympio’s death (Mbachu, 2011:98). Thus, Mbachu further stress that, scholars of history and analysts of international affairs have debunked the idea that Nigeria under Balewa did not stick to her principle of non-interference in other African ‘States’ domestic affairs in his African policy, as a result of its accusation of Nkrumah for having a hand in Olympio of Togo’s death. They share the view that Nigeria was only worried about Ghana’s complicity in Togo’s domestic affairs, therefore, Balewa’s government’s faith in the principle of non-interference manifested in 1963, when it did not raise an eye-brow over the dethronement of Maga’s government in the Gambia. Besides, giving mere moral support to the governments of Niger and Cameroon in their armed conflict with the Sawaba opposition party and the Union de-Popular Cameroon (UPC), respectively in the early 60s, Nigeria was more or less indifferent to the particularly close ties between her neighbours and France.

Finally, despite lofty aspirations, Nigeria’s foreign policy in the First Republic has often been generally described as timid, docile, ambivalent, dissonant, indecisive and inert. The colonial legacy which restricted the policy options of the immediate post-independence leaders, the relative poverty of the country at the time, the lack of experience in international affairs, the conservative outlook of the Prime Minister, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa and other member of his cabinet and serious domestic divisions which led the Regions to open different consulates abroad are some of the reasons that have been advanced for the low-profile foreign policy (Akinboye, 2013; Idang, 1973; Aluko, 1981; Osaghae, 2002). Equally, Obafemi Awolowo, a critic of the Balewa’s regime, blamed the Prime Minister, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa of being a victim of his own weakness by subjecting himself to the dictates of the Sardauna, Sir Ahmadu Bello.

Conclusion

Nigeria’s foreign policy thrust during the First Republic under Sir, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa was pro-Britain and pro-Western in nature and character. It was single-handedly guided by the British masters. In his economic dealings, Balewa opened wide the shores of Nigeria to British investors, followed by the United States, West Germany among others. The administration barely, but had little economic ties with the Soviet Union, likewise socio-cultural international relations with them. This policy however, denied young men and women the opportunity to acquire useful knowledge and skills in the Soviet Union, even though they had achieved a high level of science and technological development.

General, in international politics, Nigeria had a splendid relationship with her colonial masters and the rest of the Western bloc. They helped in moulding the Nigerian Armed Forces as well as supplied military aircrafts and equipments. In demonstrating her principle of sovereign equality of all African States and commitment to the cooperation and promotion of African unity, Nigeria under
Balewa played an active role in halting the testing of atomic weapons in the African Sahara desert by France, and equally broke diplomatic relations with them in 1961. She completely imposed an embargo on all French goods and gave the French Ambassador two days to leave or vacate Nigerian soil. In fact, the Balewa administration foreign policies was Afrocentric and pro-Western in her external relations.

References


