ASSESSING NIGERIA’S AFRICAN-CENTERED FOREIGN POLICY AGAINST AN INSIDE-OUT PARADIGM: A PROPOSAL FOR AN ALTERNATIVE FOREIGN POLICY APPROACH

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ABSTRACT:
The growing challenges of economic and social development in Nigeria provide impetus for policy makers to readdress some of the nation’s policies against the realities of a competitive global political economy. In this paper, Dr. Sanubi using the current policy focuses of the Yar’Adua/Goodluck administration, assesses the relevance of the country’s African-centred foreign policy and challenges its continuity against a new inside-out theoretical framework. It recommends to Nigerian policy makers to put the economic diplomacy at the forefront of its foreign policy to reflect the internal realities of the Nigerian developmental challenges rather than window-dressing them in a frivolous, yet expensive, big-brother African-centered foreign policy.

For Nigeria and majority of other African states, policymaking and governance in the 20th century had been a reflection of their external relations both during pre-and-post independence periods. The 20th century marked an era of decolonization and modern state-formation in which independent African states operated their “new found” governments along political, ideological, economic and social policy frameworks that were either implicitly suggested or technically commanded by their vacating colonial masters. This orientation thus placed most of African states on a platform where
their domestic and foreign policies were constructed only with significant, perhaps compelling acknowledgement of the desires and intents of these former masters and other very important external actors. Such acknowledgements were regarded as crucial.

Thus, during the early 1960’s through the 1970’s much of the contents of the Nigerian domestic and especially foreign policies were dictated by the need to find a proper external alignment. In the Anglo-Nigerian Defense Pact of 1961-62 for instance, as a nascent state, Nigeria sought British military cover in the event of any aggression from without. This was understandable against the background of her age with her explicitly very fragile economic and heterogeneous social structures. During this early stage of her nationhood, Nigeria would expectedly need “someone to lean on” in many spheres of her national development especially in national security matters. Yet despite its (Anglo-Nigerian Defense Pact) sporadic and violent criticism by the Nigerian peoples (especially the students’ union) and its subsequent abandonment, pro-British tendencies continued to define the country’s domestic and foreign policies. The nation’s 30-month civil war between 1967 and 1970 provided another proclivity to seek proper foreign re-alignment. The then Nigerian federal government under Yakubu Gowon characteristically fine-tuned Europe for a suitable alignment between “eastern” and “western” interests, especially according to Orobator (1986) between the Soviet Union and the British/American centers of power. External coloration has no doubt remained a major expression of the picture of the country’s foreign policy for the remaining part of the 20th century. In other words, the country has, for most part of its history as an independent nation, looked “outside-in”, in determining its foreign policy. It has often grappled with the national challenge of defining “what would be the direction of the external perception” or “how should fellow African states see a given policy as a nation?” The
pertinent questions at such instances centre on: How does Europe see it? How does the United States see it?

The *African-centered foreign policy* of the Nigerian government was chosen as a foreign policy thrust of the erstwhile military regimes, notably pursued by the Murtala/Obasanjo government apparently to immune the nation against the danger of falling prey to colossal alignment during the apogee of the bipolar cold war between United States and the Soviet polar epicenters. As a nation organized around geopolitical strange bed-fellows between the *nationalistic* North and the *ethno-political* South (Dinneya, 2006), compounded more so by an abhorred era of military dictatorship in the African regional political landscape, African-centeredness became a safety-net for “legalizing” a military *de facto* among “new nations” of the African region most of which were apparently in dire need of external economic and social support. African-centeredness became a vehicle for wooing external recognition through its megalomaniac spending of available national resources in the prosecution of seemingly unimportant African economic, social and political courses *albeit* without any recourse to the economic impact on the domestic sub-sector of the *national interest*. With an unspoken but tacit national approval, the *African-centered foreign policy* for decades became an economic and political negation under the frivolous guise of being a “big brother” to other Africa regional states in their time of need.

Against the current background of a realistic global economy, the relevance or not of the African centered foreign policy in Nigeria in the 21 century in her spectrum of national development, represents an implicit research problematic for the academic and policy makers alike.
A. INSIDE-OUT VS OUTSIDE-IN FOREIGN POLICY: A NEW THEORETICAL PARADIGM.

The “outside-in” foreign policy by definition is “creating internal/external policy on the basis of one’s perception of prevailing external disposition”. Conversely, the “inside-out” approach sees a nation creating internal/external policy on the basis of its internal realities without primary regards to prevailing external disposition towards it. The role of perception in our present definition of the “inside-out” framework is crucial. Perception as a tool for foreign policy refers to the outlook or visual positioning of other states or actors towards a people, state or concept. For example, the Third world perceives the advanced states as overtly exploitative in their relationships with it. It therefore sees no real good intention in all ramifications of the so-called North/South talks. This perception coheres with Wallerstein’s Core/Periphery cum Semi-periphery framework of Development Theory (Wallerstein, 1974). Perception theory was adapted from psychology and applied to the study of interstate relations. All aspects of a state’s Perception (including interstate relations) derive from human construction based on some facts. Fact has been seen as “a peculiar order of reality according to a theoretic interest” (Easton, 1965). In other words, facts are imposed upon reality by the observer rather than the other way round. Furthermore, the nature of facts depends upon the question the observer wants to ask yet, irrespective of the observer’s interpretation of domestic realities, his perception about the other states derives from his assessment of the “facts” of the domestic phenomenon and his level of “cognition” without prejudice to the possibility of falling into cognitive dissonance. The theory of cognitive dissonance holds that when a deeply held value or belief is contradicted by a new message from the environment, a dissonant cognition (message) will be rejected and the old values and beliefs retained (Aronson, 1969). This may result in not necessarily a total rejection of the discrepant message but
may actually take the form of interpreting information to make it consistent with old beliefs or values (Festinger, 1957). Due to human limitations and abilities for comprehensive rational examination of facts, actors often make selective perception of the available facts/cases and make their judgments on several issues including their national role conceptions. National role conceptions are closely related to orientations and roles too, reflect basic predispositions, fears, and attitudes towards the outside world as well as systematic, geographic and economic variables (Holsti, 1983).

The “outside in” / “inside-out” framework describes national predispositions in its conception of internal/external policies. By and large, this framework has influenced various policy outcomes in Nigeria and many other developing states of the “South”. Several expressions of this framework can be identified and diagnosed here. For example, the outside-in makes Nigerian academics seek external publications to gain local and institutional recognition, elevation (DELSU, 2007) Outside-in made Nigeria to drop further boundary contests with Cameroon even when it was obvious to her that she was ceding away what she considers rightly belongs to her. Outside-in made Nigerian policy makers to initially debilitate in considering the nationalization of certain foreign companies operating in their country even when it was most expedient economically and politically to do so in the 1980s - two of the typical cases include Standard Bank which was shown to have dealings with then-racist regime in Pretoria, South Africa and Shell ‘D’Archy Oil company. This was due to their foreign (British) origins. Currently, outside-in is weakening the implementation of the Nigerian government’s local-content policy especially in the oil exploration/exploitation industrial sub-sector. Outside-in is currently standing on the way of proper implementation of the country’s policies on environmental protection especially its legislation against gas flaring among oil companies operating in the state. Outside-in may make Nigeria drop its indictment of former top
US Government official accused recently of implicit involvement in a multi-million dollar fraud case involving staff officers of Halliburton International Limited (a US-based oil servicing company). At the international arena, it can be said that outside-in made Britain - now resigned to a medium power status in international polar configuration (Frankel, 1975) - to join the United States of America in prosecuting the now-seemingly moribund Iraqi campaign against perhaps, what at the time may be described as, “prevailing popular domestic” British economic preferences. Britain still seeks her lost international leadership glory perhaps in vain, as Edom in the Bible still seek his seniority in Israel.

Conversely, “inside-out” made Robert Mugabe to withstand the external media and political stress and sustain domestic power in Zimbabwe against outside threats and overtures, whether rightly or wrongly conceived. Inside-out, made Rwanda to wake up from the economic and social ravages of the 1994 genocide to become one of Africa’s front liners in contemporary economic, social and political development. Rwandan today, is one of Africa’s fast-growing economies currently attracting much acknowledgement in the international media. Also at the international arena, “inside-out” made Japan to look inwards to overcome the harsh economic and social impact of Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings in 1945 and today enjoys a favorable balance of trade with the United States of America. Japan’s current advancement in electronic technology has seemingly outclassed that of the West, at least in several economic (if not, technical) respects. In the current military tension between North Korea and South Korea (an ally of the United States of America) “Inside-out” is currently making North Korea to undertake military drills to also showcase her military capability in response to similar displays by the United States of America in that geopolitical hemisphere.
B. YAR’ADUA/JONATHAN AND COMMENCEMENT OF INSIDE-OUT FOREIGN POLICY

If anything, the President Yar’Adua civilian government in Nigeria, now being continued by current president Goodluck Jonathan (after the death of President Musa Yar’Adua in 2010), provides new policy thrust within the inside-out paradigm. By underscoring the significance of domestic economic and social realities as primary bases for determining the nation’s foreign policy, the Yar’Adua/Jonathan government has apparently situated the nation’s interest in the inside-out philosophy. National interest continues to remain a major determinant of a nation’s foreign engagement (Morgenthau, 1967). The foreign policy of major states is concerned both with the maintenance of a reasonably favourable international order and with the pursuit of individual national interests (Frankel, 1975). Thus, it is upon this national interest “base” are the “superstructures” of foreign economic, political or social engagements constructed. Current national diplomacy is centered on creating international understandings that will promote domestic nation-building. Towards this objective the administration has adopted development-orientated foreign policy outlook whereby mainly economy-boosting diplomacy is embarked upon. This however should not be interpreted to imply that we are equating international diplomacy with just economic diplomacy. A healthy diplomatic package should incorporate other spheres of national interest including security, politics and even culture (Chibundu, 2003). The administration has concentrated on strategic economic diplomacy as a prime tool for enhancing domestic economy. Its emphasis on the repatriation of Nigeria’s stolen wealth abroad through constructive legal and police relationship is apparently inside-out. Its recourse to seeking internal peace in the troubled Niger Delta through its constructive Amnesty policy and its post-Amnesty military campaign against criminal insurgents in that region are inherently “inside-out”. Its realistic fine-tuning of financial
administration especially in streamlining expenditure components of the national assembly including the trimming down of available international travels, coheres strictly with the “inside-out” policy. By maintaining a constructive presence in African security, economic and political courses as in its relationship with current trouble-spots like Sudan, Congo, Cote I’voire, Egypt and Madagascar and by not necessarily jumpstarting into expensive military intervention or recommending same, the Yar’Adua/Goodluck regime has continuously reviewed its international policy on African centeredness and has selected those alternatives that produce direct immediate positive impact on the nation’s economy. The country had no doubt wasted its hard-earned economic resources in prosecuting, some probably meaningless African courses and others which are based solely on illusive psychological objectives of a “big brother”. Most of these courses which were inherently “outside-in” in outlook provided an idealistic input for Nigeria and other African countries in forming such organizations as the Organization of African Unity (OAU), in 1963 (now renamed African Union), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in 1975, and in most of her role conception about the now-well-romanticized African centered foreign policy projected by the Murtala Mohammed/Obasanjo military regimes of the late 1970s. Whether or not, if anything, the African centered foreign policy favored the nation’s immediate domestic interests, she plunged her resources headlong towards several African ventures including inter alia, her contributory role in the Angolan crisis of 1975, the Apartheid struggle in South Africa in the 1960s, 70s, 80s, the Congo crisis of 1990s, the Sierra Leone crisis 1990s, Liberian crisis of 1990s, the Namibian Solidarity Movement in 1991, the Rwanda Genocide of 1994, the central Sudanese mission in 2006 and even her attitude in the Nigerian-Cameroon (Bakassi) border conflict in which the nation took a posture of “big brother who ensures that the smaller one grew up well”. It is true in life that not all “small” brothers acknowledge a “big” brother’s effort(s) no matter the
magnitude of the assistance. Rather, most small brothers treat you not only with derision and cynicism but also, in some cases, with hatred. While heading to The Hague over her border issue with Nigeria, Cameroon for instance quickly forgot the financial and material aid she received from Nigeria during the former’s latest experience of the eruption of the Cameroon Mountains on 28th May, 2000 (Seach, 2010).

C. IMPLICATION FOR DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

While not trying to jettison the whole philosophy of African centeredness, and also not ignoring the quantum of international acknowledgements and accolades which the country received in material and moral terms for her roles in these ventures, there is much proclivity here to appraise the outside-in outlook of the African centered foreign policy against the backdrop of current national, social and political realities. In current globalized market economy, international specialization/competition is the driving force of policymaking among modern states. This is the parlance in which we attempt to recommend the “inside-out” policy as an only realistic paradigm for national development in contemporary Nigeria.

For a nation with such national exigencies like poverty alleviation, the management and control of an exploding population, growing unemployment, challenges of internal security and social cohesion (especially with a massively-defined structural ethnic heterogeneity) and an undefined, perhaps dwindling, stock of economic resources, a preferred foreign policy option would be one directed at protecting these realities and hence seek “realistic” solutions for tackling such domestic challenges in its external engagements. The inside-out approach seeks to source primary external engagements that are entirely or significantly investment-driven and at improving domestic, economic, political and social structures. International diplomacy in an inside-out frame work is
directed primarily at expressing the realities of the national economy and not “window-dressing” it, as the *African-centered foreign policy* had been in Nigeria. Emphasis in an *inside-out* foreign policy framework is placed on stimulating domestic growth through foreign initiative to secure relevant foreign investors into the local economy and to expand domestic production and an accretion of the domestic capital as a relevant “engine” of economic and social growth (Stiglitz, 1996). International diplomacy should therefore attract the right type of foreign investors (irrespective of their regional or continental origins) who will “perceive” the local environment as safe and promising. This may be seen as a kind of economic *weltpolitik* for the nation. The engagement should seek to guarantee such investment safety at home with a resilient financial market structure and an encouraging social control mechanism accompanied by an honest and efficient judicial structure. For a nation with abundant human and material economic resources *inside-out* approach would attract, rather than scare foreign partners, in creating a healthy partnership in the building of the domestic economy.

REFERENCES


