Domestic policy and foreign policy: A Critical Analysis of Nigeria’s Foreign Policy under civilian Rule, 1979-1983

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Abstract

Foreign policy is an endless dialogue between the internal and external forces. A country’s domestic exigencies often dictate or influence its conduct of external relations. This paper examines how domestic factors shaped the Nigeria’s foreign policy implementation of Alhaji Shehu Shagari who was the first Executive President of Nigeria from 1979-1983. The paper adopts the historical and analytical research methods. It relies on both primary and secondary sources of information to justify the impact of domestic exigencies on the conduct of a country’s external relations. The paper establishes that domestic forces are life-line of foreign policy. It concludes that the events of the periods from 1979-1983 under President Shagari shaped the conduct of Nigeria’s external relations. The paper recommends that in the formulation and execution of Nigeria’s foreign policy, successive Nigerian government should put into consideration domestic factors in it external relations.

Keywords: Domestic policy, Foreign policy, Domestic exigencies, external relations.
Introduction

Foreign policy referred to as a co-ordinated strategy by which policy makers in a country seek to manipulate the international environment in a bid to achieve a perceived domestic interest. It can also be refers to as an endless dialogue between the forces of the domestic and external. Foreign policy consists of two basic features: the *domestic* and *external* features. The domestic elements consist of all issues within the country’s borders, while the external element refers to the ways a government of a country advances its interests in the international system. Through foreign policy, a country seeks to promote and protect it domestic interest in the process of its interaction with the outside world. The notion of domestic interest is very key to the foreign policy of states. As a result, the major foreign policy goals of states in the establishment of relations are to project, protect and defend their domestic interest. Domestic interest is the fundamental objective and ultimate determinant which guide decision-makers in foreign policy design. Indeed, a country’s domestic interests are core elements which cannot be compromised, such as national economic well-being, national security, national way of life, as well as territorial integrity and self-preservation.

The Nigeria’s domestic interests include the preservation of its sovereign; the security and protection of its citizens and maintenance of its territorial integrity. Sir Alhaji Tafawa Balewe, who became the first Prime Minister of Nigeria immediately after independence, affirmed thus, “in formulating its policy for the conduct of foreign affairs, the Federal Government recognizes that its primary duty is to safeguard and promote the interest of the federation and its citizens.” Since independence in 1960, the Nigerian government has continually reaffirmed the importance of the domestic interest as the major determinant in foreign policy formulations. This paper focuses on the interplay between the domestic and foreign forces during the Second Republic from 1979-1983.

The Second Republic began in Nigeria on 1 October 1979 when the then military regime of General Olusegun Obasanjo successfully handed
power to President Shehu Shagari after the 1979 Presidential election which ushered in another civilian government in the country. When President Shagari came on board, one basic aspect of the Nigeria’s foreign policy his administration pursued was the Nigeria’s African Policy enunciated by the Prime Minister Tafawa Balewa in 1960. In his speech to the National Assembly in 1980, President Shagari stated thus:

“Africa remains the cornerstone of Nigeria's Foreign Policy. My Administration is committed to the cause of the total liberation of Africa and the abolition of racism in all its manifestations. We shall neither relax nor relent until all Africans and all black men are free. It should be understood that political freedom is not complete without economic and cultural freedom. My Administration's Domestic Policy for peace, unity and stability in Nigeria translates, at the first instance, into being good neighbours... Nigeria stands for African unity.”

The administration of President Shagari was characterised by political tension ranging from Nigeria’s economic crisis, expulsion of illegal aliens and Cameroon aggression against Nigeria in the Bakasi Peninsular. All these gained expression in the area of foreign policy formulation and execution under President Shagari Administration. First the economy was in crisis; second, the politicians could not take up the challenges of foreign policy formulation. Ike Nwanchukwu Nigeria’s Foreign Minister under Gen. Babangida, noted that these two factors “checkmated the dynamism of our foreign policy under President Shehu Shagari.” Domestic policy and foreign policy under President Shagari will conveniently be examined under the following domestic and external exigencies: Economic exigencies, corruption, threat to Nigeria’s national interest (Cameroon aggression) and Nigeria’s African policy.
Economic Crisis

However, in 1983, Nigeria’s external relations deteriorated due to the domestic economic crisis faced by the President Shagari’s administration. The crisis led to the introduction of austerity measures by the Nigerian government which reduced Nigeria’s aids to countries in the sub-region. This also led to the cut in Nigeria’s financial contributions to liberation struggles in Africa. On 17 January 1983, Alhaji Ali Baba, the then Nigerian Federal Minister of Internal Affairs, in a television broadcast, defended the expulsion policy of the Shagari government which resulted in the expulsion of foreigner national residing and working illegally in Nigeria as a result of Nigeria’s economic challenges. This led to the expulsion of illegal foreigners mainly from Ghana, Chad, Niger, Mali among others. President Shagari’s expulsion of illegal aliens in Nigeria provoked spirited attacks and outright denunciation. The government of South Africa under the leadership of Prime Minister Botha compared Shagari with Hitler and the quit order with the question of finding the final solution to the Jewish problem in Nazi Germany.

The deportation order worsened the country’s image and created hostility towards Nigeria. The United State Department of State and many humanitarian organisations across the globe condemned Nigeria’s mass deportation. By the end of President Shagari’s government, Nigeria’s international and domestic image had been battered. The action of the Nigeria government strained the long existing relations between her and some countries of Africa, America and Europe. The action was perceived as an act against the spirit of African brotherhood and the betrayal of the spirit of pan-Africanism. Nigeria, a leading African country who stood in the defence of the oppressed African descent all over the world, became the opposite of his philosophy of ‘African oneness. This is a reflection of how a country’s domestic challenges can condition it external relations as seen in the later part of President Shagari’s administration. This was the situation before his administration was truncated on 31 December 1983, by a new
military junta headed by Major General Mohammadu Buhari and Tunde Idiagbon.

The economic situation of Nigeria at the time was one of the major factors that shaped Nigeria’s external relations. Nigeria’s economic challenges during the periods can be seen in the mono-cultural nature of the Nigerian economy and its reliance on external economy, coupled with a weak economy base. These simply meant that the economy was at the mercies of the world economy. It was thus, no wonder that the global economic recession and the glut in oil in the world market at the time which led to a fall in world oil prices would have a devastating effect of the Nigerian economy. ix

The adoption of some austerity measures in 1982 to address economic challenges resulted in the establishment of the Economic Stabilization Act of April 1982. Although, the austerity measure as a strategy failed to address the situation and end up intensifying the economic crisis. During this period, Nigeria’s economic fortune sharply deteriorated, these circumstances further pushed the government to take tough actions in the area of foreign policy. However, in 1983, Nigeria’s external relations deteriorated due to the economic crisis.

The forces of the domestic economic crisis which characterised the regime of President Shagari, necessitated a policy formulation that embraces the West, an attempt toward economic recovery. For example, the Anti-American position which characterises the Murtala/Obasanjo’s regimes was played down because the government of President Shagari wanted International Monetary Fund (IMF) credit assistance and agreed to the United States demand in 1983, that a Pan-African Peacekeeping Force should replace the Cuban force in Angola. This was contrary to OAU decision and those of the frontline state that there should be no linkage of the withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola with Namibia’s independence, as was then demanded by the United States. x
Corruption
The corrupt nature of Nigerian political office holders was another domestic factor that shaped the foreign policy of President Shagari during the period under review. The economic recession that followed the unprecedented corruption of the Shagari regime led Nigeria to embark on borrowing spree with Britain acting in most cases as the guarantor. This marked the beginning of a new epoch of debtor-creditor relationship in Nigeria’s external relations. This to some extent gave the West, most especially Britain the power to control and dictate the foreign policy goals of President Shagari. The high level of corrupt practices perpetrated by political officers arouses external concern and massive criticism. This domestic factor, not only tarnished Nigeria’s image abroad, but it also affected the country’s external relations.

Threat to Nigeria’s interest
In May 1981, the Nigeria-Cameroon border dispute was another domestic exigency that confronted the administration of President Shagari. The dispute became tense as a result of the killing of five Nigerian soldiers in the disputed Rio Del Rey. Nigeria issued a strong note of displeasure and protest to Cameroon. In the note, President Shagari demanded an apology, compensation and reparation for the killing of the Nigerian soldiers. When Cameroon government put up a non-compliance with these demands, Ishaya Audu, the then Minister of External Affairs stated “we reserve the right to take whatever action we consider appropriate.” This situation brought both countries to a state of “brinkmanship”. Tensions were so high that Chief Obafemi Awolowo, the then Opposition leader referred to President Shagari as “coward who is playing the ostrich in the face of war.”

The OAU pay no attention to the Nigerian/Cameroon border clash initially. The Organisation later became involved in mediating when President Shagari planned to boycott the OAU Summit Conference at Nairobi, Kenya. The Organisation was forced to be involved due to
President Shagari’s Airport Diplomacy, because the plan to boycott the Summit was taking at the Lagos Airport which was relayed to the OAU. Although the dispute has been settled by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) located in Hague, but Nigerians were still not satisfied with the resolution. Besides, President Shagari foreign policy toward the Cameroon act of aggression was greeted with criticism from Nigerians, although going by what the Afro-centric principle stand for, President Shagari handling of the border dispute clearly reflected the President commitment to the quest for peace in Africa. Nigeria has showed so much commitment to settling disputes among African countries; it would have been irreconcilable for Nigeria to have embarked on war against another African country even in the face of unwarranted provocation.

According to President Shagari, his non-military retaliation were based on basic principles namely: “the background of the principles of our foreign policy, our prominent membership of the OAU; our leadership and mediatory role in Africa and the continental global repercussions of any hasty reaction to conflict situation between us and our neighbours with whom we share common heritage and destiny. President Shagari also declared:

> Our whole foreign policy has been meticulously geared towards promoting good neighbourliness and a healthy respect for the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of others. We firmly believe in the OAU principle of the inviolability of the international boundaries inherited by states at the time of their national independence. Indeed, a third component of our foreign policy, adherence to the provisions of international law relating to the non-use, or threat of the use of force in relations between states, precluded any hasty recourse, by us, to military
response, until all diplomatic persuasion had failed.\textsuperscript{18}

This declaration and subsequent remarks of President Shagari, are evidences of how Nigeria’s internal exigencies shaped the country’s external relations.

In whichever way President Shagari handled the Nigeria-Cameroon border dispute, it never gone down well with many Nigerians who were of the opinion that the country condescended too low from it respected diplomatic height. The incident shows weakness in our foreign policy decision-making process. The best foreign policies, according to Banji Adeyanju, in his observations, “are activist and pre-emptive in nature but this administration waits for problems to occur before it scrambles to find solutions to them.”\textsuperscript{xv} According to him it is better for a government to be pre-emptive rather than wait for it to escalate.

**Nigeria’s African policy**

The interrelatedness between domestic policy and foreign policy was also demonstrated by President Shagari’s when his administration tenaciously pursued the Nigeria’s African policy of the total liberation of African states. This commitment became a major priority of Nigeria’s foreign policy. On the Afro-centric goals of the country’s foreign policy, Shagari declared: “We have a special responsibility for Africa and the African wherever he may be.”\textsuperscript{xvi} This was his first speech after he was sworn in as the Executive President of Nigeria on October 1, 1979. According to Shagari during the swearing in “It will be the cardinal principle of this administration to ensure that all the oppressed people of Africa regain their freedom and dignity.”\textsuperscript{xvii} He also affirmed that he was going to pursue the same foreign policy of Mohammed/Obasanjo military administration in a bid to uphold Nigeria’s dominance in Africa’s affair. On this score, Ibrahim Gambari aptly observed that:
President Shahu Shagari administration inherited a high degree of national consensus which emerged behind the main features of Nigeria’s policy goals and objectives. These include support for the liberation movements in South Africa, opposition to racism and racial discrimination throughout the world, reasoned support for regional economic cooperation such as ECOWAS, the pursuit for New International Economic Order, Africa as the central focus of the country’s foreign policy and the operationalization of a truly non-aligned foreign policy.

On the question of building on Nigeria’s leadership role, President Shagari made a tremendous success. His first major success in foreign policy issues was the outright role his administration played in ensuring the liberation of Zimbabwe from the shackle of a white minority in 1980. Southern Africa in particular and Africa in general was the centre-piece of Nigeria’s foreign policy during President Shagari administration. No other foreign relations issue generated a unified Nigerian response as did opposition to white supremacy in the Southern African Sub-continent. Many people acknowledged the supreme role of Nigeria in Zimbabwean independence in 1980.

The Lancaster House Conference in London (September 10 to December 21, 1979), which paved way for Zimbabwean independence, was spearheaded by Nigeria. As part of President Shagari commitment to Zimbabwean independence, sent a special envoy, Alhaji Maitama Sule, to head an observer delegation to the 1979 Lancaster House Conference in London. Also to demonstrate Nigeria’s commitment to the liberation of Zimbabwe, Shagari sent monitoring team to monitor the 1980 Zimbabwean elections. Nigeria’s three-man monitoring team was headed by Sam Ikoku and joined the Commonwealth team that monitored the elections. During
the Zimbabwean independent celebration on April 18, 1980, President Shagari pledged 10 million (more than $10 million then) grant to Zimbabwe.xx

On significant trend or continuity in Nigeria’s domestic policy vis-à-vis foreign policy since independence is the Afro-centricism which placed Africa as the centre-piece of Nigeria’s foreign policy. Successive Nigerian leaders have uphold this principle which often resulted in using the country’s economic, human, financial, and material resources in maintaining and resolving African conflicts without any benefit. For example, Nigeria invested human, financial and material resources in ensuring the Angolan independence without any political, economic or social benefits. Relative peace in Chad, Liberia, South Africa liberation and even in Zimbabwe, where President Shagari gave the sum of $10million and also entered an agreements which resulted in the training of Zimbabwe students, senior civil servants and military officers. For instance, many Zimbabwean Army officers are being trained at the Nigerian Defence Academy in Kaduna, while some senior civil servants also received training at the Administrative Staff College of Nigeria (ASCON) located in Tapo, Badagry, and Lagos State.xxi

In conclusion, domestic factors cannot be relegated in foreign policy formulation and execution. This goes to say that without ‘domestic policy, there is no foreign policy’. The internal conditions of States are major priority in the conduct of external relations. Nigeria’s external relations and foreign policy under President Shagari from 1979-1980, was conditioned and shaped by domestic factors ranging from Nigeria’s economic crisis, threat to Nigeria’s national interest (Cameroon aggression against Nigeria), corruption and Nigeria’s afro-centricism. These factors retarded the assertiveness of Nigeria’s foreign policy and the interrelatedness between domestic policy and foreign policy under the administration of President Shagari from 1979-1983.
Endnotes


iii Federation of Nigeria, Prime Minister, House of Representative Debates, August 20, 1960.


viii See “Geo-Politics: Nigeria in International Affairs: Lecture notes for Senior Staff Course Qualifying Examination”, prepared under the Direction of Chief of Army Staff, 2013, 9.


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