

THREE POINTS FOREIGN POLICY AGENDA

AN APPRAISAL OF PRESIDENT MUHAMMADU BUHARI'S FIRST TERM FOREIGN POLICY AGENDA

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Citation: Bello, I. & Kazibwe, S. (2023). Three Points Foreign Policy Agenda: An Appraisal of President Muhammadu Buhari's First Term Policy Agenda. *KIU Interdisciplinary Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 4(2), 37-44

ABSTRACT

On assumption of office on May 29 2015, President Muhammad Buhari outlined three cardinal issues his administration will place a premium on Economic Development, the Fight against terrorism and the Fight against Corruption. These three issues have also continued to guide the administration's foreign policy. This paper aims to appraise how the administration has performed in its first term from 2015-2019 with regard to these three cardinal foreign policy principles. Using secondary data sources from journals, books, newspapers, and government reports, the research found that President Buhari's trips across the world capital are in tandem with the administration's foreign policy goals for the implication on national development. Considerable effort has been made towards the fight against insurgency by raising a multinational coalition to tackle the menace of terrorism, which had negatively affected Nigeria's image on the International scene. This was made possible with collaboration with Chad, Cameroon and Niger to form Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) which played an important role in degrading Boko Haram Insurgency. As for economic development, the president's trip to China has brought about considerable infrastructural development and Foreign Direct Investment from other world capitals, which help the government in exiting the recession. The paper concludes that there is a need for the administration to follow up on agreements signed during this foreign trip to engender national development effectively.

Keywords: Foreign Policy; Foreign Policy Analysis, Muhammadu Buhari, Economic Development, Corruption and Terrorism.

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INTRODUCTION

The foreign policy of every country is influenced by internal and external determinants as perceived by the decision-makers. This policy safeguards the national interest and allows the state to survive in the international system characterised by competing interests between state and non-state actors. Nigeria's foreign policy since independence has gone through continuity and change. From assessment of the environment, goal setting, determination, formulation, and eventual implementation, Nigeria's foreign policy has changed from the first republic under Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa to the first fourth republic president Chief Olusegun Obasanjo and the current President, Muhammad Buhari. As Wogu, Sholarin, and Chidozie (2015) argues, the different administration had different epistemological construction and definition of their understanding of Nigeria's foreign policy. The conceptualisations, they claim, are not born out of philosophical reflection or ideological constructs but rather psychological and political grandstanding and the selfish appetite of the different administrations to make an identity for themselves. This factor remains the reason for the country's project abandonment and foreign policy failure.

On assumption of office in 2015, the president's first official trip was to Niger, Chad and Cameroon. This was done to rally its West African neighbours to fight the Boko Haram Insurgency. The visit led to the creation of a Multinational Joint Taskforce located in Ndjamena, the capital of Chad. This trip was followed by a visit to Guinea and Benin Republic to further re-invigorate relations between the West African sub-regions. Just like his predecessors, President Muhammad Buhari has continued to play a crucial role in solving various political logjams on the continent and the West Africa subregion particularly. Among these are Mali, The Gambia, Guinea Bissau and Cote D'Ivoire interventions. These intervention has brought relative peace and ensured a peaceful transfer of power, as seen in the case of The Gambia between former president Yahaya Jammeh and Adama Barrow. This is in furtherance of the Afrocentric policy, which has remained a cardinal principle of Nigeria's foreign policy from independence in 1960 to date. However, a snag in the Afrocentric policy was the closure of the border for eight months to its West African neighbours, hampered the free movement of goods, services and people within the West African sub-region. This policy was implemented to check the smuggling of foreign rice and arms from the country's porous borders. The closure has not stopped this as foreign rice still finds its way into the country, and various parts are washed with weapons smuggled through its porous borders. The smuggling has made it difficult for the government to curtail insecurity bedevilling various parts of the country. The closure of borders hampered relations between Nigeria and Ghana, as Nigerian businesses in Accra faced much harassment from the government and police authority in Ghana.

The three cardinal objectives of Nigeria's foreign policy under President Buhari were borne out of Nigerians' frustration towards President Goodluck Jonathan's administration from 2010-2015. Jonathan showed a lackadaisical attitude towards corruption and terrorism. Going by his antecedent in the fight against the Maitasine insurgent group as a military officer and the fierce anti-corruption military head of state from 1984-1986, Buhari made these two issues. In addition to revamping the economy, the focal point of his campaign, Buhari, was believed to have defeated Jonathan in the 2015

Presidential election on the strength of his campaign's anti-corruption and anti-terrorism agenda (Ozden & Onapajo, 2019). These issues later became the focal points of his foreign policy after he assumed office in May 2015.

This study adopts critical and rationalist methods of analysis. A review of relevant literature, text, arguments and archival materials was done to accurately appraise Buhari's first-term foreign policy. The paper will show that despite his antecedents in the fight against insurgents and the anti-corruption stands, the president is still widely criticised as not doing enough to improve the welfare of the citizenry.

Three Point Foreign Policy Agenda of Muhammadu Buhari Administration

On assumption of office in May 2015, President Buhari itemised his administration's three cardinal foreign policy objectives: economic development, fight against insurgency, and fight against corruption. These three issues dominated diplomatic engagements between Nigeria and its partners. Undoubtedly, the administration's economic development policy and fight against corruption were intertwined; this is because the government wooed investors from foreign countries in the West and sought to recover stolen funds from these countries.

Economic Development

Saleh (2019) stated that Buhari merged foreign policy with economic relations. On assumption of office, the president travelled to several countries to woo investors and seek to recover stolen funds to keep the economy afloat. This led to an inflow of Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) into the economy. Notable among the FDI in 2017 was a \$86 Billion investment to Dangote Cement by foreign partners, a \$1 million investment to Tomaro refinery in Lagos state, \$600 million investment to establish an industrial park in Kano state. Others include, \$1.231 billion Lagos-Kano modernization projects, Lagos-Ibadan segment, \$1.146 billion Lagos-Kano railway modernization project, Kano-Kaduna segment, \$3.474 billion Lagos-Calabar Coastal Rail project, \$6.1 billion Ibadan-Ilorin-Minna-Kaduna-Kano line, \$1.4 billion Lagos to Ibadan Rail Project, \$15 billion Agricultural Development, \$2 billion Dangote Group Cement Project, \$478 million Construction of 300 Mega Watts solar power in Shiroro, Niger State, \$55 million Construction and equipping of granite mining plant, \$1 billion Greenfield expressway for Abuja-Ibadan-Lagos, \$250 million Ultra-modern 27-storey high rise complex, \$1 billion Hi-tech industrial park in Ogun-Guangdong Free Trade Zone, \$200 million Construction of two 500MT/day float gas facilities, \$363 million Comprehensive farm and downstream industrial park, \$500 million Project for the provision of television broadcast equipment, \$25 million Facility for production of pre-paid intelligent meters (Tanimu, 2016).

The above-listed agreements resulted from President Buhari's visit to China, which lasted for one week when several agreements were signed. The visit resulted from an invitation by the President of China, Xi Jin Ping—the meeting aimed to improve ties and tap into the potential of the largest economy in Africa. The meeting birthed an agreement to improve infrastructure in the country and

was signed between Nigeria's Ministry of Trade and Investment and China's National Development Reform Commission. China also provided several loans to finance the 2016 budget deficit of Nigeria. Apart from infrastructure, both countries also signed currency agreements. This allows Nigeria and Chinese businesses to access Yuan and Naira without exchanging United States Dollars. This was meant to encourage seamless trade and economic interaction and break USD hegemony (Bello, Dutse, and Othman, 2017). Nigeria has undoubtedly leaned more towards China for its economic needs, especially infrastructural development. Scholars like Saliu (2019) acknowledged China's growing importance as a hegemon but cautioned Nigeria from falling into neo-colonialism.

During his visit to the United Arab Emirates in 2016. The president signed an agreement on reciprocal promotion and protection of investments to avoid double taxation. This is to improve economic cooperation between the largest economy in Africa and the second largest in the Arab world. To create and promote conditions for a conducive business climate for nationals and companies of both countries. During the 2016 visit, the following agreements were signed Avoidance of Double Taxation Agreement, the Agreement on Trade Promotion and the Protection and Judicial Agreements on Extradition to promote economic cooperation between Nigeria and the United Arab Emirates. Despite all these travels and diplomatic engagements, Saleh (2019) submitted that Buhari's economic diplomacy failed to attract the needed FDI to improve the manufacturing and industrial sector, eventually leading the economy to contract, and the country went into recession during his first tenure as president.

Fight against Corruption

President Buhari's strong stance against corruption has earned him much goodwill within the international system, which has also given investors some confidence to encourage FDI into the country on his visit to the United States of America in 2016. The president meets with the erstwhile Vice President, now the President of the USA, Joe Biden, the Treasury Secretary, Attorney General Loretta E. Lynch and Bob Work, the Deputy Defense Secretary. At the meeting, it was agreed that the USA would play a key role in complementing the administration's fight against corruption. Nigerian stolen funds have, in the past, found their way to the USA. In 2017, the US Department of Justice filed a civil complaint for the forfeiture of \$144 million linked to former Nigerian Minister of Petroleum Diezani Alison-Madueke. The DOJ said this money was a result of corrupt proceedings. Also implicated were Olajide Omokore and Kola Aluko as fronts for the former minister. During her tenure, these individuals won lucrative oil-lifting contracts and purchased choice properties for the former minister worldwide (Bello, Dutse, Othman, 2017). Page (2016) states that US government officials saw the election of Buhari as an avenue for Nigeria to improve on its anticorruption records, as the Nigerian political elites have continued to plunder the country's oil wealth for the benefit of the very few at the expense of the general populace. The DOJ under Loretta E. Lynch collaborated actively with the Buhari administration to ensure that they assisted Nigeria in recovering its loot domiciled in the US and other Western countries.

Akpan and Eyo (2018) added that the invitation of Buhari to the 2016 Anticorruption Summit in

London was an acknowledgement of his zero tolerance for corruption which was vital to restoring the dignity of the Nigerian state among its peer within the international system. After the summit in 2016, Nigeria and the United Kingdom signed a Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) to help Nigeria recover and return the proceeds of bribery and corruption transparently and responsibly. This agreement paid off as the United Kingdom returned £4.2 million to Nigeria in 2021. The funds were recovered from James Ibori, the former Delta state Governor and his associates. Ibori had earlier been prosecuted in the UK and jailed. Both countries agreed the recovered sum would fund critical infrastructure such as Abuja to Kano highway, Lagos to Ibadan expressway and the second Niger Bridge.

In 2016, President Buhari, during his visit to the United Arab Emirates, signed Mutual Legal Agreement (MLA) on Criminal Matters to improve the effectiveness of Nigeria and the United Arab Emirates to investigate and prosecute corrupt individuals and confiscate criminal proceeds. The agreement defined proceeds of crimes to include *“any assets derived or realised, directly and indirectly, by any person as a result of criminal conduct or the value of any asset, “asset” itself is defined as “ money and all kinds of moveable or immovable or tangible or intangible property, and include any interest on such property”* Similarly, the MLA provides for that each state agree to extradite to each other upon request by both parties. The agreement stated that *“any person who is found in the territory of the Requested Party (say UAE) and is wanted in the Requesting Party (say Nigeria) for any prosecution or trial or execution of a sentence in respect of an extraditable offence committed within the jurisdiction of the Requesting Party”* (Shehu, 2016).

As a follow-up to the 2016 agreements in UAE, the president 2017 signed and ratified the earlier agreement made in the UAE for it to become law in Nigeria and reciprocated in UAE. The agreements include Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters, Agreement on Mutual Legal Assistance in Civil and Commercial Matters, Agreement on the Transfer of Sentenced Persons and an Extradition Treaty. All these agreements have been put in place to strengthen the anticorruption efforts of the administration.

The importance of these agreements cannot be overemphasised. Dubai has become a destination and haven for Nigerians accused of financial crimes. Page (2020) stated that Dubai has become a perfect place to stash financial crime proceeds from Nigeria's corrupt elites. They mainly invest millions of dollars in Dubai's expensive luxury real estate. This is because of the minimal oversight and few legal obstacles to transferring large amounts of money for property purchase in Dubai compared to the West, notably the United States, United Kingdom and France. He elaborated that at least 800 properties worth over 146 billion naira were linked to Nigeria's elite or their associates, proxies and family members. This amount is three times the annual budget of Nigeria's electoral body, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and roughly two-thirds of the Army's budget in Nigeria.

Notable among them was James Ibori, who escaped to Dubai while he was sort after by the United Kingdom and Nigeria; he was eventually extradited to the UK, where he was jailed for money laundering. More recently, the immediate Attorney General and Minister of Justice, Muhammed Bello Adoke, was extradited from UAE to face charges in Nigeria. Since 2015, there has been an

investigation of Politically Exposed Persons (PEP) and high-ranking political office holders such as Governors, Legislators,

Presidential Aides, Ministers and even the wife of former President Goodluck Jonathan. Prominent among them include former governors Babangida Aliyu (Niger State), Sule Lamido and Saminu Turaki (Jigawa State), Jonah Jang and Joseph Dariye (Plateau), Jolly Nyame (Taraba), Orji Uzor Kalu (Abia) among other. Former Senate President Bukola Saraki, National Security Adviser Colonel Sambo Dasuki, Former First Lady Patience Jonathan. To understand the magnitude of the preceding administration before the assumption of office by Buhari, the Minister of Information, Alhaji Lai Muhammad, stated that about 3.4 trillion naira was recovered as cash and assets in the first year of Buhari's presidency (Ozden & Onapajo, 2019).

Fight against Insurgency

Prior to the general election in 2015, Boko Haram, also known as Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad (*People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad*), had taken control of a substantial part of Borno and Yobe state in Northeastern Nigeria respectively. The group soon got notoriety for a violent confrontation with the Nigeria government institutions, especially the police. The confrontation got more violent in 2009, leading to the death of their leader Muhammad Yusuf and over 1,000 group members. Yusuf's successor and Deputy Abubakar Shekau assumed the group's leadership and took a more violent approach towards achieving the group's agenda. After its violent approach in Nigeria, the group action soon became transnational, spreading to neighboring countries of Chad, Cameroon, Niger, and Mali, among other African countries. This internationalization was capped with allegiance to ISIS, making Boko Haram; the Islamic State of West Africa. With internationalization, the group had support from Al-Qaeda, Al-Qaeda in the Maghreb (AQIM), the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO), and Ansar al-dine. These groups provided Boko Haram with weapons, ammunition, and Improvised Explosive Device (IED). The group became an issue for the administration of Goodluck Jonathan, with their attacks on various soft and military targets across the country. Notable were the attack on Nigeria's police Headquarters, the Kidnapping of Chibok Government Secondary School girls from Borno State and the suicide bomber attack on the United Nations Building in Abuja, Nigeria. The inability of Goodluck's administration to effectively put an end to the Boko Haram menace led to the loss of appeal across the country and the international community. Hence, then-candidate Buhari's central campaign promise was to put an end to the group. One of the reasons which contributed to the success of Buhari during the elections was the failure of Goodluck Jonathan's administration to deal decisively with the Boko Haram terrorism, which badly affected Nigeria's image in the international community. This became President Muhammadu Buhari's foreign policy cardinal point upon assuming office in 2015 (Funtah & Azieh, 2016; Duta, 2016; Bello et al., 2017).

They were considering the multinational nature of the Boko Haram terrorism in West Africa and keeping to their foreign policy objectives of fighting terrorism. President Buhari's first foreign trip was to Niger

Republic on 3rd June 2015. The trip was less than a week after taking the oath of office on May 29 2015. This gives credence to the seriousness the president gave to the issue of ending insurgency in the country. At the meeting in Niamey was the President of Cameroon. At the Anti-Boko Haram Summit, regional actors committed to a well-coordinated response to the Boko Haram menace that has ravaged the region. The meeting also provided the impetus for enhancing the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) to combat the terrorist effectively. After that, Buhari visited N'Djamena, Chad, on 4th June 2015 and Yaoundé in Cameroon for a bilateral meeting with President Paul Biya. The President also visited Benin President Boni Yahaya, though not affected by the Boko Haram insurgency but committed to sending troops to the MNJTF to help his West African neighbours (Bello et al., 2017; Saliu, 2019). Onapajo (2017) submitted that these shuttle diplomatic engagements by the president played a crucial role in uniting regional allies and denied the insurgents safe heavens. Before now, the insurgents could attack Nigeria and recede to Niger or Cameroon; this made it difficult for Nigerian troops to engage in hot pursuit because it would mean violating the territorial sovereignty of these nation-states.

In the West, mainly the United States of America, President Buhari got the Donald Trump administration's support for purchasing twelve A-29 Super Tucano light attack aircraft. This was in the aftermath of the blacklisting of the Nigerian state from weapons purchase over the Leahy law, which prohibited the US from selling arms to states where armed forces have been accused of human rights violations. The military under President Goodluck Jonathan was accused of flagrant human right violation such as summary execution of combatants and non-combatants. The Nigerian state received the first batch of six aircraft mid-this year and is expected to receive the rest by the end of 2021 to improve Nigeria's air superiority in combating the terrorist.

CONCLUSION

Under President Muhammad Buhari's first term, the Nigeria situation has gone through twist and turn. The three cardinal issues on which his campaign was based formed the crux of his foreign policy. These are the economy, anticorruption and the fight against terrorism. A critical look at these three issues shows that there have been some levels of progress and setback on all three fronts. As argued earlier, on the security front, the government is now confronted with security challenges on a multifaceted front, from just fighting insurgency in the North East in 2015 to Banditry and farmers-herders conflict in the Northwest, secessionist calls by Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and the Yoruba Nation in the South West led by Mazi Nnamdi Kanu and Sunday Adeyemo respectively. On the economic front, Nigeria has experienced two recessions under President Buhari, coupled with high inflation and the closure of its border with its West African neighbours. A reminiscent of what happened under his military administration in 1985. On anti-corruption, the government secured some high-level convictions at the court; however, there are still lapses in the anti-corruption fight. The shortcomings associated with the three-point foreign policy agenda informed the decision of the government to announce a nine-point foreign policy agenda in 2020 by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Geoffrey Oyeama. The expansion was necessitated by the need to be more explicit with Nigeria's

national interest in interaction with actors in the international community, as the three points were seen as vague and failed to achieve the desired objectives.

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