



A Comparative Analysis of Nigerian Foreign Policy Under the Administration of President Olusegun Obasanjo and Muhammadu Buhari

Atah Pine

Department of Political Science, Benue State University, Makurdi

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the activities and engagements of foreign policy on a comparative basis under the administration of Olusegun Obasanjo from (1999-2007) and Muhammadu Buhari (2015-2023). Nigerian foreign policy enjoyed a lease of life and dynamism in both administrations. Their foreign policy thrust could be gauged from issues such as pan-africanism, economic development in the areas of repatriation of stolen funds, debt cancellation, loans for infrastructural development, and image rebuilding. The administrations also had their differences in terms of the personalities and their approaches to issues of foreign policy. However, their leadership skills and capabilities, their diplomatic sagacity, their innovative capacity to build bridges across the continent of Africa and the world, their pursuit of good governance and push for democracy, their effort in resolving conflicts and impasses; their relationship with the western partners and their opening up of new frontiers by establishing and extending their hands of fellowship to China and Russia, that has led to massive infrastructural investment like the rail projects and the road infrastructure. The method of data collection adopted for this study is the qualitative method. The study found out that why president Obasanjo was pragmatic and proactive in his approach to foreign policy engagements, president Buhari on the other hand, was passive to foreign policy engagements, This study concludes that for any administration to fully benefit from foreign policy, there is the need for such administration to define clearly their foreign policy agenda, align it with Nigeria's National Interests, so as to use it to pursue the Nigerian government development agenda and goals.

Keywords: Foreign Policy, Administration, Diplomacy, National Interest, Diaspora.

Introduction

One important tool that nations use to interact with other states and non-state players in the international system is foreign policy. States participate in these interactions in an effort to manage their sovereign nations while pursuing various goals and objectives. As for the principles themselves, some can be implemented by the countries alone, that is, without the help of any other state; others, however, can only be implemented with cooperation and active support from other similar entities outside of their own borders. Foreign policy encompasses all procedures, whether they take the form of acts or reactions, that deal with issues that need the active involvement of those outside the borders of a particular state in order to be accomplished.

Since 1960, Nigeria's guiding principles have been: not aligning with any of the military and ideological power blocs that were in place at the time, particularly the Warsaw Pact and NATO during World War II; The principles of non-interference in the domestic affairs of other states, legal equality, political independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity are all respected. Nigeria also aspires to join both continental and international multilateral organizations due to their practical significance, with Africa serving as the focal point of its external relations. The aforementioned goals are intended to safeguard and further Nigeria's national interest. Although the approaches and intensities used by each government to pursue them have varied greatly, they have all been recognized as legitimate.

They serve as benchmarks that the general public with an interest in foreign affairs can use to assess specific actions. Therefore, it is essential to assess Nigeria's foreign policy under the democratic regimes of Olusegun Obasanjo and Muhammadu Buhari in order to make sure that the nation's interests are vigorously pursued within the framework of the international political system in order to further our country's developmental objectives.

The only two Nigerian presidents to have held office twice are Olusegun Obasanjo and Muhammadu Buhari, both as military heads of state and as civilian presidents. Nigeria's foreign policy saw a rebirth and vigor under his two administrations, marking a golden age in the development and application of foreign policy. Nonetheless, compared to the preceding administrations, one might observe a mix of continuity and change in Nigeria's foreign policy during their second terms in office (Durutoye, 2014). During Olusegun Obasanjo's administration (1975-1979), the government adopted a radical foreign policy with the goal of releasing African governments from the shackles of colonialism and apartheid and lessening the power of Western capitalist nations.

After the Sani Abacha government was isolated, Olusegun Obasanjo (1999–2007) made the decision to reopen Nigeria to the outside world. His foreign policy was centered on shuttle diplomacy, which was intended to promote economic development. Muhammadu Buhari decided to adopt the hardline Murtala/Obasanjo foreign policy from 1983 to 1985. Muhammadu Buhari's foreign policy from 2015 to 2023 also focused on fostering better ties with neighbors and preserving links with other nations, including China and the United States (Bello, Dutse & Othman, 2017).

President Obasanjo was forced to concentrate on the goals of pan-Africanism, shuttle, economics, and home diplomacy as a result of these direction changes in his foreign policy push following his second arrival in 1999. An analysis of the administrations of President Muhammadu Buhari and Obasanjo showed little difference between them, with both focusing on debt recovery and image cleaning as part of their shuttle diplomacy (Ighoshemu, 2021).

The concept of economic development, for example, considers how the continent can be productive to take advantage of its natural and human resources to achieve development for its individual states as well as for the entire continent; the principle of democracy and good governance, on the other hand, considers how African citizens can be granted civil and liberty rights so that they will have the opportunity to pursue their goals and realize them as well. Pan-Africanism, for example, is simply the policy thrust that sees how African can present a united front and a common purpose so they can achieve development and progress in the continent of Africa, as seen in the case of the United States of America.

Taking the aforementioned into consideration, the goal of this study was to compare the foreign policy of Nigeria under the administrations of Presidents Olusegun Obasanjo (1999–2007) and Muhammadu Buhari (2015–2023). How they both handled and carried out foreign policy matters while serving as presidents. Just attempting a comparative comparison of the two eras is the goal. It outlines the salient features of Nigeria's foreign policy during the two time periods and provides an explanation for the parallels and discrepancies.

The Idea of Foreign Policy

The idea of foreign policy has been defined based on scholarly viewpoints that reflect the various vantage points from which scholars view it. Ofoegbu states in (Ola,1997, p.6) that foreign policy is as follows:

a collection of related concepts and ideas that are frequently the result of mental reflection and development. It includes judgment, selection, assessment, methodical insight, understanding of the objective reality pertaining to the environment, and solution-seeking.

A state's program of decisions and activities about its external environment, intended to accomplish both long- and short-term goals, is essentially its foreign policy. By extension, a nation's foreign policy decisions are influenced by its internal climate. "The system of activities evolved by communities for changing the behavior of other states and for adjusting their own activities to the international environment" is how Bojang (2018) defines foreign policy. Foreign policy needs to shed insight on how governments try to alter the behavior of other states and are successful in doing so.

To put it succinctly, in this sense, foreign policy is just the set of behaviors and inactions that are aimed at the outside world in order to achieve the goals of home development. According to this definition, the goal of any country's foreign policy, including Nigeria's, is to assist the country to accomplish its internal or domestic goals, the primary one being the transformation of its people.

Olusegun Obasanjo/ Muhammadu Buhari: A Comparison

Pan- Africanism

Promoting African unity, peace, progress, and oneness—Africans first—as well as the idea of building a united Africa through brotherly love is the essence of pan-Africanism. For example, during his tenure as African Union Chairman in 2004, President Olusegun Obasanjo, along with a few other African leaders, requested that Senegalese President Abdoulaye Wade organize a Pan-African Conference of Intellectuals and Men of Culture from Africa and the Diaspora to explore the role of intellectuals and scholars in bringing about a conflict-free environment and sustaining the African Union through the spirit of Pan Africanism.

The conference, which was held in Dakar, Senegal, from October 6 to 9, 2004, advocated for a Decade of Peace in Africa, starting in 2005, in order to uphold the spirit of the agreements and treaties intended to free the continent from crises and conflicts. Bola (2024).

Nigeria, under the civilian government of Obasanjo, remained steadfast in its traditional Afrocentric position on the continent of Africa. The President reportedly stated:

"I guess Africa should continue to be the centerpiece of our foreign policy" (Ifaenyi, 2017, p. 55). There are signs that we are in a new Africa, including the redoubled resolve of African leaders, the strengthening of regional economic alliances, the OAU's transformation into the AU, and a more positive global perception of Africa, the AU, and its initiatives like NEPAD. Africa should be integrated, united, and free from aggression and violence, especially in the current global system where there isn't a persistent ideological split.

According to Akinterinwa (2004), there was a paradigm shift from an African-centered to a global-focused foreign policy with the ascent of President Obasanjo in 1999. According to him, Nigeria's foreign policy was still primarily focused on Africa on the political arena, but on the global

economy on the economic one. In fact, it forced the need to focus more attention on non-African actors, without necessarily implying any type of disrespect for Africa, given the dire state of the Nigerian economy that Obasanjo inherited and the political unrest of the period.

This pan-Africanist political orientation was likewise pursued by the Muhammadu Buhari administration, although it extended beyond the continent. Nigeria established organizations that would help the nation gain more respect throughout Africa, promoting peace and development on the continent.

Economic Development

In conducting diplomatic interactions with other countries, international organizations, and other actors in international relations, a sovereign state's objectives for economic development are emphasized and pursued with a focus on economic development as a foreign policy direction. Nigeria does not have to lead by example when it comes to the conduct of foreign relations within the community of countries. (2018, Business Day)

The Gulf of Guinea Commission (GGC), which consists of six members (Nigeria, Cameroon, Gabon, Sao Tome and Principe, Congo DR, and Angola), was established in November 1999 under Obasanjo. The objective was to enhance political and economic cooperation among member states and to offer a forum for collaboration between and among sub-regional organizations (such as the ECOWAS and the Central African Community). President Obasanjo revived the Bilateral Joint Commissions in order to facilitate the entry of more capital for Africa's development, particularly with the continent's principal exporters of investment capital. Following the signing of several International Promotion and Protection Agreements (IPPA), Nigeria is anticipated to receive increased development funding, from which other Africans stand to gain greatly as well. Bola (2004)

The Nigeria-South Africa Bi-National Commission was established in the course of multiple diplomatic meetings with South Africa with the goal of fostering greater economic cooperation and increased investment inflows into both nations. This was a contributing factor in the engagement that led to the liberalization of the Nigerian communication market and the emergence of the MTN and DSTV communication networks. Along with Wade of Senegal and Bouteflika of Algeria, Obasanjo and Mbeki served as the driving forces behind the creation of the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) Nuhu, (2004).

Regarding the subject of repatriation of stolen and plundered funds, President Olusegun Obasanjo's government was the one to start the call for their return to the states where they originated, which was a significant accomplishment for him. The administration established a precedent that subsequent governments built upon in order to reclaim funds that had been pilfered and stolen by Abacha's dictatorship. It is important to highlight that President Muhammadu Buhari's engagement in foreign policy and collaboration with the United States of America, building on the foundations laid by President Olusegun Obasanjo, improved USA-Nigeria relations in the area where embezzled and pilfered Nigerian funds were concealed and retained by dishonest officials of the previous administration in Nigeria.

Repatriation agreements were formed and carried out during those interactions, and several finds and disclosures of plundered and stolen money were made. For example, it was documented that the US Justice Department helped Nigeria recoup approximately 144 million dollars in proceeds of corruption that were taken from Diezani Alison-Madueke, the former minister of petroleum, during President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan's administration. Numerous other forfeitures, including the loots from the Abacha family, were also retrieved. Pine (2023).

Regarding the issue of debt cancellation, President Obasanjo traveled to several major world powers shortly after taking office, including the United States of America (USA), the United Kingdom (UK), France, Japan, China, etc.; President Bill Clinton of the United States also visited Nigeria, and one of the most significant topics that was discussed or raised by President Clinton was debt cancellation.

According to Terungwa (2002), the official start of the debt cancellation movement was the G77 meeting in June 1999, which took place in South Africa. The National Economic Diplomacy program, which was introduced by President Muhammadu Buhari's administration on April 5, 2018, was a positive development during his presidency. A great economic and foreign policy plan for the nation is the National Economic Diplomacy Initiative. It is crucial to remember that the African Economic Community and the Lagos Plan of Action were intended beneficiaries of this economic diplomacy strategy. For this reason, the nation has been a signatory to the African Economic Community Treaty and the Lagos Plan of Action.

This is also the reason the country actively took part in the discussions to create the African Continental Free Trade Area, with the goal of implementing it with consideration for local content. According to Business Day (2018), there is a considered view that before foreign direct investment and economic partnerships between Nigeria and other nations can have a positive impact on our economy, there are fundamental economic policies that Nigeria needs to get right. One such policy is the implementation of the annual budget.

Additionally, because of President Buhari's administration's interactions with China, loans were obtained to finance the 2016 deficit budget, with a portion of the funds going toward job creation and infrastructure improvements. Cooperation in science and technology was also entered for the nation's economic growth. Furthermore, as of 2016, commercial relations established by the Muhammadu Buhari administration were valued at 6.4 billion dollars.

The boundaries and reach of Nigeria's foreign policy engagement and business were broadened under the Buhari administration to include uncharted territory where prior administrations had either not paid much attention at all or not at all. Examples of these areas include the signing of agreements with Germany and Russia regarding the development of the nation's power sector and major developmental projects involving the construction of roads and railway infrastructure. Pine (2023).

By lowering import duty taxes on necessities like wheat, the Obasanjo trade liberalization strengthened the country's economy. The introduction of mobile phones also helped small enterprises and the communication sector. Similar to Obasanjo, the Buhari government prioritized economic diplomacy, with a particular focus on the agriculture sector. President Buhari asked the Obama administration to help the government combat corruption, which has persisted in the nation, and to help improve the economy by implementing reforms in the energy sector, such as putting an end to oil theft.

Following the meeting, Vice President Joe Biden and I met, and at that time, it was decided that the United States would support Nigeria in its efforts to eradicate corruption, maintain economic stability, and implement policies with particular attention to the country's north, which serves as the epicenter of the Boko Haram insurgency (Blanchard & Husted, 2016).

President Buhari's strategy is comparable to that of President Obasanjo; his foreign visits instilled confidence in Nigerians living abroad, particularly regarding his alleged efforts to combat corruption, revive the country's economy, and combat insurgencies, particularly those led by the terrorist group Boko Haram, which had besieged the country's northeast. Because of his charisma, Nigeria was able to establish diplomatic ties with the Arab world and receive low-interest loans for the construction of its infrastructure. The dynamic strategy used by Obasanjo to attract investors to Nigeria contrasts with Buhari's methodical approach to matters of national importance when it comes to domestic diplomacy.

Promotion of Democracy and Good Governance in Africa

As part of the plan to promote good administration throughout the continent, President Olusegun Obasanjo, who chaired the African Union in 2004 and served as president of Nigeria for eight years, suggested a code of governance for Africa. Dayo (2004) cited President Obasanjo as saying, "We have introduced a unique scheme called the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) which would enable us to peer review ourselves" in reference to the launch of the APRM in the quest of good governance. Stated differently, we have the ability to support, exert pressure on, and share best practices with one another. We would establish benchmarks that would control every country's performance.

The APRM's essence is captured in the aforementioned statement. It is a monitoring system designed under the auspices of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) to make sure that African leaders and their nations sincerely follow the program's noble objectives. The APRM offers a way to track Africa's progress toward sound corporate, political, and economic governance. According to President Obasanjo, the APRM is the necessary remedy for corruption, careless leadership and followership, authoritarianism/fascism, and the urgent need for urgent surgery on the African condition in order to achieve sustainable growth on the continent.

For example, the Due Process or Budget Monitoring and Price Intelligence (BMPI) Unit, which is the brainchild of APRM, was established in Nigeria under President Obasanjo with the goal of reducing corruption, over-invoicing, and other related issues. The head of the BMPI Unit at the time, Oby EzeOkwesisili, was quite assertive and tough-talking. She added that the BMPI Unit was able to save approximately N125 billion two years after it was established, money that could have been wasted on inflated and bogus contracts. The Procurement Bill, which was approved by the Nigerian National Assembly, is the new law that supports the BMPI Unit. When the APRM operators learned how much the BMPI Unit had saved Nigeria in a little more than two years of operation, they were overjoyed.

Additionally, numerous "419ers" have been tried by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), which was founded by President Obasanjo with APRM in mind. In Nigeria, 419 refers to the act of gaining money by deceit. Many citizens who were formerly involved in this illegal commerce are now wary of them. This was in contrast to the previous impunity culture that existed prior to Chief Olusegun Obasanjo's arrival. The APRM executors acknowledged that this was a favorable development at that point. Nuhu Ribadu, the first head of the EFCC who was later nominated by President Obasanjo, has gone so far as to prosecute serving governors on charges of corruption and has even imprisoned a few of them.

The scenario hasn't played out yet since things keep changing. In addition, the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) has prosecuted numerous dishonest public servants as well as various groups of Nigerian natives and even foreigners engaged in illicit commerce in Nigeria. It is evident that the country's level of impunity in the distribution of funds, particularly public funds, was severely curtailed during the Obasanjo administration. The financial industry was generally more disciplined back then. Insofar as we acknowledge the challenge of policy continuity in Africa, credit must go to Chief Olusegun Obasanjo for his leadership, innovation, temerity, and skills in laying the groundwork for good governance in Africa. At the time, Nigeria was highly rated on the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) Dayo (2004) due to the existence of accountability.

President Muhammadu Buhari's administration saw Nigeria's government stand strong and work with the ECOWAS to push for the full implementation of the Conakry Peace Agreement. Sanctions were imposed on nineteen (19) individuals who stood in the way of the agreement's implementation, which helped to restore the peace that is currently in place in Guinea-Bissau. In doing so, Nigeria reaffirmed its commitment to collaborating with Guinea-Bissau and other nations to uphold and enhance democracy and sound governance throughout the subregion and the continent of Africa.

Additionally, President Buhari upheld Nigeria's afrocentric foreign policy goal in the Gambia, which was essentially to maintain Africa as the focal point of Nigeria's foreign policy. The political impasse in the Gambia between Adama Barrow and Yahaya Jammah, where the people's will was to be subverted, is a clear example of this (Shehu, 2022).

Image Rebuilding

Any nation is greatly impacted by its image. Some indicators of a positive country image include human nature, the fight against corruption and the advancement of human development, adherence to international norms and values, good governance, social corporate responsibilities from the private sector, social and cultural diversity, economic stability and structure, democracy, and human rights, international relations of the nation, technological advancements, globalization of business, national history, environmental responsibility, and tourism.

A country is simply perceived negatively by members of the international community when it is deemed to have a bad image. This trend is related to the state's inability to resolve several basic problems that threaten the stability of the current political order. The state's failure to address these social, economic, and political disparities—such as poor governance, impunity, disdain for the law, violations of human rights, environmental problems, unchecked corruption in both public and private institutions, incapacity to address rural-urban drift, dearth of essential social services, crumbling infrastructure, and the government's insincerity in living up to expectations—are among the factors contributing to the image crisis (Tunca, 2010). Building one's reputation is therefore a crucial component of a country's foreign policy.

Chief Olusegun Obasanjo's inauguration as the Federal Republic of Nigeria's elected president in May 1999 signaled a turning point in the country's standing abroad. The Nigerian state has been embroiled in protracted periods of military control since gaining independence in 1960, which resulted in an apparent decline in the country's international standing. This phenomena peaked in 1999, when Nigeria was relegated to the periphery of Pariah state and on the verge of democratic government. Nigerians would rather forget what happened during the Abacha administration, which caused them unnecessary suffering and led many of them to seek asylum overseas. Those who were unable to travel formed numerous coalition groups against the despicable Junta (Sanubi, & Oke, 2017).

After taking office in May 1999, Obasanjo traveled abroad, touring important nations to repair Nigeria's damaged reputation. He made almost 103 travels abroad during his 168-week term in government as Ezeife (2003). Through his ability to forge bilateral and multilateral links with nations all over the world, Ezeife (2003) successfully reintegrated Nigeria into the global community, which resulted in the London and Paris Club forgiving Nigeria's \$18 billion debt.

The administrations of President Obasanjo and President Buhari are comparable in that they both travel abroad to restore the country's reputation, but they differ in how they carry out their policies. Obasanjo built his shuttle diplomacy around the cancellation of debt in order to improve the standard of living for his constituents and the nation's economy. Buhari is traveling in order to strengthen ties with his neighbors and the United States in the fight against Boko Haram terrorism, which was rendered ineffective by the previous government prior to the 2015 election.

Conclusion

This paper compared the administrations of Muhammadu Buhari from 2015 to 2023 and Olusegun Obasanjo from 1999 to 2007. It is discovered that the main differences between the two administrations' approaches to foreign policy issues and personalities are what matter most. They both took decisive steps to create an environment that was favorable to the growth of democracy, restore their integrity and respectability abroad, and put the country's political and economic systems on a path toward stability, peace, and sustainable development.

It is noteworthy that the Obasanjo administration launched a number of policies, such as the anti-corruption bill, continued the national and international campaign to recover embezzled public funds, addressed the energy crisis, and reduced or eliminated Nigeria's debt of over \$18 billion with the condition that Nigeria settles the remaining \$12 billion. Between 2015 and 2023, the Muhammadu Buhari administration upheld positive ties with its neighbors in the fight against the Boko Haram insurgency. It also strengthened ties bilaterally with China in order to address the nation's economic imbalance. Finally, it maintained positive ties with the United States of America.

Additionally, it established the Nigerian Diaspora Commission, which serves as a point of contact for Nigeria's foreign policy affairs, notably with regard to the defense of Nigerians living abroad. Nigeria was put on the path of robust foreign involvement by both governments.

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