NIGERIA-US RELATIONS: DIPLOMACY BY THE BANDWIDTH

By

BENEDICT A. OLADELE, PhD
National Institute, Kuru
E-mail: benolak8@yahoo.com
08033487015

ABSTRACT

The concept of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is daily redefining relationships between and among individuals and corporate bodies including nations. As tangible tools, their convergence and application is daily impacting on society so much so that the notion of distance, time and physical barriers has assumed relative virtual meanings in terms of the existence of ICT infrastructures and capacity to utilize the technologies for development by nations. Against this background, attempt is made to discuss how Nigeria and the US can leverage the opportunities presented by technologies to foster their relationship in the 21st century in the context of the two nations' mutual and disparate strategic interests. It was posited that international relation as art is compatible or amenable technology utilization. In the context of Nigeria-US relationship, it was further posited that security is one area in which the two countries can apply technology provided the challenges of mutual trust, integrity of electronic transactions and availability of bandwidth are addressed. The importance mutual respect for one another as a platform for consensual agreements on issues of common interests, and delicate balancing of divergent strategic national interests was highlighted.

Introduction

Nigeria and United States of America (USA) are two great sovereign nations on the African and American continents respectively. Both countries at different times fought their wars of survival with US emerging from the ashes of war stronger as a nation while Nigeria is still on the part to nationhood. Nigeria is racially homogenous with divergent ethnic cultures while the US is multiracial also with different cultures but common American dream. As sovereign nations, the US is over 200 years old while Nigeria is just above 44 years old. The two countries believe in democracy and operate the Federal Presidential System of governance with component State and Local Governments structures. The US by its capacity and capability is the 'mega' or supra power of the world while Nigeria is seen as the visible and influential "big brother" of Africa.

In terms of resources, both countries are richly endowed with the US talking of the quantum of its resources in real term and ability to mix the resources to produce the desired objectives, while Nigeria talks of its resources in potential terms. Expectedly the two counties have different strategic interests, which they project in diverse ways around the globe. They however a common interest to safeguard the safety of their interests and people in particular and that of humanity in general. The need to achieve their

diverse objectives and protect their common values can be descried as the *raison d'etre* for establishing diplomatic relationship by the two countries. In others words, it can be assumed that countries of the world on the basis of their identified needs and objectives as opposed to altrusive reasons establish diplomatic relationships between and among themselves. The Nigeria-US relationship is therefore not an exception to this assumption. The management of such a relationship is a function of many considerations. Thus it is the objective of this paper in the light of many ICT driven possibilities to discuss how Nigeria and US can enhance their present level of understanding and cooperation through technology diffusion and utilization. The paper is divided into six sections commencing with the introduction. This is followed by a brief conceptualization of information technology and its implication for global development. Section three attempts to explicate the idea of diplomacy by the bandwidth and this is followed by an historical review of the relationship between Nigeria and the US. Section five of the paper discusses in the context of technology application the challenges on contemporary Nigeria-US relationship and this followed with the concluding section,

Information Technology

Information and Community Technology (ICT) is daily influencing humans and nations' thought systems, behaviour, routine and ways of doing

2

things. Due to the ever-converging power of technologies, human beings as well as nations have been brought or 'pooled together' beyond ordinary imaginations. Real time online communication between and among nations as well as individuals is a modern time reality irrespective of time, distance and physical barriers. This development can directly be linked to information technologies diffusion which has brought about the emergence of the Internet; the ubiquitous interactive cyber arena where individuals, groups and nations interact with one another on a daily basis. As a melting pot of activities, the Internet has continued to provide forum for individuals, organizations and nations to project their interests through discussions and sharing of ideas and information on issues of common interest. Nations as well as individuals can now relate with each other on interactive basis more than ever before thereby reducing among them some of the communication gaps that are often induced by variation in time zones, distance and spatial barriers. Between and among leaders of nations consensus on issues can easily be arrived at in a much quicker way than before using the converging power of the multimedia possibilities of information technologies. The general impact of the Internet on societies as reported by Oladele (2004) is of such a magnitude that "new habits and culture have emerged in much the same way the old ones have been redefined"

At the pragmatic level, concepts such as 'globalization' and 'global village' are directly linked to the power and influence of technologies on societal routine operations and activities. In a figurative sense, countries of the world have been shrunken into a global village which Oshikoya and Hussain (2004) defined as that world arena comprising of "network of individuals, firms and countries that are linked electronically and inter-dependent relationships". The import of this electronic linkage is that the sometimes-artificial geographical boundaries with their characteristic features of distance, spatial limitations, and time variations between and among nations are no more than convenient physical territorial delineations. In a virtual sense, boundaries among nations are non-existent. In the context of relationships between and among nations, countries have continued to use the Internet platform to project their images and interests, engaged in diplomatic consultations, negotiations and advocacy, exchange of ideas and information sharing among themselves thereby reducing the volume of physical diplomatic shuttles among themselves. The convergence and use of telecommunications based services such as telephony, facsimile, conferencing, web-casting and email are all technology driven multimedia possibilities that are daily fostering understanding within the diplomatic community and in particular among nations. Among nations, decisions on

issues are now much quicker as information can easily be sourced and obtained on any subject thereby reducing their reaction time to issues and events. Arising from this development, nations and analysts can no longer define the concept of national interest strictly from its exclusive meaning but from an inclusive perspective that transcends national or territorial boundaries. Thus for Ohmae (1995:60) the definition of national interest as the capacity of a nation to protect its "resources with military force if necessary and control their use" should be expansive enough to include nations' capacities to manage their own resources as well as influencing how other nations should manage theirs. In this context, the management of national or strategic interest can be described as a delicate balancing art that requires nations reaching out to each other by way of diplomatic relations. Thus the management of the relationship between Nigeria and US in the 21st is one of complexities arising from the interplay of the two nations divergent strategic interests including the complexities of the fora in which these interests are unfolding. The two countries can manage these complexities better by leveraging the advantages provided by the ever-converging power of information technologies.

Bandwidth Diplomacy

As a discourse, international relation has to do with how countries or states relate with each other including their relationship with international or multilateral agencies and non-state actors. The intensity of such relationships is in most cases determined by individual country's foreign policy, which is usually articulated against the background of the country's domestic experiences and the interplay of these experiences with the international environment. In essence, the foreign policy of any nation is a product of that country's historical antecedents, terrain, economics, the management of existing resources and how to source for the non-existing ones all in the context of the country's strategic goals. In terms of attributes, a foreign policy must be based on some cherished national values and interests but must be dynamic and sufficiently flexible enough to accommodate emerging contemporary conditions and challenges. The policy must be descriptive and prescriptive with regard to goal setting and modalities for accomplishing such goals. The accomplishment of these objectives is a function of diplomacy, which is the art of managing international relations. It is however observed that the demarcation line between foreign policy and diplomacy is somehow blurred. It suffices however to say that a foreign policy is only as active and

dynamic to the extent of the level of resources and political commitment and tact deployed for its actualization.

As an art, the etymology of diplomacy is traceable to ancient Greek word "diploma" meaning to fold an object into two (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2003). The French is however credited to have given a much wider definition of the concept. In contemporary times, diplomacy has assumed a much wider scope to encompass the conduct of summit meetings and other international engagements of supra and sub-national agencies including non-state actors. As a vehicle for the conduct of international relations by nations, diplomacy seeks to project a country's national or strategic interests and at the same time to canvass other nations' understanding for the interests without necessarily provoking resentment or rejection. It seeks to bring about reasons and cooperation on issues of common interests to parties in a relationship as much as ensuring that the interests are not put into jeopardy through errors of commission and omission. In this regard, diplomacy is a preferred alternative to the use of force to achieve a country's strategic goals. It is admitted nevertheless that in history nations have had to combine just as in modern time diplomacy with a little dose of coercive threats to achieve their objectives. The cost benefit analysis of this approach is a function of many

variables such as the good will and material trade-offs or opportunity costs and the State's capacity to project its supremacy or power with equanimity.

As an alternative to war, diplomacy thrives on consultations, dialogues, negotiations, and advocacy/interventions all as methods for consensus building with ideas and information exchange being the major commodities. As an activity, diplomacy more often than not involves frequent travels and physical contacts with parties in a relation. By extension therefore, it is a dialogue or intensive communication activity that can exert a lot of material and physical stress on resources and persons respectively. The advent of information and communication technology has however brought new approaches to the conduct of diplomacy. In other words, diplomacy as an activity is amenable to ICT application and even more so in the light of existing ICT driven multimedia possibilities for communications and transactions. With these possibilities, distance, time and physical barriers which until recently constituted constraints to the conduct of international relations have to a larger extent been reduced to the minimum. Nations in a relationship can now conduct their discussions, dialogues, negotiations, and conferences online in real time without parties necessarily living the comfort of their homes, offices or territories. Herein lies the idea of diplomacy by the bandwidth or the 'cyber tube'. The advantages of conducting international

relations through the cyber space are many as leaders can reach out to each other by way of consultations, negotiations and consensus building on issues with relative speed and ease. This advantage has the tendency to enhance confidence building and reduction of mutual suspicion of each other's intentions which distance and time induced communication gap often engendered prior to the emergence of communication technology.

Nigeria-Us Relations

Since independence in 1960, Nigeria has officially maintained a non – align posturing. In practice however, the country had always leaned more to the West perhaps because of her British colonial heritage. During the cold war era, Nigeria in a relative sense suddenly became a nation to be courted by both the West and East. This was not unconnected to the huge potential of the country and her enormous resources such as land mass size, population, and large deposit of natural resources. During the Nigerian Civil War, the country was forced to lean towards the defunct USSR for the supply of the badly needed military hardware, which was denied it by both Britain and USA. The relationship between Nigeria and US at that time was probably at its lowest ebb with the situation being aggravated by both countries divergent views on the apartheid regime in South Africa.

9

In a more technical sense, relationship between Nigeria and US could be said to assume some level of vibrancy during the administration of President Carter. This development could loosely be linked to the administration's relative liberal view on the apartheid regime in South Africa and the recognition of the pivotal leadership role of Nigeria as a rallying force on the continent (Dagne, 2003). This relationship was however short-lived as its premise was based on shifting grounds. Above all, the dominance of the governance of the nation by the military and its characteristic abuse of human rights and repression of opposition voices combined to explain the lack luster relationship between Nigeria and US. All these changed with the demise of Abacha and ascendancy of General Abubakar who returned the country to democracy in 1999.

On assumption of office in 1999 as the democratic leader of Nigeria, President Obasanjo brought about a new beginning in the relationship between Nigeria and US. This beginning is predicated on the desire of the two countries to project and protect their individual and common strategic interests with trade and investments constituting the pivot around which such interests revolve. Both countries consequently signed a number of bilateral agreements as well as endorsing a number of multilateral agreements aimed at promoting their common interests.   While Nigeria is in need of US'

supports and investments to revamp her economy, the US on the other hand is

interested in Nigeria oil deposits and general trade. Issues such as democracy,

good governance and transparency, respect for rule of law and human rights,

security and the creation of an enabling environment have also featured

prominently on the two countries agenda as additives and framework for

understanding and ensuring the stability of cooperation between the two

nations. The political dimension of the relationship is also underscored by the

US recognition of Nigeria's prominent and visible role on the African

continent and more importantly her role in conflict intervention and mediation

on the continent. The desire of the US and Nigeria for safety and stability

around the world has further reinforced the relationship between them.

Presidents Clinton and Obasanjo succinctly captured this view at a joint press

briefing when the latter visited Washington in late October 1999. At this press

briefing President Clinton said as much that:

> It is very much in America's interests that Nigeria
> succeeds, and therefore we should assist them in their
> success. We intend to increase our assistance to Nigeria
> to expand law-enforcement, cooperation to work toward
> an agreement to stimulate trade and investment between
> us. We intend to do what we can to help Nigeria recover
> assets plundered by the previous regime (Dagne, 1993).

President Bush equally echoed this belief during his 2005 visit of some African countries including Nigeria.

The September 11, 2001 terrorist attack in the US is a new dimension of terror that has no respect for boundary, colour or creed. It suddenly jolted the whole world to the reality of how insecure humanity can be. This suddenly brought security to the front burner of discussion at the global level. President Obasanjo's visit to Washington in the aftermath of the attack to discuss "mutual concern to fight and win the war against terror" was informative as well as instructive enough. The 2001 report of ICISS on page 3 aptly captured the menace of terrorism as a war that must be fought "with no contested frontiers and a largely invisible enemy." The description presents global challenge for collective actions at both bilateral and multilateral levels to fight terror. Nations of the world among themselves now face the challenge of understanding the need to surrender certain degree of their sovereignty and resources into a common pool as a strategy to confront headlong the menace of terror if only to save mankind from some of its kind.

Challenges of Understanding

Emerging events of the 21st century present new sets of challenges to the conduct and sustenance of relationship between Nigeria and US. Principal among these challenges are the sustenance of democracy and good

governance, the management of the two nations' mutual strategic interests of oil and extractive minerals exploration and exploitation, general trade and the challenge of reinforcing public institutions and structures in a manner that foster state stability and security as well as the challenge of combating global acts of terror and terrorism. There is also the challenge of how the two nations can reconcile their differing views on issues such as debt relief, and trade imbalance between them. The trade imbalance between the two countries and more importantly the low level of Nigeria products penetration into the US market is a challenge that the two nations need to address within a framework of understanding and agreement. The US stringent specification of parameters for products coming into the country from Nigeria are as protective as much as they run counter the idea of free market competition. This is a challenge that is expectedly provoking some emotive expectations for common actions at bilateral level of two sides of the Atlantic. In this connection, the use of public policy advocacy approach provides a quick means of arriving at acceptable decisions.

The issue of democracy as a platform for bilateral relations between the two nations has to do with the tenets of democracy as a form of governance that is participatory or inclusive rather than exclusive, as a form of governance with checks and balances against abuse of power, accountability

and transparency. After all democracy is all about openness. These are values that are compatible with the application of ICT for the sustenance of democracy and good governance of which e-governance provides a forum for interaction between the government and the governed (Steidel, 2003). It is however submitted that the practice of democracy and sustenance of good governance are functions of individual environment and acceptable cultural norms and nuances all of which call for understanding between the two nations. The tendency for nations to view democracy and good governance as phenomena having single line definition is as subjective as well as exclusive. In other words the Nigeria-US relations should be anchored on understanding or empathy for each other. This however does not in any way undermine the need for common and acceptable standards of practice in the areas of accountability and transparency. Needless to say, these common standards of practice are considered crucial to the building of understanding and acceptance for the common and disparate strategic interests of the two nations. Successful management of these interests to a large extent depends on the degree of openness and the level of compromise the two nations are ready to concede to each other. In this regard, the use of technologies for regular consultations and dialogues by the leaders of the two countries

14

become major tools for consensus building including awareness creation among their citizens.

The strategic interests of US and Nigeria as different as they appear, have a common need in the area of security as an essential requirement for the mutual survival of the two countries. This need can be brought about through empowerment/reinforcement of state structures and institutions to wade off external aggression, reduce conflicts and destructive youth activism. Both countries therefore need have an in-depth understanding of the nature and dynamics of conditions that impair security prior to evolving acceptable solutions. For instance the perpetrations of acts of terror and terrorism across the globe are issues that impinge on the security and mutual interests of the two nations. The September 11, 2001 attack on US by terrorists is a case study that has not only revealed how destructive mankind can be but also how vulnerable mankind and institutions are to terrorism. The attack took place physically on US soil but with reverberative effects on nations and families across the globe. As a nation, Nigeria was affected emotionally and economically jus as much as US and this was attested to by President Obasanjo during his visit to the White House in the wake of September 11 attack. During the visit, the President talked of "mutual concern to fight and win the war against terror". The concern pointed to the desire for mutual

15

survival by nations and this underscores the necessity for collective preventive and proactive mechanisms using human and technologies as tools in a collaborative fashion. Thus the sustenance of the relationship between Nigeria and US can better be enhanced if the two nations collaborate to foster security for the sake of their mutual and divergent interests. The idea of a joint investment in alerting mechanisms against acts of terror and terrorism is one area that urgently begs for understanding and acceptance. This proposition can be actualized through collaborative management of intelligence using the converging powers of technologies. This appears more imperative against the background that the war against acts of terror and terrorism is in the word of International Commission on International and State Sovereignty (ICISS) (2001:3) a war that every nation of the "world must now fight with no contested frontiers and a largely invisible enemy."

The utilization of information technologies for the conduct of international relations between Nigeria and US however faces three fundamental challenges of trust, security or integrity of electronic based transactions and bandwidth availability. Trust as a basis of any form of relationship has to do with the degree of openness and confidentiality parties in a relationship enjoy with each other on any issue. This is particularly important in view of the importance consensus building on issues prior to

final decisions. On the other hand, the security or integrity of electronic based diplomatic activities relates to the relative fidelity of activities or freedom from unauthorized intrusion. The third challenge has to do with the digital divide syndrome or the discrepancy between the two countries individual national information infrastructures (NII). It is apparent enough that the US NII is incomparable with that of Nigeria in terms of level of development, diffusion, bandwidth availability, and application. The prevalence of myriads of electronic driven opportunities and services in the US are indices of the level of development of information infrastructures in the country. As Larson (2000: 7) reported "half of the more than 300 million people accessing the Internet are in North America". The same source further reported that there are more Internet users in the city of New York than there are on the continent of Africa. This is unlike in Nigeria where infrastructures are still at the rudimentary level of development and this perhaps explains the paucity of large bandwidth in the country. In the past five years or thereabout however, government has put in place a policy framework for the development of ICT infrastructures in the country with the policy currently being fine-tuned for implementation. The challenge before Nigeria and the US therefore is that of how to leverage information technologies for the management of their relationship with particular emphasis on the issue of imbalance in bandwidth

17

availability for multimedia conduct of diplomacy. This is one area that the US government can be of immense help to Nigeria in the area of personnel capacity building and technical assistance.

Conclusion

In contemporary time, the greatest challenge to the Nigeria and US relationship is that of security as a platform for the sustenance of their common and divergent interests. The management of this challenge demands for greater understanding and cooperation by both parties more than ever before. In this regard, the diffusion of information and communication technologies to create electronic based possibilities and services provides a vista of opportunity for the two countries to leverage technology to manage their relationship in a more proactive way. The choice of e-diplomacy by the two countries however depends on their level of ingenuity and commitment to embrace technology for their needs. With technology, factors such as distance, variations in time zones and physical barriers that hitherto slow down decision-making process at multilateral and bilateral levels can now be reduced or eliminated completely. Diplomatic consultations/negotiations can now be conducted online and decisions reached almost instantaneously without parties leaving the comfort of their environments. The greatest challenge to e-diplomacy between the two countries has to do with the issue

of imbalance in the level of access to these technologies. This is not

unconnected with the wide disparity in the national information technology

infrastructures of the two nations. The disparity can however be resolved

through understanding and collaborative initiatives of the two countries.

REFERENCE

Dagne, Ted (2003)
> Nigeria in Political Transition
> Washington: Congressional Research Service, 2003

International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, 2001
> The Responsibility to Protect
> Ottawa: IDRC, 2001
> Xiii, 91p

Larson, Alan (2000)
> Maximizing International Digital Opportunities
> Electronic Journal of the US Department of State
> Vol. 5 No. 2 7-10 2000

Ohmae, Kenichi, 1995
> The End of the Nation State: The Rise of Regional Economics
> London: Harper Collins Publishers
> X, 214p.

Oladele, Benedict. A. (2005)
> Information And Communication Technology for Sustainable
> Development in Nigeria: Hope or Hype? FAAN Book of Reading No.
> 3.

Oshikoya, T.W. and Hussain, Nureldin, M (2004)
> Information Technology and the Challenge of Economic
> Development in Africa.
> Economic Research Paper No. 36
> http://www.afdb.org 04/02/2004

Steidel, Sharon Crouch (2003)
> Using E-Government: Effects of the Digital Revolution
> US Electronic Journal, October 2003, 13-18

20