KNOWLEDGE FOR SERVICE

Benin Journal of
Social Sciences

Volume 24 Number 1 June 2018

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AN APPRAISAL OF LEADERSHIP ROLE CONCEPTION AND NIGERIA'S FOREIGN POLICY AT THE REGIONAL LEVEL

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Abstract

This paper examines leadership role conception within the context of Nigeria's foreign policy at the regional level. The nature and scope as well as the rational basis of Nigeria's leadership role in Africa are examined. It argues that leadership role is not only an aspect of Nigeria's dignity as the most populous country in Africa but is also crucial to note that there was a tacit international recognition that Nigeria is destined to play a leading role in African affairs. Thus, international legitimacy of Nigeria through independence in 1960 gave the country the responsibility of playing an active role in African affairs. Central to this discourse are: the psychological reasons why Nigeria is supreme in Africa, factors that influence Nigeria's leadership role in Africa, including the interrogation of selected foreign policies within the context of Nigerian-African diplomacy. Since 1970s, Nigeria's leadership role in regional affairs has been very visible and commendable. However, Nigeria's diplomatic influence in Africa declined in the 1990s as a result of domestic political and economic crisis. In spite of these challenges, no external policy issues has preoccupied Nigeria more than Nigerian-African diplomacy. The paper concludes by asserting the need for Nigeria to stabilize its domestic polity in order to continue playing a leading role in regional affairs.

Keywords: Leadership Role; Africa; Nigeria; Foreign Policy; Diplomacy; Regional Affairs

Introduction

Foreign policy is concerned with an analysis of the action of one state towards another. Akinyemi (1988: 12) has observed that the making or formulation of the foreign policy of any country depends on a number of complex factors with different variables becoming decisive at different times. Nigeria, like most other sovereign states of the world, situates its course of action on its relations with other states on a well-defined and well-articulated national interests based on clearly defined national

objectives. The entrance of Nigeria into the United Nations according to Gambari (2005: 188), made it possible for the country to pursue its own national interests and also adopt multilateralism as an approach in its transactions with the international community. Thus, Nigeria's national interests have continued to characterize and drive the thrust of Nigeria's foreign policy since the country became an independent state in 1960.

Since 1960, Nigeria by virtue of its size, population, and enormous resources has always been expected to play a leading role in Africa's politics and Africa's relationship with the outside world. As Toyden (2012) rightly observed:

> *The euphoria of independence was largely informed by the belief that given the huge natural and human resources Nigeria is blessed with, it was expected that Nigeria's new sovereign status would prepare her for a disciplined and effective leadership role in Africa and beyond.*

Basically, leadership role conception had become the hallmark of Nigeria's foreign policy since 1960. Nigeria has over the years pursued an activist role as regards African affairs. (Amuwo, 2014; Akinterinwa, 2015; Pogoson, 2016). In the same vein, successive Nigerian leaders have been very careful to preserve this leadership posture. The main aim of this paper is to appraise Nigeria's – African diplomacy within the context of her leadership role conception. This paper is structured into four basic parts. The first part deals with the basis and rationale for Nigeria's leadership role at the continental level. The second part examines factors that influence Nigeria's leadership role conception. The third part, which is the case study proper, deals with an appraisal of Nigerian – African diplomacy. The fourth part concludes the paper. It reiterates the view that the promotion of leadership role in African affairs by Nigeria is an inevitable role diplomatic task. This means that Nigeria has the added challenge of further strengthening her resource base and diplomatic profile as a regional leader of hegemonic stature.

The Basis and Rationale for Nigeria's Leadership Role Conception

Any meaningful discourse on the basis and rationale for Nigeria's leadership role conception can be traced to the pre-independence period. However, the mid-70s undoubtedly offered a major turning point in Nigeria's African diplomacy and international relations in general (Fawole, 2000, Osuntokun, 2005, Ayinde, 2010).

Essentially, before Nigeria became an independent country in 1960, some Nigerian nationalists have appealed to the international community to recognize Nigeria in the international system with economic, political and cultural arguments. For instance, at the 1955 conference of Afro-Asian States held in Bandung (organized by the newly independent states); Ghana (then Gold Coast) was invited. Dr. Nnamdi Azikwe the leader of National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) felt that it was a deliberate slide on the integrity of a destined country not to be invited. Azikwe said:

I may say without fear of contradiction that any decision made at Bandung on the future of this continent that does not take into account the fact that every sixth person in Africa is a Nigerian, is bound to be like a flower that "is born to blush unseen and to waste its sweetness in the desert air"... The Asian powers will do well to appreciate the historic mission and manifest destiny of Nigeria on the African continent (Azikwe, 1961).

Again, when Azikwe was on a visit to London and delivering a speech on colonialism he argued that:

It should be the manifest destiny of Nigeria to join hands with other progressive forces in the world in order to emancipate not only the people of Africa but also other people of African descent from the scourge of colonialism... Nigeria should be in the vanguard of the struggle to liberate Africans from the yoke of colonialism (Azikwe, 1961).

From the foregoing, the black world expects Nigeria to play a leading role in the struggle for the political and economic emancipation of the black man. It has been observed that before Nigeria got independence, Journalists and nationalists subscribed to this fact that Nigeria should play a leading role in Africa. Thus, this leadership role conception entered the psychic of Nigerian rulers (Fawole, 2000). It was a well known fact that independence came for Nigeria at a most critical juncture in the history of Africa. The Federal Government took office at the moment when the focus of African interests was shifting from colonial relationship to the relations of independent states of Africa to each other and to the rest of the world. Nigeria also took her seat in the United Nations at a point when African issues were of supreme importance in world organization. As Africa's most populous state, Nigeria was expected to assume a public posture on questions which involved the future of Africa and ultimately that of the world. To be sure, commitment to making the African continent the primary area of interest and focus was underscored by the Prime Minister at the UN on 8th October 1960 when he said: "being human we are naturally concerned first with what affects our immediate neighbourhood" (Balewa, as cited in Fawole, 2012: 159). Since 1960, Nigeria continued to preoccupy herself with the cause of Africa and this was underscored with demonstrated commitments to the principle of Africa as the centerpiece of her foreign policy.

The Determinants of Nigeria's Leadership Role Conception
There are three important factors in this regard. These are:

1.   *Geography:* The location of a country, particularly in relation to other countries, is significant. This also influences the foreign policy of a state. Locational advantage placed Nigeria between West Africa and central African countries; which allowed Nigeria to operate at two junctions (i) It

has access into the Atlantic Ocean and vital sea link to Europe and Latin America. (ii) The Maritime resource available provide opportunity for a formidable naval system. In addition, the tropical climate of Nigeria with heavy monsoon rains gave Nigeria the opportunity to have diversity of many agricultural products.

2. **Population:** As it is true for geographic size, the size of a country's population can be a positive factor as well. Population constitutes an important indicator of a country's power potential and thus influences its foreign policy. The question of human resources of a country affects, in one way or the other, the foreign policy of the country (Ajiboye, 1999). With its 55 million people (estimated population figure in 1960), Nigeria remains a country with the largest concentration of black people in the world. It is estimated that one in every five black Africans is a Nigerian. This population factor placed Nigeria above other countries in Africa to play a major role in African affairs.

3. **Resources:** Nigeria is endowed with mineral resources, such as Coal and Gold etc. However, Nigeria experienced the golden age of its foreign policy in the 1970s due to the oil boom and the willingness of the western powers to accord Nigeria international recognition due to its perceived strategic value during the Cold War. They therefore looked forward to Nigeria to play a leadership role in Africa. The oil factor in particular has profoundly influenced the political economy of Nigeria in a way that has empowered her to play a credible and dynamic leadership role in Africa.

An Appraisal of Nigerian – African Diplomacy

Nigeria's broad consensus about her "manifest destiny" has been put into reality with some selected foreign policies at the continental level. In this chapter, effort is made to discuss some of these policies and examine the challenges facing Nigeria in its bid to maintain a leading voice in Africa.

Decolonization

As Nigeria became an independent country in 1960, the eradication of colonial rule in African continent has been its priority. The struggle to end colonial rule in Africa was one area in which the positions taken by Nigeria and the United Nations coincided. The Nigerian attitude to the UN's role in the area of decolonization was often mixed and sometimes ambivalent. Sometimes, it was highly critical of the organization's seeming helplessness in the face of defiance by recalcitrant colonialist and racist regimes such as the Apartheid rule in South Africa. At other times, it lauded the role of the UN in the decolonization process. This is not as contradictory as it first appeared; rather it reflected a concern about the use of the veto by the Western permanent members of the Security Council to protect the colonial regimes (Nigeria and the United Nations, 1991:51).

The Balewa regime though in support of Africa's self-determination, his position on this stood in marked contrast to that of the political unificationist states (that is, the Casablanca powers) which as a matter of declared policy, supported nationalists and revolutionary leaders and movements from areas still under European domination. This cautious position is related to Nigerian policy of non-intervention and of apathy to violent decolonization. However, Nigeria's support for the creation of the Liberation Committee in 1963 revealed Balewa's willingness to attack any white supremacist regime in Africa through the instrumentality of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) now African Union (AU). While we may argue that Balewa's input into decolonization in Africa was too little, we cannot conclude that this record was a total failure. Even with regard to Apartheid regime in South Africa, it was clearer that Balewa played a leading role in getting it expelled from the commonwealth. His government also actively encouraged the expulsion of South Africa from the International Labour Organization (Agbi, 1989: 163).

Nigeria and Liberation Struggle in Southern Africa

After other countries in Africa have gained independence, the only areas of racist engagement with colonial rule was Southern Africa. In Southern Africa, there were many Portuguese colonial territories, comprising Angola, Mozambique, Guinea Bissau, Cape Verde and Sao Tome and Principe. Portugal held tenaciously to these territories, arguing that they were part of the Portuguese state and therefore that the issue of self-determination and independence did not apply. The liberation struggle championed by Nigeria had global coverage as it was taken to the United Nations. At the UN In 1961, Nigeria criticized the claim that Portuguese territories in Africa were part of metropolitan Portugal. Nigeria's struggle to liberate African territories coincided with the global body's resolve to end colonization of dependent territories (Adeniran, 1986, Oculi, 2010, Simbine, 2012). Indeed, Nigeria supported diplomatic actions against the European-settler government in the following countries:

Angola: The Angolan crisis instigated Nigeria to display its leadership role in continental affairs. It is well-known that in the struggle to drive the Portuguese out of Angola, three liberation movements: Movimento Popular de Libertacao de Angola (MPLA), Frente Nacional Para a Libertacao de Angola (FNLA) and Uniao Nacional Para a Independencia Total de Angola (UNITA) had well-established claims to recognition by the Organization of African Unity (now African Union). Although, the Angola crisis had been simmering before the Murtala Mohammed Administration came to power, it reached a critical state late in 1975, when it was discovered to the displeasure of Nigeria that in the fratricidal war going on among the three liberation movement, South Africa was brazenly backing the FNLA – UNITA group (Agbi, 1989).

Quite obviously, the Angolan crisis was the first major African issue that tested the Murtala Mohammed administration's new approach in foreign policy. It

was rather coincidence that the question of African liberation was the utmost burning issue at the time the Murtala/Obasanjo administration came to power. Thus, the administration recognizes the implications and magnitude of African liberation.

Essentially, the recognition of Angola is perhaps one of the most radical foreign policy decisions made by a Nigerian government since 1960; a decision made after a careful consideration of a report submitted by a Nigerian team of experts confirming reports of collaboration between South Africa and the UNITA/FNLA coalition, and also an indication from Washington that Nigeria should stay off any decision concerning Angola; and to regard the Angola crisis as an issue between the two super powers (Garba, 1991, Aluko, 1979). The South African involvement in Angola crisis appears to have provoked the Nigerian foreign policy-makers into a radical posture. In this regard, Nigeria accorded diplomatic recognition to Angola under the MPLA government. The support of Nigeria for the MPLA did not assure it of the immediate support of OAU (now AU). The OAU's former decision to support a Government of National Unity may have forced a number of states to oppose the MPLA. Nigeria, thus launched a series of campaigns in favour of the MPLA; vigorous efforts were made to contact other African governments, canvassing support. This was amply demonstrated in Nigeria's leadership role at the extraordinary summit of the OAU in Addis Ababa in January 1976 during which Murtala Mohammed led a spirited lobbying programme to get the MPLA recognized as the legitimate representative of Angola people (Otubanjo, 1989: 242).

However, Nigeria's diplomatic offensive late in 1975 brought the country into a frontal conflict with the United States. President Ford's letter to the OAU Heads of Government was regarded by Nigeria as an insult to the intelligence of Africans. Nigeria's determined support for the MPLA seemed to have assured it of success in 1975 and induced the OAU's diplomatic *volte face* towards the MPLA, when it recognized Angola's membership of the OAU in 1976. It is not clear to what extent Nigeria's role during the Angolan crisis helped other African countries to accept Nigeria's leadership but there is no doubt that Nigeria provided the initiative at a difficult moment for Africa, and that initiative won the day (Agbi, 1989: 169). In other words, that the rest of Africa gradually changed its mind in recognizing MPLA in Angola was due to the Nigerian initiative.

Zimbabwe: The situation in Zimbabwe (formerly Southern Rhodesia) occupied Nigerian – African diplomacy. The struggle for majority rule in Southern Rhodesia which began in the early 1960s became intense in the 1970s. This was a period of increased activity in Nigerian foreign policy marked by the adoption of radical approach to the realization of the goal of decolonization in Southern Africa.

In 1977, when the United Kingdom and United States government announced the Anglo-American proposals providing for a phased movement towards majority rule in Southern Rhodesia, the Nigerian government expressed tentative support for the proposals. The Nigerian position was that while it so

recognized the inadequacies of the Anglo-American proposal, it was willing to give it a chance since it acknowledged the principle of majority rule based on one man one vote. Thus, Nigeria intensified its efforts to isolate itself in any dubious arrangement concerning Zimbabwe. In the words of General Obasanjo when he addressed the UN General Assembly that year, he said:

> *I consider it imperative to sound a note of warning that Nigeria will never be party to any solution in Zimbabwe that could be remotely interpreted as a sell-out of the six million people of that land. Our objective is the unequivocal surrender of power by the minority of the population* (Obasanjo, 1977).

However, the anxiety and dilemma which the heightened nationalist struggle against the minority regime meant for Ian Smith can only be fully appreciated when seen against his hurried programme of internal settlement with the moderate nationalists – Muzorewa, Sithole and Chirau in 1978. The internal settlement undoubtedly compromised the position of the liberation fighters, and the OAU (now AU) did not mince words in their condemnation of the settlement. When the Conservative Party under the leadership of Margaret Thatcher took office in May 1979, she indiscreetly fuelled the fears of African leaders when she maintained that her government would not only recognize the internal settlement but would resume the sale of arms to Southern Rhodesia (Agbi, 1989).

The Nigerian government took much interest in Zimbabwean election and rejected the handpicked candidate to participate in the election. The reason for Nigeria's position is to allow proper handover to independent Zimbabwe. To be sure, the Nigerian government deployed extensive diplomatic, military and financial resources to the achievement of independence for Zimbabwe. The Federal Government nationalized the British Petroleum share of Shell BP in which the British government had interest as a protest to the intention of Thatcher's government to recognize the Musorewa regime after it had been declared victorious in a doubtful general election in April, 1979 (Olaniyan, 2005: 423). Subsequently, at the Lusaka Commonwealth Summit of August 1979, the federal government further warned that other similar actions could follow if no satisfactory solution was found to the Rhodesian crisis. The result of this pressure was the Lancaster House Constitutional Conference that worked out the Constitution for an independent Zimbabwe.

Namibia: South West Africa, which later came to be known as Namibia, was occupied by Germany in 1884 during the "Scramble for Africa" by the European powers. Between 1968 and 1969, South Africa adopted measures to make Namibia part of its territory. In the same vein, the United Nations Council for Namibia was created as the legal administering authority for the territory prior to independence. In 1973, the UN General Assembly recognized as legitimate, the armed struggle which had been launched in Namibia by the South West Africa Peoples' Organization

(SWAPO) in 1966. SWAPO was founded on 10 December 1959 to articulate the concerns of the black majority in all their facets, including independence. The UN General Assembly's recognition of SWAPO as the sole and authentic representative of the Namibian people was widely seen as a major diplomatic gain for the black majority in Namibia.

Nigeria was actively involved in the protracted and numerous efforts at ending the Namibian crisis. Apart from its vigorous diplomatic and material support for the liberation efforts of SWAPO, Nigeria was also active in the United Nations in support of the attempts at working out a formula for Namibia's independence and in the adoption of Resolution 435 (Otubanjo, 1989). Nigeria also gave $400,000 to officials of the SWAPO to support lobbying at the UN and another $165, 674 to cover expenses for training future administrators of the country (Simbine, 2012: 220). It is important to note that Nigeria played a major role in the negotiations immediately leading to Namibia's independence, acting through her membership of the frontline states, African Group in New York, the OAU, Non-Aligned Group of 18, Non-Aligned Movement, UN Council for Namibia and the United Nations. Despite the initial and long-term difficulties, Namibia achieved its independence on 21st March, 1990.

Apartheid and Racism in South Africa

Nigeria's commitment to the eradication of apartheid has been manifested in several international organizations. In the United Nations, it has been an initiator in that organization's efforts to eliminate apartheid, which the UN General Assembly has condemned as a crime against humanity and the Security Council described as a crime against the conscience and dignity of mankind.

More importantly, apartheid became a unified force for Nigeria; and all Nigerians united to get rid of apartheid. Nigeria became increasingly visible as the leading speaker against apartheid in Africa. Apart from chairmanship of the UN Committee against Apartheid, Nigeria was active on all fronts. Nigeria led the withdrawal of African countries from the Montreal Olympics in 1976 in protest against the participation of New Zealand which had sporting links with South Africa, hosted the first international conference in Africa on action against Apartheid, in Lagos 1977, withdrew Nigeria's money from Barclays Bank because of its declared intention to continue doing business in South Africa, and offered considerable assistance to South African refugees and Liberation Movement, including allowing the African National Congress and the Pan African Congress to open offices in Lagos (Otubanjo, 1989: 243 – 244).

It is worthwhile to state that the significant shift to radical posture of the Obasanjo administration in 1977 was further testified to by the setting up of the South Africa Relief Fund (SARF) which was to serve the dual purpose of attracting generous donations from the Nigerian populace as well as serving as a forum of propaganda, educating and mobilizing the opinion of the generality of the citizenry against the inhuman atrocities going on in South Africa. This significant radical shift

can also be seen in the light of the fact that a Nigerian administration for the first time is ready to take the necessary economic measures against foreign monopolies that deal with us and at the same time with the "devils" of South Africa, who continue to subject our sisters and brothers to perpetual bondage and slavery. Thus, Nigeria's commitment to the anti-apartheid struggle is not in doubt and derives both from its feeling of obligation as the largest concentration of black people in the world and its belief that racial discrimination violates the fundamental rights of black people worldwide and poses a threat to international peace and security. At the long run, South Africa got her independence in 1994 and Nigeria's commitment to this achievement cannot be underestimated.

Financial and Technical Assistance

It is very important to note that Nigeria's immediate environment in its sphere of influence is very significant for Nigeria's foreign policy and its national security. Thus, common heritage of history, geographic contiguity and cultural as well as linguistic affinities and also interdependence in economic and trade relations have propelled Nigeria towards closer ties with her neighbours. For instance, Nigeria operated several joint venture projects with the Republic of Benin and Niger Republic and also actively participated in the work of the River Niger and Lake Chad Basin Commission which include all the neighbouring countries. Since independence from the 1960s and the continuing weakening of neo-colonial domination over former colonies, even though still potent, Niger had come to depend more and more on Nigeria, both for its economic prosperity and international relations. The inland ports of Kano, Maiduguri and Kaduna in Northern Nigeria form important export/import havens for Niger which supplied enormous livestock and livestock products to several Northern cities despite their huge populations and bourgeoning economies (Tijani, 2010: 203).

Nigeria spearheaded the formation of Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). In 1972, a combination of circumstances made the promotion of the community an attractive venture for Nigeria. The first of these circumstances was the recognition of Biafra by Ivory Coast during the Civil War. It was realized that benign rapprochement with neighbouring countries was basic to national security if they are not to serve as platforms for the promotion of political instability. The second circumstance was Nigeria's emergence as a regional power, partly because of the large revenue accruing to the country from the sale of petroleum. Thirdly, there was the commitment by Nigerian political leaders to make the country the industrial centre of Africa (Olaniyan, 2005: 424). The establishment of an economic community in the sub-region was perceived as part of the politico-economic restructuring needed to enhance co-operation and collective self-reliance basic to redressing the problems of regional underdevelopment. The treaty providing for the establishment of ECOWAS was signed in Lagos on May, 1975. In line with Nigeria's leading role in ECOWAS, Nigeria has been supportive of this organization. Nigeria's annual contribution, 32.5% of the community's budget is

paid regularly in order to ensure the effective operation of the community's secretariat. Nigeria's share in the community's fund paid-up capital was promptly paid. Further financial assistance have also been extended to the secretariat, located in Lagos, Nigeria, in times of financial crisis. For example in June 1985, the federal government settled a sum of ₦80,000 outstanding in respect of house rents for the community's technocrats (Olaniyan, 2005: 426). It is worthy to emphasized that Nigeria's success in the area of ECOWAS in line with Afrocentricism of Nigeria's foreign policy; earned Nigeria the honour of being elected thrice as the Chairman of ECOWAS under President Ibrahim Babangida's administration.

In addition, Nigeria is also involved in assisting needy African states through the instrumentality of the Technical Aid Corps (TAC). This scheme was instituted during former President Ibrahim Babangida's military government in 1988 to serve as a platform for helping African states with technical manpower to fast-track their socio-economic and cultural transformation. TAC is one of Nigeria's instruments of foreign policy targeted at impacting positively on Africa. The scheme involves conscious mobilization of domestic human resources and deploying them to different parts of Africa where they are critically needed. This scheme is a welcome relief to some of these needy African countries that are obviously deficient in well-trained manpower needed for meaningful development. Since the inception of the scheme, more than two thousand volunteers have served in 32 ACP countries. The beneficiary countries in Africa include; Angola, Benin Republic, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Ethiopia, Kenya, Senegal, etc. The weak capacity of some African states has compromised their ability to respond to the legitimate aspirations and needs of citizenry. This partly motivated the introduction of the Technical Aid Corps to fill the gap created by the weak capacity of some states to produce highly trained manpower towards driving the economy of these states (Tyoden, 2012: 264). This programme turned out to be a success which gave a boost to the image of Nigeria inspite of the contention of critics that it was "superfluous".

Nigeria and Peacekeeping Operations at the Regional Level

Since independence in 1960, peacekeeping operations have been an integral part of the philosophy of Nigeria's foreign policy, especially at the regional level. These include, among others, the country's contingent to the Congo in 1960 – 64 (ONUC); Tanzania in 1964, Chad in 1981 (under the auspices of the erstwhile OAU (now AU); Angola (UNAVEM II) 1991 – 1992 as military observers; Somalia between 1993 – 94 as military observers and Rwanda in 1994 as military observers (Nwolise, 2004, Ogomudia, 2007).

Nigeria's leadership role in Africa in terms of peacekeeping operations is mostly appreciated at the sub-regional level under Economic Community Monitoring Group (ECOMOG). The sub-regional conflict management mechanism, ECOMOG instituted in 1990 would not have been possible if Nigeria had chosen not to participate. The bulk of the resources needed to restore peace and stability to

the war-torn Liberian society was borne by Nigeria. There is therefore a sense in which one can contend that commitment to the promotion of peace and security in Africa is Nigeria's heaviest leadership role in Africa (Tyoden, 2012).

The Challenges of Nigeria's Leadership Role in African Affairs

There is no doubt that Nigeria has played a significant role in African affairs. However, an examination of Nigerian – African diplomacy through decolonization, support for liberation movements, peace keeping operations as well as other bilateral and multilateral aids, Nigeria rendered, show the omnibus nature of the principle of African centeredness in the Nigerian foreign policy. This was caused by failing Nigerian foreign policy that did not reflect Nigeria's national interests (Al-Hassan, 2013). It seems there is apparent disconnect between national interest and Nigeria-Africa relations. It has been observed that Nigeria is doing too much in the African continent without corresponding positive outcome.

Furthermore, the debacle of the mid-1990s forced a slowdown in Nigeria's leadership role in Africa. This has been attributed to Nigeria's internal issues such as the frequent eruption and protracted nature of violent conflicts. Thus, lack of domestic stability can undermine the capacity to respond to African issues which may demand urgent attention. In addition, the primary goal of physical and economic security of the state and its people would need to replace the excessive emphasis on prestige or continental leadership which, in turn, in any case, has little direct impact on the well-being of the average citizenry (Ayinde, 2010). It is very important to strengthen our economy in order to influence African affairs.

Another challenge facing Nigerian – African diplomacy is the question being posed by Nigerians on the benefit to Nigeria in this leadership gesture. Even policy makers argued that Nigeria took a lot of political, economic and diplomatic risk in ensuring independence for Southern African countries. However, recent xenophobic violence in South Africa where Nigerians were brutalized tempted one to ask if Nigerians deserve such brutality taking into consideration the fundamental role played by Nigeria in dismantling apartheid. To be sure, the recurring xenophobic attacks on foreigners including Nigerians have drawn severe criticism of South Africa in Nigeria especially in the light of Nigeria's front line status in the apartheid struggle (Seteolu and Okuneye, 2017).

Conclusion

There is no doubt that the role Nigeria played in African affairs over the years has been proactive. Nigeria has used various international organizations and platforms to champion the interests of Africa in the true spirit of Pan-Africanism. Nigeria pursued African affairs with political, diplomatic and economic risk. That is why in recognition of its struggles and contribution to the elimination of colonialism, apartheid and racism, it was categorized as a "Frontline State". However, with the recent economic and political crisis confronting Nigeria, there is a need for Nigeria to re-strategize its leadership role conception at the continental level. This is because

a country that is strong at home should be influential at the global level. It is apparent that Africa will continue to be relevant in Nigeria's foreign policy agenda in the years ahead. Therefore, Nigeria must do something in improving its domestic economy in order to continue to assert its influence in continental affairs. Finally, the leadership role of Nigeria in the 21st century can be discerned through the need for Nigeria to overcome its domestic problems without necessarily over stretching itself to attain African unity. In this context, Nigeria can use its position as a non-permanent member of the Security Council of the United Nations to influence issues concerning Africa in global politics.

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