

## **The Impact of Domestic Factors on Foreign Policy: Nigerian/Israeli Relations**

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“...the domestic structure is not irrelevant in any historical period. At a minimum, it determines the amount of social effect which can be devoted to foreign policy”

(Kissinger 1969:504).

### **Introduction**

Since 1960 when Nigeria became an independent state, its relation with Israel has generated “heated controversy” (Nereus, 1993:16). From the late 1970s, the controversy climaxed when late President Sadat of Egypt embarked on his bold peace initiatives in the Middle East (Olusola, 1986:438). It is worth mentioning that the events leading to the Arab-Israeli War of 1967 also contributed in no small measure. The consideration or adoption of the Arab-Israeli War in the Nigerian domestic milieu and politics further complicated the issue, elevating the debate to a stage of great suspicion and sentiment.

The Debate on the Arab-Israeli conflict has not in any way helped clarify issues of great importance such as problems of underdevelopment, religious jingoism, ethnic fundamentalism and pervasive poverty which developing nations like Nigeria with a distorted

and monolithic economy should aggressively address (Ayagi, 1990:15-22). The ethnic fragmentation and religious heterogeneity of the country has posed a great “dilemma” on the government’s decision to sever diplomatic ties with Israel due to mixed feelings among the country’s diametrically opposed religious structure. Aluko (1981: 83-95) argued that the Muslims felt that the move to break ties with Israel was not only timely but also desirable, whereas the Christians saw the move as a wrong foreign policy (FP) option. However, when the Nigerian government decided to renew diplomatic ties in 1992, the Muslim group vociferated over this policy decision, whereas the Christians saw it as a welcome idea.

The paper demonstrates the interplay of domestic factors, which has necessitated a flux in the FP orientation of Nigeria towards Israel in the context of initial severance and later restoration of diplomatic ties with Israel. It argues that domestic factors as exemplified in the Nigerian-Israeli FP have been instrumental to cold and warm reception of the Nigerian government towards Israel. Divided into sections, the first conceptualizes the domestic structure (DS) and Nigeria’s FP; the second focuses on the domestic environment as they impact on Nigeria-Israel relations; and the third is a brief summary and conclusion.

### **Conceptualizing the Domestic Structure of Nigerian Foreign Policy**

It has become an axiomatic truth that the FP of a country is to a large extent determined by its DS. Many scholars and diplomats have accepted this view. They have attempted to “demonstrate that the various constituent elements in the political system- the government, the political parties, pressure groups, the civil service, the political and bureaucratic elites, public opinion, and the press- operating within the democratic process provided by the constitution, exert direct or indirect influence in shaping a country’s FP ( Nweke, 1986:34 ). It is line with this assertion that Akokpari (1999:24) has argued that Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) countries have to constantly reorient their foreign policies to reflect or accommodate domestic and external vicissitudes. Such orientation shifts have rendered SSA’s foreign policies innately malleable and pliable, deprived of coherence or consistence. Since the independence decade

of the 1960s, shifts in the orientation of foreign policies of SSA states have been profoundly evident.

A lot scholars and diplomats have attempted an in-depth assessment of Nigeria's FP. Idang, Akinyemi, Gambari and Aluko perspectives in analyzing Nigerian FP focused exclusively on limited goals. Idang (1986) focused on the impacts of institutions and social forces, like parliament, political parties and FP elites. Akinyemi on the other hand conducted a dissectional examination of the nature and character of the administrative structure in the FP process when subjected to other "pressures" of DS, particularly political parties and attitudes of political elites (1970:2). Gambari has also argued that the domestic political structure and process are of great impact on the nature and character of Nigerian FP because they serve as the channel for internalization of the international environment and events, thus making them intelligible and of value to the participants in domestic political roles (1980:1). Aluko (1976) on his part embarked on the imperative to resolve the impact of colonial heritage and the formative experience of the leadership. Other studies have focused on the evolution of Nigerian FP by demonstrating how "internal pressures" both of administrative structure and of the society as well as how organizations really affect FP formulation (Philips, 1973). In spite of all these intellectual exercises in clarifying the link between the DS and FP, Nweke (1986:35) has pointed out that a thread that runs through all of these studies is there shortcomings. One of them was the issue of preference given to institutional forces with less consideration given to the impacts of socio-economic structure and social classes. Another main weakness is their failure to analyze "beyond the levels of description and explanation".

### **Domestic Environment**

Conventional thinking holds that foreign policies aim at enhancing a state's ability to achieve a specific FP is "a programme (plan) designed to address some problems or pursue some goal that entails action towards foreign entities. A country's FP is determined by two broad

considerations: the domestic and the external environment. Our focus in this paper is however on the formal. According to Otubanjo (1999:9),

“the domestic environment refer essentially to features, factors and forces...peculiar to the state,...foreign policy is being made. The domestic environment includes geographical location of the state, its peculiarity, natural and human resources, the nature of the political system, quality of leadership, the nature of the interaction among groups in the society etc (p.10).

Domestic environmental factors have great impact on the decision/policy making of a country. Little wonder, Northedge (1968:15) posits that the FP of any country is a product of environmental factors both internal and external. The strength of a particular domestic factor in influencing a particular FP option of a country however represents a complex calculus as evident in Babaginda administration’s involvement of human and financial resources in the Liberian Crises at a time when public opinion in Nigeria heavily tilted against an involvement in the crises (Nwosu, 1993:17). As noted by Synder (1962:5),

“...the number and complexity of factors that influence national action in the international arena are not only enormous, but the task of identifying the crucial variables is also unfinished”.

Marston (1968) on his part postulates that it is in the “home made” and aggregate of all the external conditions and influences that affect the life and development of organism, including also FP. Ogene (1998:68-81) and Kissinger (1969:503-05) in their submissions examined the role of domestic structures in a country’s relations with other nations in the world system. Modern diplomatic history has portrayed the FP of a nation as one determined by its domestic structures (Northedge 1968:20). Domestic environment as a matter of fact determines the role a nation plays in the international system. Before the collapse of the Soviet Union, USSR was

a champion of communist policy, but today, the effect of perestroika and glasnot has affected her role-playing in the international arena. The DS plays a crucial role in the way actions of other states are interpreted. We can not therefore consider the DS in isolation of the international system since the technological achievement of any country has a ready impact on other states (Nwosu,1993:17).

The next sub sections shall consider the following factors: political development, economy, the press, public opinion and pressure groups as been central in the examination of the FP response of Nigeria towards Israel.

### **Political Development**

Nigeria's diplomatic ties with Israel had been in existence before her independence in 1960. Many contacts were facilitated in the late 1950s between Nigerian and Israeli officials through joint participation in labour and socialist movement meetings (Ojo 1986:436). Through these efforts, many Nigerian's were encouraged to visit Israel, and at a time Israel was aggressively galvanizing friendship with the newly emergent Third World countries as to bridge the diplomatic gap between her and the Third World (Curtis and Gitelson, 1976).

The constitutional provisions of the Nigerian government allowed the regions of the federation to facilitate their own foreign policies, allow regional delegations to be sent abroad to negotiate loans and other forms of assistance for their regions as evident in a Western Regional delegation led by its Minister of Agriculture, Chief Akindeko, who visited Israel in 1958 to observe cooperative movements. The delegation negotiated cooperation agreements in the field of agriculture and cooperatives, the setting up of a number of joint ventures with Israel which facilitated the establishment in 1959, the Nigersol Construction Company and the Nigerian Water Resources Development Corporation (Ojo, 1986:437).

Counter factually, the Northern Peoples Congress (NPC) in the first republic dominated Nigeria's domestic cum political environment (Nereus, 1993:19). The Northern oligarchy displayed a disdained attitude towards Israel and preferred external contact with

Muslim countries, as shown in Sir Ahmadu Bello's public hostility and pronouncements towards Israel. Sir Ahmadu Bello, the Chairman of NPC, and the Premier of the former Northern Region is credited with the following statement at the World Islamic League:

“It is also fitting at this juncture for me to mention the numerous attempts made by the Jews to entice underdeveloped countries to their side. Barely two years ago, they offered a sizable amount of loan to the Federation of Nigeria. The offer was accepted by all the governments except we in the North who rejected it outright. I made it vividly clear at the time that Northern Nigeria would prefer to go without development rather than receiving an Israeli loan to aid. We took this step only in good faith as Muslims (Paden, 1986:541)”.

Sir Ahmadu Bello himself had traced his lineage to Prophet Mohammed (Bello, 1962:239), and as noted in the editorial of *West African* (1956:606), the receptiveness of the Northern leadership to Arab pressure attracted allegations of Egyptians covert support for NPC before 1960. In spite of extreme policy of Mohammedanism adopted by the Northern region, Federal Government in the first republic established diplomatic ties with Israel. Such move must have been necessitated by the adoption of non aligned policy favoured by the National Council for Nigeria and Cameroon (NCNC), the junior partner in the federal coalition. Alhaji Tafawa Balewa therefore had no other option than to establish formal diplomatic relations with Israel when he reiterated that Nigeria would “remain on friendly terms with every nation which recognizes and respects our sovereignty and... shall not blindly follow the lead to anyone” (Balewa, 1964:56-7). Ojo (1986:437) is therefore right in his persuasive submission that Nigeria might have adopted “open door” diplomatic policy as the result of the need for national unity and economic development. Israel was therefore allowed to establish an embassy in Lagos, but the hostility of the northern elite towards her to a greater extent was responsible for a major constraint by the Federal Government's policy towards Israel by refusing to open an embassy in Tel-Aviv in order to maintain the balance.

The Nigerian-Israeli relations equally suffered a great set back as a result of the 1966 military coup d'état (Adefila, 1979:635) and the subsequent civil war that bedeviled the nation for about 30 months. Nigeria perceived a foul play towards Israel for its alleged sympathetic role played by supporting the defunct Republic of Biafra during the country's civil war (Aluko, 1976:92). The bloody coup against the first republic brought in General Aguyi Ironsi as the first Military Head of State in Nigeria. Before he could settle down to deal with domestic let alone foreign issues, he was brutally murdered and his regime overthrown via a counter coup (Operation Massacre) that instituted Gowon Administration. At the inception of Gowon's regime, it was alleged that Israel was covertly giving military training and ammunition to the Ibos (New Nigerian, 1966). Israeli mission in Lagos denied the allegations but throughout the war, the suspicion remained and Israeli Foreign Minister, Abba Eban, confirmed after the war that Israel had exerted herself to a large extent in providing aid to former Biafra, that if a dozen or twenty had also extended the same gesture, the case would have been different (Aluko, 1976:50). The press in Nigeria was furious and reacted angrily to Eban's statement.

General Gowon showed his displeasure by protesting to the Israeli government through a letter sent to its Ambassador in Lagos. Gowon however believed that Israeli aid to the defunct Biafra was less significant to that of France and for his regime to single out Israel would appear "selective" capable of causing "more problematic internal cleavages" (Ojo, 1986:440). On the other hand, Mathews (1987:534) has argued that the Nigerian government engaged in a wild romance with North Africa and Arabs in the Middle East due to their military assistance during the civil war. Thus, in 1971, Nigeria joined the Arab-dominated oil cartel- the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC).

Nigeria-Israeli relations suffered another set back due to the outbreak of the October 1973 Middle East war as Gowon blamed Israel for the renewal of hostility. Despite the fact that the first shots were fired by Egypt, the Nigerian Head of State argued that the hostility could not have resurfaced if Israel had withdrawn from Arab territories in accordance with the 1967 United Nations Resolution (West African 1973:1508). Yet, he never bowed to both

internal and external pressures to sever diplomatic ties (West African, 1973: 1545). Israeli defiance in the Middle East, violating the ceasefire agreement and consolidating its presence on the West Bank of the Suez Canal, made Gowon to angrily accuse Israel of breaking “faith with Nigeria” (Ojo 1986:440). General Gowon had no choice than to sever ties with Israel as Chairman of the Organization of the African Union (OAU).

After the Gowon’s administration was overthrown by General Murtala Mohammed, subsequent administrations in Nigeria have towed the pro-Arab FP in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Despite the fact that the Obasanjo’s regime renounced the use of terms like Zionism to categorize the Israeli political system, Major General Shehu Musa Yar’Adua, the second in command, declared in Saudi Arabia in 1979 that “our friends are the Arabs, we shall always support them” (Daily Times, 1979). Obasanjo’s government could therefore not do much to restore diplomatic relations Israel,-leaving the issue to be handled by second Republic Government. The leadership of Nigerian Peoples Party (NPP) and the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) favored the restoration of ties with Israel (Nigerian Forum 1983:740-45). The National Party of Nigeria (NPN) leadership perceived as representing the interest of the Northern Muslims was unenthusiastic. The UPN and NPP with dominant Christian root supported the restoration of Nigeria-Israeli relations.

However, such debate was ongoing when the military ended the civil rule in 1983. General Mohammed Buhari regime was dominated by Muslim officers, and no consideration was shown to the issue of restoring diplomatic ties with Israel. In a way to tell the world that the status quo would remain, the military junta appointed Ibrahim Gambari as Foreign Affairs Minister. Gambari, known for his outright criticism and condemnation of Israel policy towards the Middle East before his appointment, aggressively opposed to such move to reestablish relations with Israel. The government demonstrated a total commitment to anti-Israel policy by suspending the Emir of Kano and the Ooni of Ife for their visit to Israel. The Emir of Kano was also removed as Chancellor of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (Nigerian Tribune, 1985).



Buhari regime was overthrown via a coup d'état that ushered in Babangida administration on 27<sup>th</sup> August, 1985 condemning Buhari's FP, and describing it as retaliatory and incoherent (Newswatch, 1985:19). In 1991, the then Nigerian Foreign Minister, Major General Ike Nwachukwu admitted that "Africa could not allow itself to be left out in the current efforts to bring peace to the Middle East and other parts of the world". He also admitted that the restoration of diplomatic ties with Israel was "aimed at getting Africa back into the mainstream of world politics" (African Concord, 1991:24). General Babangida on his part noted that Nigeria's renewal of diplomatic relations was deliberately designed for Nigeria by his administration "to remain relevant in the world affairs", noting "...we don't want to be left in an empty shell" (Nigerian Tribune, 1992). He further reiterated the intention of Nigerian Government to be part of the Middle East Peace Process, speculating that Nigeria would host one of the peace meetings. Thus, the accounts between Nigerian government and their Israeli counterparts opened, culminating into the decision for the reestablishment of diplomatic ties (Nereus, 1993:21). The Foreign Minister made it clear that "diplomacy these days is not based on things that divide people but things that unite them (Nigerian Tribune, 1992). It should however be noted that Nigeria never sought for OAU consent before restoring diplomatic ties with Israel.

## **Economy**

At independence, Nigeria depended basically on the export of agricultural produce which accounted for about 61 percent of its foreign earnings. After the Nigerian civil war, the economy experienced another economic face, with the development of manufacturing sector with a corresponding dependence on foreign inputs like capital, managerial skills and technology. This was followed by the oil boom and petrodollar inflow which made Nigeria to embark on a flamboyant FP (Olaniyan, 1988:105-8). At the close of the 1970s, majority of SSA's were deep in debt following the cumulative events of crushed primary commodity prices, oil shocks, discredited statist policies and dysfunctional military rule (Akopari,

1999:26). It is therefore not surprising when Nwakwo (1984) argued that, since then, Nigeria has developed a monolithic oil economy which has subjected the country to vagaries of economic downturns. The major oil glut in the world market accounted for a budget deficit of \$2,899.3 million in 1982 as against a budget surplus of \$1,796.3 million in 1974 thus institutionalizing poverty and turning the nation into a beggar status (Nwakwo, 1984:41).

This situation further deteriorated the economy which was dependent, disarticulated and peripherally integrated into the world capitalist economy. The government in order to address these deficiencies adopted several economic policies such as Nigerianisation and Indigenization (which created very uncondusive environment for foreign investors) as to bring the nation out of its economic doldrums. The administration of Babangida sought to address these galaxies of economic challenges by adopting several economic policies like Structural Adjustment Programme [SAP] (Babangida, 1985:238) and the “use of economic diplomacy to attract foreign investors” (Nereus, 1993:18). Nigeria had been engaged in bilateral relations with Israel before 1960 in which there was economic cooperation in the areas of agriculture, cooperatives, construction and water resources etc, particularly, in the Eastern and Western regions which were pro Israeli.

In the 1990s, due to economic logjam and alarming withdrawals of foreign investment from the country in spite of the government’s adoption of new economic diplomacy, Babangida administration viewed the restoration of diplomatic relations with Israel as great agendum to stimulate the national economy so as to encourage American Jewish leaders in promoting investment in Nigeria. General Nwachukwu in his visit to Israel told his counterpart that:

“We know, for instance that you have the command of financial institutions of the world through your kith and kin in several industrialized and highly developed economies and we believe also that your influence can bring some meaningful investment to support such development programes” (The Guardian 1991).

The reluctance shown by Arab states to assist Nigeria and other African countries out of their serious economic problems left Nigeria with no other option than to extend her friendship to a “former foe” due to Babangida regime’s eagerness to improve the domestic economy. Since May, 1992, when Nigeria and Israel restored diplomatic relations, they have exchanged economic delegations for the betterment of the duo.

### **The Press, Public Opinion and Pressure Groups**

Nigeria has maintained certain level of freedom of speech even during the military era. Even during the Civil War, General Gowon often yielded to “severe press criticisms” as earlier obtained during the democratic regime of Balewa (Chick, 1971:126-27).

Counter factually, the press, pressure groups and different interest groups have been able to persuade the government and the direction of its policy. Claude (1965:2) has also acknowledged that public opinion has always been a political factor guiding a country’s FP. The Nigeria government especially has displayed this sensitivity both in its perception and conduct of its FP. Due to the Israel-South African ties in the 1970’s, Nigerian press was very critical of this relationship, and its denouncement frosted the ties between Nigeria and Israel. However, there was no monolithic voice from the press as regards how Nigeria should interact with Israel. There were different views by the Nigerian Press on the issue of Middle East crisis based on regional and religious sponsors (Daily Express, 1978). According to the New Nigerian, there was to be total disregard of restoration of diplomatic relation with Israel because of it’s role in the civil war, the need to support Egypt, and the fact that the “Israelis themselves have by their recent elections demonstrated their preference for continued occupation by voting into power the extremist Lukud Party”. In August 1991, following General Ike Nwachukwu’s visit to Israel, the same New Nigerian, in its editorial column advised Babangida regime not to consider the restoration of diplomatic ties with Israel.

The New Nigerian’s view was supported by the Northern elites, who even sponsored the distribution of pamphlets creating a negative impression about Israel and the evils done by

Israel in the past to destabilize the Nigerian state'. On the other hand, Southern based press and individuals clamored for restoration of diplomatic ties with Israel because some of them believed that will affect the religious climate in Nigeria. The Nigerian Tribune, The Guardian, Newswatch, NACCIMA, Nigeria/Israeli Association emphatically called for restoration of diplomatic ties and when president Babangida announced the restoration of diplomatic ties with Israel, this was regarded as a triumph over the opposing pro-Arab group who saw such restoration as unwise.

### **Conclusions**

Domestic factors have been central, though not the only factors conditioning Nigeria's FP positions, especially towards Israel. The early years of Nigerian-Israel relations were friendly, and though at the beginning there were Nigerian Christians who advocated that such a relationship would benefit both countries, later the majority of Moslems and their leaders joined in. During the first 13 years (1960-73), many Israeli experts were sent to all parts of Nigeria, at the request of the Nigerians, helping to modernize agriculture, building new housing projects, highways, universities and assisting in laying foundations for a modern communication system. Nigerian scholars, agriculturists, educators and students were sent to study in Israel and major Israeli companies and private entrepreneurs became involved in Nigeria's development. However, this fruitful and meaningful relationship came to a halt in 1973, when Nigeria adhered to the decision of the OAU, which under hard pressure of its Arab members, called upon its members to break off diplomatic relations with Israel following the Yom Kippur War. It took 19 years until the Moslem Nigerian Head of State, General Ibrahim Bagangida decided to restore and normalize the relations between the two countries.

To establish the relationship on a reciprocal basis, Nigeria took an unprecedented step and established, for the first time, an Embassy in Israel, headed by one of its most experienced Ambassadors. The two countries were preparing for closer cooperation when the Nigerian crisis erupted during the Abacha's regime, deteriorating the internal situation, and as in many

other cases, causing a decline in the mutual cooperation. Under the Obasanjo's government, the relationship has been strengthened for the mutual benefit of the two countries. Nigeria and the State of Israel have inaugurated a mechanism of holding annual dialogue aimed at strengthening the existing diplomatic and political relations between the two countries. The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to that effect was signed in Jerusalem by the representatives of the two countries, in which details of the agreement were outlined. Under the terms of the agreement, the two Ministries agreed to establish a procedure "for bilateral consultations at diplomatic level that will constitute a useful mechanism in order to promote their bilateral dialogue". With the recent election of Alhaji Umar Musa Yar' Adua, a Muslim as the President of Nigeria, we can only hope that the relationship will not nosedive again.

Clearly, the world has become a global village, and interdependence is being emphasized by foreign policy makers. There is no doubt that Nigerian's decision to sever and eventual restoration of diplomatic ties with Israel facilitated by both the senior players like (President, the External Affairs Ministers etc) and other players (members of business sector, press, religious leaders etc), constitute important elements on the issue in focus'. We can therefore confidently assert that the DS is of fundamental importance in the FP orientation of Nigeria towards Israel.

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