

Phases of Nigeria's Foreign Policy I

The Abubakar Tafawa Balewa Administration
(1960-1966)

- Nigeria obtained its political independence from Great Britain on 1st October 1960.
- Independence naturally led to the creation of governmental machinery, which in turn necessitated the creation of relevant administrative structures to oversee the country's relations with other countries.
- Nigeria's foreign policy since independence has been viewed from different perspectives.
- Some scholars contend that Nigeria's foreign policy is constantly in a state of flux as a result of internal and external dynamics inherent in various administrations (Anyaele, 2005) .
- Some other writers however maintain that notwithstanding frequent regime changes, that the substance of Nigeria's foreign policy has remained the same.

- For instance, Akintola in an article entitled “Nigeria and the World: A Review of Nigeria’s Foreign Policy (1960-2007) published in *The Nigerian Army Quarterly Journal*, 3(4) (2007),
- “From 1960 to date, Nigeria has maintained a relatively consistent foreign policy considering the fact that the country had experienced varied forms of government within this period. Right from independence, Africa was the centerpiece of Nigeria’s foreign policy with emphasis on the emancipation, development and unity of Africans both within and outside the continent”.
- Despite the divergent views of scholars about the nature of Nigeria’s foreign policy, there are certain principles that have underpinned the country’s foreign policy.

- Olusanya and Akindele (1986:3-5) have identified five major principles as influencing and guiding the conduct of Nigeria's foreign policy:
 - non-alignment (not successful as she unabashedly tilted to the West)
 - the legal equality of all states
 - non-interference in the domestic affairs of other states
 - multilateral diplomacy
 - Afrocentricism
- However, Akindele & Ate, (2000:xiv) have listed a more comprehensive objectives and principles to include:

- ✓ the protection of Nigeria's national interest;
- ✓ respect for, and protection of, the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Nigerian State;
- ✓ promotion of the socio-economic well-being of Nigeria;
- ✓ Enhancement of Nigeria's image and status in the world at large;
- ✓ respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of other states;
- ✓ non-interference in the internal affairs of other states;
- ✓ promotion of the unity and solidarity of African States;
- ✓ total political, economic, social, and cultural emancipation and rejuvenation of Africa, an unflinching commitment to the liberation of countries still under colonial rule, as well as removal of remaining vestiges of colonialism in Africa.
- ✓ the promotion of world peace based on the principles of freedom, mutual respect and equality of the world.

- The formulation and implementation of Nigeria's foreign policy from independence till date has been undertaken by fourteen different administrations - From Tafawa Balewa's administration in 1960 to the various military regimes that ruled for a cumulative period of over 35 years and the various post-military administrations since 1999.
- As already mentioned, Nigeria's foreign Policy since independence appears to be driven by certain principles and objectives but the strategies for their pursuit varied from one government to another.

- **Abubakar Tafawa Balewa (1960-1966)**
- As Nigeria's first Prime Minister, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa played a significant role in the emergence and institutionalization of Nigeria's foreign policy.
- As a matter of fact, the foreign policy foundation that Balewa erected is what is carrying Nigeria's foreign policy till today. Successive Nigerian leaders have merely built on it.
- The foreign policy foundation which Balewa's administration laid was distilled from three speeches he made at different fora.
- These included:
 - Statement in the House of Representatives on August 20, 1960;
 - Independence day address on October 1, 1960;
 - Acceptance speech on the occasion of Nigeria's accession to membership of the UN in New York on October 8, 1960.

- During Debates in the House of Representatives on August 20, 1960, Balewa had argued:
- “We shall not blindly follow the lead of anyone; so far as is possible, the policy on each occasion will be selected with a proper independent objectivity in Nigeria’s national interest. We consider it wrong for the Federal Government to associate itself as a matter of routine with any of the power blocs (House of Representatives Debates, 20th August 1960, Lagos).”
- In Balewa’s address at the UN, he asserted,
- “First it is the desire of Nigeria... to remain on friendly terms with all nations and to participate actively in the work of the United Nations Organization.
- “Secondly, Nigeria, a large and populous country of over 35 million, has no expansionist intentions.

- “Thirdly, we shall not forget our friends, and we are proud to have been accepted as a member of the British Commonwealth. But, nevertheless, we do not intend to ally ourselves as a matter of routine with any of the power blocs. We are committed to uphold the principles upon which the UN is founded.
- “Fourthly, Nigeria hopes to work with other African states for the progress of Africa and to assist in bringing all African territories to a state of responsible independence”.
- Balewa clearly portrayed Africa as the foremost concern of his foreign policy when he said:
- “So far I have concentrated on the problems of Africa. Please do not think that we are not interested on the problems of the rest of the world; we are intensely interested in them and hope to be allowed to assist in finding solutions to them through this organization, but being human we are naturally concerned first with what affects our immediate neighbourhood”.

- Thus, the guiding principles of Balewa's foreign policy which his speeches threw up included:
 - ❖ Africa as the cornerstone of the country's external relations;
 - ❖ Respect for the doctrine of non-interference in the internal affairs of other states;
 - ❖ support for world peace;
 - ❖ respect for the legal equality, political independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of states;
 - ❖ opposition to colonialism and racial discrimination of any kind;
 - ❖ Seeking membership of both continental and global multilateral organizations for their functional importance to Nigeria; and,
 - ❖ nonalignment with any of the then existing ideological, economic and military blocs, especially NATO and Warsaw Pact. Nigeria's interstate dealings to be based on friendship with any country that took a reciprocal position.

- From first October, 1960 to January, 1966 when the Balewa administration lasted, Nigeria pursued its foreign policy in the context of the professed principles and objectives.
- However, the country violated her non-alignment position by aligning with the West.
- Nigeria's foreign policy immediately after independence till the first military coup was predominantly pro-British and guided by British interests.
- Thus, while claiming non-alignment as one of her policy objectives, Nigeria was clearly pro-British and pro-West generally.
- Balewa's administration was decidedly anti-communist.
- According to the Institute of Army Education in an article entitled "Nigeria's Foreign Policy, 1960-1976" in *Nigerian Army Information Briefs* (1977), asserts thus:

- “Would it be surprising therefore that when the Soviet Embassy was established in Lagos in 1961, the number of its diplomatic staff was limited to ten whereas no such restriction was placed on the diplomatic missions of West European countries or the United States of America. The Soviet embassy was allocated a paltry figure of five diplomatic car plates whereas Britain and the United States of America were entitled to one hundred each. It can therefore be asserted that even the opening of the Soviet embassy was grudgingly conceded: a camouflage to the outside world that Nigeria was non-aligned”.
- Balewa hardly took any major foreign policy decisions without first consulting the British government (Idang, 1973:14).
- Nigeria’s pro-Western slant could be seen in the West’s control of all sectors of its economy as well as its dependence on capitalist orientation for the country’s consumptive patterns and developmental efforts.

- The Balewa government placed Africa as the centrepiece of its foreign policy as demonstrated the government's strong commitment in the unity, progress and decolonization of Africa.
- Balewa played a leading role in the formation of Organization of African Union(OAU) in 1963 as well as the Chad Basin Commission in 1964.
- Nigeria equally contributed immensely in the funding of OAU Liberation committee.
- However, as stated earlier, Balewa's government was deeply involved in the decolonization of Africa:
 - He played a leading role in the expulsion of racist South Africa from the Commonwealth in 1961.
 - He also offered administrative and medical staff training to the provisional Angolan government.

- One unique character of Balewa's government was the establishment of foreign missions by the regional governments – similar to the offices maintained by the Quebec Province of Canada in some foreign countries.
- All such offices were closed down after the fall of the Balewa administration. His administration established the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs (NIIA) as a foreign policy think tank.
- However, there were lots of inconsistencies and contradictions in Balewa's foreign policy as could be seen from the following actions he took within the period:
 - severing relations with France over their testing of an atomic bomb in the Sahara desert in 1961 just three months after independence;
 - refusal to attend the maiden conference of the Non-aligned Movement in Belgrade;

- prevarication over the establishment of formal diplomatic ties with the Sino-Soviet bloc until December 1961;
 - acceptance of the Anglo-Nigeria Defence Pact until he was forced to abrogate it by students and the opposition;
 - refusing to train armed militia for Angolan national fighters waging a war against Portuguese colonialists despite Nigeria's avowed resolve to rid the continent of colonialism.
- The overall performance of Nigeria in foreign policy lacked the expected vigour.
 - Gambari (1989) describes the Balewa foreign policy direction as timid and uncertain and lacking in ideological values.