

The Concert of Medium Powers

- In 1987, Bolaji Akinyemi, Nigeria's Foreign Minister, initiated the Concert of Medium Powers.
- The Concert of Medium Powers was an informal and flexible consultative organ that comprised sixteen countries that were regional powers in terms of the significant amount of their regional influence.
- These countries were Algeria, Argentina, Austria, Zimbabwe, Brazil, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mexico, Senegal, Sweden, Switzerland, Venezuela, Yugoslavia, and Nigeria .

- Thus, the membership was drawn from across the continents and transcended such dichotomies as North, South, East and West as well developed and developing; and capitalist and socialist.
- The emphasis was on those countries that had tended to pursue a neutralist or independent foreign policy, drawn from the four regions of Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America.
- These countries were expected to act together in mediatory capacity in pressing global conflict situations as well as act as a bridge between competing interests in the international system.

- **Origin of the Concert of Medium Powers initiative**
- The background to the origin of the Concert of Medium Powers initiative which was championed by the then Minister of Foreign Affairs, Bolaji Akinyemi, could be traced to the dynamism that was brought to bear on Nigeria's foreign policy following the overthrow of Yakubu Gowon and the emergence of Murtala Muhammed in 1975.
- The Murtala Muhammed's dynamism on the foreign policy front provided a platform for Bolaji Akinyemi, who was then the Director General of the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs, (NIIA), to convene a conference in 1976 under the auspices of his Institute.

- The Conference which consisted fifty Nigerian scholars drawn for the academia public service and other think-tanks was convened to discuss Nigeria's foreign policy.
- At the conference, which took place between January 25 and January 30, 1976, almost all participants agreed that Nigeria possessed all the necessary qualities to become a power to be reckoned with in the international arena. However, there was no consensus about what constituted greatness to enable the Conference chart a course of action that would enable Nigeria to become great.

- The views that were expressed scholars at the conference could be compartmentalized into the idealist, reformist and realist groups.
- The idealist group wanted Nigeria to put its house in order, develop home grown technology, lessen dependence on foreign experts and foreign goods, and tackle its socio- economic problems;
- The reformists advocated modernization and the revamping of Nigeria's socio-economic system in order to meet the challenges which would be posed by its emergence as a regional power in Africa.

- The realist approach proffered that Nigerian energy should not be focused solely on the domestic scene. It acknowledged that in terms of the indices of development Nigeria could not be said to be great or powerful in the international system. However it posited that this should not undermine its aspiration to becoming a regional power.
- It would appear that two groups, the reformist and the realist, became dominant in the analysis of Nigerian foreign policy.
- Bolaji Akinyemi identified himself with the realist school of thought and worked hard to promote its idea, particularly during his tenure as the Director General of NIIA.

- Thus, when he was appointed the Minister of External Affairs in 1985 under the military government of General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida, he started working in line with his realist inclinations
- The Concert of Medium Powers therefore, was one of the foreign policy initiatives articulated by the military administration of IBB to expand Nigeria's role in international affairs.
- It has been suggested by scholars that the Concert of Medium Powers Initiative was also designed as a response to the then increasing resort to threats by the super powers as well as their unilateral use of force to settle geopolitical issues.

- **The Lagos Forum**
- The Lagos Forum served as the platform for the consultative meeting that midwifed the Concert of Medium Powers . The meeting was held between March 16-18, 1987.
- The Lagos forum was an idea that sought to explore with a number of countries, the concept of a concert of medium powers as a new approach, designed to restore confidence in the international peace process, and to complement on-going efforts at international cooperation.

- Meanwhile, before the Lagos exploratory meeting between March 16 and 18, 1987, there had been consultations for about one year, both at the bilateral and multilateral levels.
- For instance, informal ministerial meetings of a number of countries were held in New York, during the 41st session of the United Nations General Assembly in September, 1986.
- It was at the level of some of these consultations that countries of like-minds were identified and subsequently were invited to Lagos.

- Thus, the Lagos meeting of senior officials from Algeria, Argentina, Austria, Zimbabwe, Brazil, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mexico, Senegal, Sweden, Switzerland, Venezuela, Yugoslavia, and Nigeria, the host, was just another of such consultations. It was only different from others in the sense that it was to set up a framework for the formal operations of the Lagos Forum.
- At the first meeting, it was agreed that the membership of the forum be expanded. In doing this, the forum was conscious of not losing its manageability. It was the belief of the members also that the consultative role of the group would be enhanced if the membership reflected various tendencies and orientations.

- By consensus, the Forum agreed to extend invitation to Hungary, Australia, Pakistan, Peru, and Canada.
- All the invitees except Ethiopia attended the second meeting of 1-3 September, 1987.
- Zimbabwe which had attended the first meeting withdrew from the group, on the ground that it did not see itself as being in the league of medium power states.
- Due to several political and strategic issues that characterized the Cold War era, especially the ideological bipolarity of the international system, the meetings could not produce a draft charter.

- **Objectives of the Forum**

- Despite the fact that the Forum was unable to draft a charter, certain aims and objectives could still be discerned from the various discussions in the course of the meetings.
- i) The initiative of the Concert of Medium Powers was motivated by a deep concern at the lack of progress in the resolution of pressing global economic and political issues such as the continuing arms race, the increasing militarization of the outer space, the persistence of apartheid in South Africa then and the economic problems of many member states of the United Nations.

- ii) The marginalization of small and medium powers in world politics.
- This had generated new fears and uncertainties in international interactions and impaired the ability of multilateral institutions, particularly the United Nations and the Non-Aligned Movement, to resolve fundamental global problems and crisis situations.
- iii) The Concert of Medium Powers was a new approach designed to restore confidence in the international peace process and complement efforts at international cooperation.

- iv) The Forum was envisaged to serve as a platform for the advancement of international dialogue and cooperation as well as contribute positively in shaping the course of international relations, by acting as a bridge-builder across the various divides.

- **Issues in Membership Structure**

- The initial number of countries that Nigeria invited to be part of the Forum was 16, namely: Algeria, Argentina, Austria, Zimbabwe, Brazil, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mexico, Senegal, Sweden, Switzerland, Venezuela, Yugoslavia, and Nigeria.
- At the first meeting, it was agreed that the membership of Forum would eventually be expanded but the initial limitation of the number of invited countries was to build a Forum of manageable size.
- It would appear that the Initiators of the Forum paid attention to 'geographical spread' and 'regional balance'.
- For example: Africa had Egypt, Algeria, Senegal, Zimbabwe and host, Nigeria. For Asia, there were India, Indonesia and Malaysia. Latin America was represented by Brazil, Mexico, Argentina and Venezuela.
- Europe had Sweden, Yugoslavia, Austria, and Switzerland.

- During one of the exploratory meetings, there was a consensus on the expansion of the membership of the Forum.
- The major reason for voting for expansion was to take care of possible misunderstandings from other members of the international community, who were not members.
- Furthermore, the examination of the composition of the member-states that attended the first Lagos meeting, in March, 1987, showed that conscious efforts were made not to bring mutually antagonistic countries together such as Pakistan and India; Libya and Egypt; and Iran and Iraq with Saudi Arabia.
- Even after the expansion of membership, conscious efforts were made to exclude the revolutionary members of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), like Cuba, Libya, Ghana.

- **An Evaluation of the Concert of Medium Powers Initiative**
- i) Credentials of Nigeria as a Convener
- Some scholars believe that Nigeria was eminently qualified to aspire to be recognized as a medium power based on its potentials, active participation in global affairs, especially in peacekeeping operations.
- Right from its independence, Nigeria had actively participated in UN peacekeeping operations and peace observer missions around the world.
- Nigeria was appointed to serve as a non-permanent member of the UNSC between 1966 and 1967.

- In terms of activism against injustice, Nigeria led thirty other Commonwealth nations to boycott the Edinburgh Commonwealth Games in 1986.
- Nigeria also sponsored the proposal for the creation of a solidarity fund for the Frontline States at the Harare Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in 1986. This led to the inauguration of the African Fund of the NAM in India in 1987.
- Nigeria possessed impressive military and political power in the sub-Saharan Africa.

- Militarily, Nigeria had the second largest army in Africa, after Egypt.
- Economically, Nigeria was reported in the World Bank Report of 1987 as the largest African country with Gross Domestic Product (GDP) US\$ 74 billion.
- This figure surpassed that of every African country except South Africa and Algeria.
- In the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) sub-region, Nigeria's GDP is twice that of all other countries combined.

- **ii) Perception of Other Countries about Nigeria**
- Nigeria was seen as possessing the qualities of a regional power.
- Scholars contend that the very fact that the sixteen countries attended the exploratory senior officials meeting in Lagos in March 1987 and decided to christen the initiative as the Lagos Forum was a demonstration of their respect and appreciation for Nigeria.
- It was also seen as an acknowledgment and recognition of Nigeria's leadership status.

- **iii) The Forum served as a platform for the furtherance of Nigeria's Foreign Policy**
- The Concert was conceived as an avenue for promoting Nigeria's national interest.
- It was seen as a major platform that served several purposes:
 - for the projection of Nigeria's image on the world scene;
 - for carving out a major role for Nigeria in world affairs.
 - providing an extra-African forum where Nigeria could enlist the cooperation of certain other countries, in the pursuit of its foreign policy goals and objectives.

- **iv) Skepticism about the Initiative**

- Scholars were skeptic about the viability of the whole project because it originated from Nigeria.
- The major argument was that although Nigeria could be described as a potentially great country, yet it lacked the credential to regard itself as a medium power.
- According to the skeptics, looking at the potentials of Nigeria, the country was eminently qualified to be in the medium power club and by extension, could aspire to be recognized as a strong force in international politics.
- However, they pointed out that this was not the case.
- To them, therefore, for Nigeria to attain the status of medium power, it must get certain things right, particularly its economic development.

- **v) Potential Boost to Nigeria's Quest for Development**
- Some scholars believed that the Forum would serve Nigeria's quest for development.
- They argued that most of the countries, including Brazil, Mexico, India and Malaysia were characterized by intermediate technology which was of greater relevance and applicability to Nigeria than western technology.

- **vi) Prospects of Economic Diversification through the Forum**
- Such developed countries as Sweden and Austria were not colonial powers, and were not characterized by the type of exploitative capitalism typical of other western countries.
- Thus, the Concert of Medium Powers was seen as possessing the capacity to facilitate the process of economic diversification which was necessary to cushion the fallouts of the structural adjustment programme introduced by the Babangida administration.

- **Last word**
- As laudable as the initiative was, some scholars have criticized its failure from several perspectives, such as:
 - Lack of continuity in Nigeria's policy arena. As soon as Akinyemi was removed from office, the policy died.
 - Nigeria's weak economic base and political instability. This made the country ill-equipped and poorly positioned to pioneer such an expensive adventure.
- Although the Concert of Medium Powers Initiative was jettisoned by Nigerian officialdom after the removal of Akinyemi from office as the Minister of External Affairs, the idea did not die as it has reemerged on the international scene in form of ***the D8 group*** of middle-level countries of Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan and Turkey and as ***BRICS*** – Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.