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# Nigeria, the African Union and Regional Integration (1963 – 2019)

Ayodele Haruna MUSTAPHA\*

**Abstract.** The study adopted qualitative historical and descriptive methods. The historical dimension considers the antecedents of the Nigeria's Foreign Policy with respect to Africa as centre piece of its external relations since her independence till the current period. The descriptive and analytical aspects of the methodology focus on the analysis of Nigeria foreign policy objectives based on the empirical validation, while the description approach deals on the impacts/ role of Nigeria on the continental integration of Africa and finally, the admissions of Nigeria into African Continental Free Trade Area (AFCFTA), its challenges and prospect for economic and political integration. Key informants' interview was conducted with diplomats, academics and scholars through structured questions and Focus Group Association (FGA) as primary and secondary source entails data collected from textbooks, internet, materials, journal paper etc. The study adopted role theory to x-rays, midwife and validate the nexus between the roles of Nigeria towards the African Union and regional integration for economic and political realization.

**Keywords:** Diplomacy, Foreign Policy, National interest, National interest, Regionalism, Role conception

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## Introduction

### Background to the Study

NIGERIA BECAME INDEPENDENCE ON OCTOBER 1<sup>ST</sup>, 1960 from the British Government. The Prime Minister then Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa in his first address to the United Nations General Assembly on October 7, 1960 stated the great desire of Nigeria to remain on peaceful and friendly terms with all countries of the United Nations Organization (Ashiru and George 2013: 2). It was from that historical statement of the Prime Minister usually referred

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to as the “Balewa Doctrine” that the following objectives and principles that have guided our foreign policy framework were articulated:

- Acceptance of the sovereign equality of all African states;
- Respect for the independence, Sovereignty and territorial integrity of every African states;
- Non-interference in the internal affairs of other African countries;
- Commitment to functional co-operation as a means of promoting African Unity; and
- Total eradication of racism and colonialism from Africa (Nweke 2010: 13).

Successive Nigerian Governments with the reality in the international level have added to the guiding principles of Nigeria’s foreign policy declared as another five-man objective of the nation’s external policy, sequel to the review panel of Professor Adebayo Adedeji on Nigeria’s foreign policy in the following ways:

- The protection / defence of the sovereign and territorial integrity of the Nigerian state
- The creation / promotion of the necessary political and economic conditions in Africa and the rest of the world which will facilitate defence of the independence and territorial integrity of all African countries, while at the same time fostering national self-reliance and rapid economic development;
- The promotion of equality and self-reliance in Africa and the rest of the developing world;
- The promotion and defence of justice and respect for human dignity, especially the dignity of the black man; and
- The defence and promotion of world peace (Nweke 2010: 14).

It is instructive to note this assertion when the Minister of External Affairs, Jaja Wachukwu’s commented on Nigeria-African continent. According to Wachukwu (1963) cited in Akinterinwa (2005) that:

Our Foreign policy is based on three pillars: the concept that Nigeria is an African nation; it is part and parcel of the continent of Africa and therefore it is completely involved in anything that pertains to that continent; that it cannot be neutral and must never be considered as a neutralist country. We are independence in everything, but neutral in nothing that affects the destiny of Africa (sic). The moment Africa is affected, we are involved. We want to make this absolutely clear! Nigeria finds itself involved in anything affecting the African continent anywhere, any square inch of African territory. We are involved. The

peace of Africa is the peace of Nigeria. Its tribulations are our tribulations and we cannot be indifferent to its future (Akinterinwa 2005: 8).

To fully appreciate the different facets of Nigeria's foreign policy, cognizance must be taken of the fact that the guiding principles of Foreign Policy remain the same, room exists for adjustment and change in line with domestic, external realities and variables. For a proper understanding also, the historical periods have been delineated as follows:

- Nigeria at independence or the Balewa Administration (1960 – 1966).
- The civil war era (1966 – 70).
- Post-civil war or oil boom years (1971 – 1983).
- Period of prolonged Military rule (1983 – 1999).
- President Obasanjo Civilian Administration (1999 – 2007).
- Late President Musa Yar'Adua Administration (2007 – 2010).
- President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan Administration (2011 to 2015).
- President Muhammadu Buhari Administration (2015 – till date).

After two years of Nigeria's independence, the country became a force to be reckoned with in the African continent, playing a vital role in the process of the formation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU). In that regard, three African groups emerged, namely: the Casablanca Group which stood for immediate political union of all African countries, with a radical approach to Africa's international relations; the moderate Monrovia Group, which advocated functional cooperation, equality of all states, non-interference in the internal affairs of other states as well as opposition to forced political union of the continent; and the conservative Brazzaville Group, which was made up exclusively of French colonies adamant on maintaining their ties and influence with France. It was against this background of political fragmentation that these groups came together at the conference held in Addis Ababa in May 1963 to form a single organization that would embrace all African states (Akinterinwa 2005: 10; Nweke 2010: 15; Obikeze and Anthony 2003: 303).

Over more than 50 years of independence, Nigeria's foreign policy had focused principally on Africa. Successive Nigerian leaders have professed Africa as the centre piece of its foreign policy. Nigeria sees itself and is widely seen as a leader of Africa, and this has profoundly influenced the perception of its role, both on the continent and globally. It played a pivotal role in the formation of the OAU and its transformation to African Union (AU) corresponding to its African foreign policy through the conservative phase, the radical phase and the realist phase (Ibeanu 2010: 17). Since Nigeria's independence in 1960,

Africa has been the centre piece as manifested in its commitment to the total liberation of Africa from colonialism, racial discrimination and apartheid. By that, as a result, Nigeria was on centre stage in the clamour to intensify embargoes, boycotts and economic sanctions against apartheid South Africa (Abegunrin 2009: 2).

Nigeria's impressive commitment in huge diplomatic and financial resources towards the total liberation of Africa significantly saw to it that both apartheid and colonialism were engaged, confronted and liquidated on the continent. Diplomatic, moral and financial resources were consistently placed at the disposal of the liberation movements across Africa (Saliu 2012: 48). The need to form an African unity-oriented organization came as a result of the quest to create a collective anti-colonial struggle on a continental level. This quest brought about a manifestation of the age-long search for an institutionalized body which led to the formation of the OAU in 1963 (Saliu 2012: 49).

On 9th September 1999, the Heads of states and governments of the OAU at their fourth extraordinary summit held in Sirte, Libya, deliberated extensively on the ways and means to strengthen the continental organization. The aim was to make it more effective so as to keep pace with the political, economic and social developments that were taking place within and outside Africa. The primary goal was to accelerate the process of implementing the Abuja Treaty. Nigeria played a leading role in the process that transformed the OAU to the African Union (AU) (Akinsanya 2005: 106). According to President Olusegun Obasanjo:

The nature of African union should be understood to mean the pursuit of socio-economic integration of the continent as a first and necessary step towards the achievement of a political union. This arrangement may not necessarily be in the form of a federation or even confederation at this stage but could be the ultimate goal to be aspired to in the future (Akinsanya 2005: 107).

### Statement of the Problem

While there have been scholarly studies that address Nigeria's role in the African Union, many of them have failed to explore how the general framework of its role (foreign policy goals and strategies) in Africa has served both its national interest and the overall integration process of the continent and its people.

Expectations were running high at the start of the new millennium when the African Union was established in 2002 as the successor to the OAU. The general hope was that it would overcome the long-standing problems and

speed up the pace of African integration. However, it has been observed that political intentions will not always translate into action. It soon became clear that many African leaders did not want to give up any element of their national sovereignty. The Constitutive Act of 2002 that underpins the creation of the African Union was therefore a compromise between partisans of a federal union (endowed with supranational competence) and those who resisted this ambitious vision and did not want to give up their internal sovereignty (Laporte and Mackie 2010: 15).

There is also the hurdle of the human factor that has negatively affected the African Union, as manifested in widespread corruption, economic mismanagement and inefficiency, lack of probity and accountability in government and sit-tight leadership. Ethnic conflicts, economic recession, diseases, illiteracy, poverty, military coups or threats of it, genocide, ethnic cleansing and international terrorism have combined to undermine Africa's capacity to propel development and face up to the challenges of the 21st century (Azaigba 2010: 127).

In addition, improper coordination has fostered a low level of trade and communication among African states. Compounding this are the non-implementation of treaties that form the bedrock of integration efforts and the failure of African states to achieve diversification and structural transformation within their economies. And these are a reflection of the degree of economic and political crises fuelled by globalization, the problem of refugees and displaced persons, as well as the slow pace of democratization (Oche 2005: 156).

It is also been observed that some countries are disturbed by the implications of certain articles of the African Union's Constitutive Act, especially in regard to notions of a central government that is capable of enforcing those union's principles which seem to derogate from the sovereignty of member-states, such as the right of the union to intervene in a member-state pursuant to a decision of the union in grave circumstances like war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity (Article 4(h) etc. These are circumstances in which any member that fails to comply with the decisions and policies of the union may be subjected to sanctions such as denial of transport and communication links with other member-states as may be determined by the Assembly (Article 23(21), even when such sanctions may be difficult for friendly states to observe (Agubuzu 2010: 371).

However, most compelling is the observation that not yet explored is the role of Nigeria in the political and socio-economic integrative forces like common defence, common government, single currency, continental airline, common market and trade, common anticorruption drive, harmonized migration policies, shared policies on refugees crises, coordinated climate change drive and free trade areas. This study intends to fill the gap by

providing appropriate insights.

### Research Questions

From the foregoing, are the following research questions:

- How has Nigeria's role been supportive of the African Union's effectiveness and efficiency in continental integration in terms of failure or successes?
- What is the impact of Nigeria's National interest and foreign policy on achieving the objectives of African Union in the quest for continental integration?
- What progress has been made and what lessons have been learnt from the establishment and institutionalization of the African Union in the quest for continental integration in the level or degree of integration?
- Is there any apparent disconnect between Nigeria's foreign policy and the African Union's key objectives?
- What are the key challenges and prospects of the African Union in a rapidly changing Africa, continental and global context?

### Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to assess the impact of Nigeria's foreign policy on the African Union as well as regional integration. Other objectives of the study are:

- To examine the role of Nigeria in the support of African Union's effectiveness and efficiency in the quest for continental integration in areas of failure or success.
- To determine the impact of Nigeria's National interest and foreign policy on achieving
- the objectives of African Union in the quest for continental integration.
- To find out the progress made, and lessons learnt from the establishment and institutionalization of the African Union in the quest for continental integration.
- To investigate if there is a disconnect between Nigeria's policy and the African Union's key objectives in the level or degree of integration.
- To interrogate the key challenges and prospects of the African Union in a rapidly changing continental Africa and global world.

### Statement of Assumptions

The study is guided by the following basic assumptions:

- That the high level of economic and political crises in Africa tends to slow down the pace of continental integration in Africa.
- That leaders' degree of commitment and political will can determine the level of continental integration through the African Union.
- That the asymmetrical relationship among African countries tends to inhibit effective continental integration.
- That the high rate of corruption among African leaders tends to undermine integrative efforts/mechanisms in Africa.
- That a pragmatic and strategic conduct of Nigeria's foreign policy can improve the institutional framework of both continental integration and the African Union's sustainable objectives.

### Justification of the Study

This study is a critical appraisal of Nigeria's role and the African Union in the context of continental integration. The study is expected to be beneficial to Africa's quest for political stability, enhanced intra-regional trade, greater security, reduced poverty, overcoming drought and its adverse effects, eliminating human and arms trafficking, as well as better standards of living. It should also verify Nigeria's vaunted leadership role in African affairs, straddling peacekeeping missions, peace building, conflict resolution, the promotion of democratic governance, and African integration in particular. It will as well show how well or otherwise such engagements have promoted Nigeria's national interest.

Importantly, the study should clearly demonstrate the status of African integration as well as highlight the attendant challenges and the future prospects of the on-going process.

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### Definition of Terms

#### Foreign Policy:

Foreign policy denotes the authoritative actions which governments take or are committed to take either to preserve the desirable aspects of the international environment or to alter its undesirable aspects. It also represents

the range of actions taken by various sections of the government of a state in its relations with other bodies or states acting on the international scene in order to advance the national interest of that particular state (Akinboye and Ottoh 2007: 116).

#### **Role conception:**

Daniel (2018) noted that role conception is defined by a broader public rather than a single or few policy makers, domestically shared views and understanding regarding the proper role and purpose of one's own state as a social collectivity in the international arena, while the concept is related to other concepts such as national self-image and state identity as the role concept can be determine either through individual/group(s) or state(s). National role ascribes to the state an organic and social nature which national interests may not do. It establishes the basis for the social functionality of states and provides the platform for the comprehension of state behaviour (Folarin 2011: 4).

#### **National Interest**

National interest is the sum of the objectives and goals of a nation-state. It is the basic motivation for foreign policy formulation and execution as a guide for policy makers. It is considered as the simplest means of understanding or explaining how and why nations do what they do when they engage in international action (Eminue 2013: 67-68).

#### **Regionalism**

Regionalism is a concept which refers often to formal cooperation and integration arrangements of a group of countries within a common geographical space aimed at facilitating or enhancing a sense of common identity and purpose through the creation of institutions that give shape to, and drive collective action. In defining the concept of regionalism, regional cooperation and regional integration are two distinct concepts often used together (Jibowu 2015: 7).

#### **Economic Integration**

Dalimov (2009) argued that economic integration is a process of a formal unification of previously separate economic areas: after cancelling tariff and non-tariff barriers, as it increases volume of trade among members of economic union, generates more economic activities and changes inner dimension of integrated economies towards better united welfare.

## Theoretical Framework

### Role Theory

Role theory first attracted attention in foreign policy literature after the publication of [Holsti's \(1970\)](#) study of national role conceptions. [Walker \(1987\)](#) sets the stage for further advances in foreign policy and international relations' use of role theory which has descriptive, organizational and explanatory value for the study of foreign policy. Descriptively, role theory provides a rich vocabulary for categorizing the beliefs, images and identities that individuals and groups develop for themselves and others, as well as types of processes and structures that govern the government in particular situations. Organizationally, role theory allows the analyst to focus on any level of analysis commonly used in the study of foreign policy, in addition to bringing those levels through a peace-orientation that joins agents and structures. The explanatory value of role theory may derive from its own middle-range theories as well as harnessing its concept to other theoretical approaches ([Theis 2009: 3](#)).

Role theory is derived from the concept of role as used by sociologists, psychologists and anthropologists in distinguishing individuals or groups, role perceptions and actual performance in any social gathering. This could be family, peer group, religions group, workplace community, market and in this case, the political groups ([Folarin 2010: 89](#)). Role theory is a perspective in sociology and social psychology that considers most of everyday activities to be the acting out of socially defined categories. Each role is a set of rights, duties, expectations, norms and behaviours that a person has to face and fulfil ([Role theory 2017: 3](#)).

It refers to the explanation of what happens when people are acting out in a social process and the consequences of doing so. The essence is to provide a model of behaviour in a specific situation like the principal function of role-playing in conflict resolution and discovering details of a manifested behaviour which helps elucidate social positions in education, the economy, science and government, among many categories (Role theory leadership, 2016). Various scholars are credited to have been the founders and proponents of role theory, and these include Margaret Mead, Talcott Parson, Robert K. Merton (1957), B.F Skinner, Mintzberg (1978), Ivan Nye (1976), Linton (1945), Goffman (1959), Turner (1956), Lopata (1991) and Stryker (1968). The theory formalized discussion in the 1920s ([Role Theory 2017:5](#)).

Role theory concern with one of the most important features of social life, characteristic behaviour patterns or roles. It explains role by presuming

that persons are members of social groups and hold expectations for their own behaviour and those of other persons. Recent developments suggest both centrifugal and integrative forces within the role field. The former reflects differing perspectives of commitment by scholars, confusions and disagreements on the use of role concepts, and the fact that role theory is used to analyse various forms of social system. The latter reflects the shared, basic concerns of the field and efforts by role theorists to seek a broad version of the field that will accommodate a wide range of interests (Biddle 1986: 68).

The linkage and relevance of role theory to this study lies in the attempt to interpret and examine the foreign policy behaviour of the Nigerian state as projected by different actors with different ideological and political orientations. It x-rays the role of each player in the conception,<sup>1</sup> formulation and implementation of the country's foreign policy. The role of Nigeria as a nation with respect to its foreign policy objectives and principles that are Afrocentric, making Africa its centrepiece and theorizing/prioritizing initiatives in the forms of concentric circles around the African Union regional integration process.

Like all theories, role theory has its own shortcoming as argued by scholars, which include the following: (i) the central weakness of role theory is in describing and explaining deviant behaviour; (ii) it does not and cannot explain how role expectations came to be what they are; (iii) it does not explain when and how role expectations change; (iv) it has a hard time explaining social deviance when it does not correspond to a pre-specified role; (v) it is only a snapshot of activity performed by an individual and may not be representative of everyone and for all time (Role Theory Leadership 2016: 3).

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## Findings

The findings of the study revealed across the key informants' interviews that Nigeria has to review its role in Africa to reflect the domestic politics and reality. It requires the country having been a frontline state in the past for countries struggling to attain their independence to consider its national interest. Again, the dynamism to international integration concept especially in EU and ASEAN demands robust and appropriate move for African states to integrate economically and politically which Nigeria is best expected to take the driver's seat. However, that should not make the country dumping site for dumping goods. Again, it revealed that the political will to integrate in order to enjoy the fruits of economic and financial gains collectively is not exercised and as the institutions are weak, it makes the observance practically impossible. Again, it requires the full commitment of government and institutions to ensure appropriate measures to safeguard smooth path for economic and

political integration devoid of war, climate change, migration, corruption, sit tight syndrome, hunger, famine, weak institution, nationalism etc. which are antithetical to continental integration.

### **Interrogating the Key Challenges of the African Union**

Talking of integration in an environment of distrust and division is a big challenge, yet it must be embraced that integration is not static at all.

- Dependency on the West or East remains a dividing line defining the member states of the African Union, while African Union has to devise African solutions to African problems. The global world is seeking solutions to global challenges, like climate change, financial crises and civil unrest. Africa has so much of its own problems from which also are vast embedded opportunities.
- There are political, economic and social disparities in Africa. The modelling of the African Union was along that of the EU. It has been observed that there are overt African disparities which are the recipe for weakening the African Union.
- Africa continues to engage at the periphery of the global economy as is evident from the continent's declining share in global production and trade with the majority of Sub-Saharan Africa's 47 countries being labelled small and least developed (UNCTAD 2007: 8).
- Apart from wars, conflicts and the crippling poverty, another unexpected development is the scourge of the remnant HIV/AIDs pandemic and the new emergent contagious disease Ebola and their debilitating impact on the African continent as majority of the victims are Africans between the ages of 15 and 49. The scourge has adversely impacted on every segment of life in the worst affected countries in education, agriculture and food production especially health enterprises and life expectancy (Sesay 2008: 15).
- The sluggish progress of member states' economic development has been a recurring concern as Africa is the continent with widest gap between rich and poor, with more than 40 percent of the population in Sub-Saharan Africa living on less than one US \$ a day, and for many an average of only 65 percent in that regard.
- Insufficient funding and absence of critical logistics capability are the most debilitating constraints to Africa's peacekeeping operation as member states fail to pay their annual subscription to the African Union, while those that pay, even pay small amount of money (Grimm & Katito 2010: 3).

### Prospects of the African Union in a Rapidly Changing Global World

Africa's greatness in the international system has long built and rested on the fulcrum of Pan-Africanism. The idea is hinged on the understanding that confronting the challenges of globalization requires a coordinated/continental interaction and unity of interest.

- The regionalization of economic activities will enable national economies to build capacities in all critical areas from the absorption and generation of new technologies to production and marketing as a springboard for more meaningful participation in the world economy.
- While the foundation for regional economic cooperation and integration in Africa has been well laid through the establishment of the AEC, the RECs should continue to build their capacities, harmonize and coordinate their institutions, improve performance and avoid wasteful duplication of effort. This will include the harmonization of national reconstruction programmes of the member states with those of the RECs, in such a way that one can complement the other. It applies to relationship among the RECs, the AEC, countries, the multinational organizations and the African Union.
- The African Union together with the RECs and their various member states should invest more energy and resources in promoting the integrity of electoral processes as a strategy to prevent electoral violence and support peaceful post-election transitions. Joint activities between the African Union and the RECs and other international actors offer important opportunities to build trust and strengthen collaboration, highlighting the synergies and complementariness of their mandates.
- The African Union must realize that Africa's enemies such as disease, illiteracy, poverty, wars, famine, conflicts economic recessions, sit-tight leadership, corruption, refugees/migration crisis can only be eradicated through common action and joint efforts of African Union government and parliament as it must struggle to achieve universal human dignity and racial equality across the continent and the world at large. Africa's political and economic integration are interlinked involving democratization of African regional organizations, free movement of goods and people among countries and actions to address such cross-border issues as AIDs, child labour, and trafficking in women to be noted.

- Rationalizing Africa's many different regional institutions, to reduce overlap and inefficiency.
- Pursuing a pace of integration that is simultaneously ambitious and realistic. Reconciling conflicting interests of countries with diverse sizes, natural resources and economic performance.
- There must be legal reform in African states to address issues of corruption, money laundering, human trafficking and other deterrents to foreign investment.
- External aid is incentive to African states to signal their supports for the programmes and policies of regional integration.
- The African Union now pays more attention to international development cooperation and relationship with international partners than before, especially as the China's ever-growing influence and presence in Africa. African Union would have to adopt an appropriate strategy to manage international cooperation in an era of globalization and in a changing world to come out with relevant and practical conceptualization of innovative and transformation partnership which its member states will need to complement national development efforts (Lisk 2012: 2).
- African Union needs to be more firm in its use of force. The organization's conflict management strategy lack effective coercive measures to ensure compliance of its members and implement forceful intervention as provided under Article 4(h) of its constitutive Act and as proposed under the responsibility to protect (R2P) concept where and when consensual interventions and peaceful negotiations are in appropriate or inadequate. Delay in reaching political agreement among African leaders on collective security, norms and practices should be reduced or absolutely eradicated (Joshua & Olanrewaju 2017: 12).
- The building of social capita through spreading of information, which would enhance trade and reduce the probability of conflicts as well as building a strong social infrastructure in addressing other constraints.
- It has already been pointed out that primary factors of success for regional integration in Africa would require firstly political liberalization and sound macro-economic reforms. This would underpin by infrastructure development, attracting and nurturing private economic activities, supporting socially and economically viable indigenous practices, and creating the right climate for the

expression of a plural and divergent political voice in civil society as these factors together would contribute significantly to the vitality of Africa's integration process.

- ECOWAS has adopted a single currency called ECO for the West African region which African Union show learn from it to adopt a single currency, defence and political platforms for the continent in the fulfilment of African Union agenda 2063-SDGs.
- Monetary integration can also provide the basis for more efficient coordination and monitoring of the social and regional impact of structural adjustment policies. Improved regional coordination and commitment of donors to such policies are equally decisive for the success of the creation of stable monetary areas ([Bach 1999: 8](#)).

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### Summary & Conclusion

The study justified the role of Nigeria in the quest for continental integration in terms of economic and political agitation for union/ unity. Its roles be it hegemonic, solidarity affirmative, selfless and assertive to either cater for her national interest and foreign policy realization or the attributed affection of the continent as its centrepiece, all worked for the actualization of continental integration of the desires of the founding fathers of African Nations to be economically relevant, prosperous and self-sufficient countries.

The study justified the role of Nigeria in providing the lead amongst countries in Africa by ensuring that its vacuum cannot be easily filled as observed in the Africa continental Free Trade Area (AFCFTA) where its admission into it was initially delayed as African Union felt it badly.

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## NIGERIA, THE AFRICAN UNION AND REGIONAL INTEGRATION (1963-2019)

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