

## MID TERM REPORT OF PRESIDENT MUHAMMUDU BUHARI'S FOREIGN POLICY

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**Olowojolu Olakunle**

*Department of Political Science and International Relations,  
Landmark University, Omu Aran, Nigeria*

*Email: [kunleolowojolu@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:kunleolowojolu@yahoo.co.uk)*

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### **ABSTRACT**

The emergence of former military ruler, Major General Muhammadu Buhari (retd) as Nigeria's elected president in May 2015 was well received by majority of Nigerians and the International community. Prior to Buhari's rise to power, Nigeria had been confronted with myriads of domestic and international problems that needed prompt attention. This paper shall assess the performance of President Buhari in the area of conducting Nigeria's external relations.

**Keywords:** Foreign Policy, Realism, Buhari.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The 2015 general election in Nigeria brought about a new dimension into Nigerian politics. It was the first time in Nigeria's history that an opposition party would defeat the ruling party at the polls. Coincidentally, former head of state, Gen Muhammadu Buhari (retd) became the second former military ruler after Olusegun Obasanjo (1999-2007) to become civilian president in Nigeria. The fourth republic which kicked off on May 29, 1999 after the military establishment relinquished power to the civilians, brought about a paradigm shift in the conduct of Nigeria's foreign policy. Upon becoming Nigeria's president in 1999, ex-president Olusegun Obasanjo had to re-strategize the foreign policy of Nigeria. The June 12, 1993 crisis and the eventual emergence of late Gen Sani Abacha as military ruler in November 1993 dealt a heavy blow on Nigeria both domestically and internationally. During Abacha's reign

of terror, the military junta clamped down on civil society groups, journalists, human rights activists and several individuals and pro democracy groups that were against the perpetuation of the military in power. The series of ugly events led to the isolation of Nigeria from the International community till June 8, 1998 when Abacha died suddenly. President Obasanjo had to embark on several foreign trips in order to sensitize the international community about changes in Nigeria's political climate. It must be noted that Obasanjo's 8 year tenure yielded fruits in the area of increase in foreign direct investment, increase in gross domestic product, massive reduction in Nigeria's external debts and the restoration of Nigeria's international prestige. Obasanjo's successor, late Umaru Musa Yaradua came up with the principle of Citizen Diplomacy, however, he was unable to drive forward his foreign policy goals due to serious health issues that ultimately led to his death in 2010. Yaradua's vice president, Dr Goodluck Ebele Jonathan was eventually sworn in as president on May 6, 2010 and he went on to claim the keenly contested and bloody 2011 presidential election. After the 2011 polls, President Goodluck Jonathan launched the "Transformation Agenda" that will position Nigeria as an economic giant. The Transformation Agenda was instituted in order to actualize the Vision 20: 2020 which will make Nigeria become one of the top 20 economies in the world. The key elements in the Transformation Agenda include: Real sector; Agriculture and Rural Development; Water Resources; Commerce and Industry; Mines and Steel Development; Physical Infrastructure; Defence and Security; Job Creation; Health Sector; Information and Communication Technology among several others. Nigeria's foreign policy during Goodluck Jonathan's presidency was geared towards economic diplomacy. Through the instrumentality of economic diplomacy, Nigeria entered into strategic partnerships for investment purposes with countries such as United States, China, Turkey, Mexico, Britain and many others. Nigeria and America deepened their economic ties during the Jonathan presidency. For instance, the General Electric

Company of US invested over \$1 billion in the construction of a factory in Calabar to manufacture Gas turbines for power sector. Under the US-Nigeria Bi-National Commission, over 1000 ex-Niger Delta militants were trained in American institutions on the acquisition of vocational skills (Ashiru, 2013). Nigeria received a foreign direct investment of \$54 million to develop agriculture plantations for the cultivation of pineapple and other crops for export to EU market (Ashiru, 2013). As at 2012, Nigeria had the highest FDI Inflow in Africa to the tune of \$8.9 billion (Nwankwo, 2013). Under the Dr. Goodluck Jonathan administration, Nigeria played key roles in fostering peace and stability in Ivory Coast, Guinea Bissau and Mali. During Jonathan's tenure, Nigeria secured strategic positions in several key international organizations such as President for International for Agricultural Development (IFAD); Member of UN Economic and Social Council; Member of International Law Commission; Member of the Panel of Judges at International Criminal Court; Member of the Peace and Security Council at AU; Member of the Governing Board of the International Atomic Energy Agency and many others. President Jonathan's administration dared some key allies of Nigeria by his approval of the Same Sex Marriage Prohibition Act in January 2014 after it was passed by the Senate and House of Representatives. The anti-LGBT law prohibits gay relationships, membership and other involvement in gay societies and organizations and gay marriages. The penalty for gay marriages is 14 years imprisonment in Nigeria (Tribune, May 28, 2015). The EU, UK and the United States threatened to cut off financial aid to Nigeria if the country's ruling authorities refuse to reverse the anti-LGBT law. Up until now, the anti-LGBT law is still in operation in Nigeria. Despite the giant strides attained in Jonathan's foreign policy, there were episodes that put Nigeria in a bad light internationally. The sloppy attitude of Jonathan's administration in tackling the Boko Haram Insurgency coupled with the high level of corruption in his government dented Nigeria's image abroad. Towards the end of Jonathan's reign, Nigeria's relationship with South Africa

deteriorated because of the \$15 million arms deal that was exposed by the South African authorities. It must be noted that President Jonathan ended his tenure on a good note with the successful conduct of the 2015 general election. Jonathan's show of statesmanship after losing the presidential election to ex-military ruler, General Muhammadu Buhari (retd) received high ratings from many Nigerians, international observers and nations across the globe. The focal point of this paper shall be premised upon the successes and failures of President Buhari's foreign policy between 2015 and 2017.

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:**

Global history has been changed, influenced or even re-written by the exploits of leaders such as Napoleon Bonaparte; Martin Luther the Reformer; Martin Luther King Jnr; Mao Tse Tung; Vladimir Lenin; Adolf Hitler and Nelson Mandela. History reveals that the personality of some acclaimed world leaders as mentioned in this section have been studied in the past, making their stance on global politics and issues easily understood (Oviasogie and Shodipo, 2013).

In the extensive research on personality and foreign policy, Kegley and Wittkopf (1999) argued that state action is nothing but the preferences, actions and initiatives of the highest political office holder. This explains why name of leaders are attached to policies that were initiated and implemented at the time they rule. They argued that for the same reason also, failures and successes in foreign policy are ascribed to the leaders at the helm of affairs at the time they occurred. Consequently, the 'equation of U.S. foreign policy with Nixon Doctrine in the 1970s, the Regan Doctrine in 1980s, and the Clinton Doctrine in the 1990s' all attest to the role of personality in determining foreign policy. In the same vein, Goldstein and Pevehouse (2007) argued that individuals are the only true actors in international relations. Goldstein asserted that individuals make decisions on behalf the state. Leaders' decisions may be shaped by their own personal history, their childhood, career and

early political experiences building in them certain values and ways of handling problems (Durotoye, 2014). Margaret Hermann's Leadership Trait Analysis is based on some certain parameters used in measuring the connection between the personality traits and decision making choices of political leaders. Hermann identified factors such as belief in the ability to control events, conceptual complexity, need for power, distrust of others, in-group bias, self confidence and task orientation (Hermann, 2005).

### **MUHAMMUDU BUHARI : THE MILITARY RULER**

Major Gen Muhammadu Buhari became Nigeria's military ruler after a bloodless coup ousted President Shehu Shagari on December 31, 1983. Prior to his ascension as commander-in-chief, Buhari was highly revered within the military as a disciplined, honest and patriotic soldier. Shagari's presidency (1979-1983) became unpopular with most Nigerians because of widespread corruption among public office holders, top party members and individuals that benefited from their close links to the ruling class. The Nigerian economy was at its lowest ebb and the conduct of 1983 general election was marred by outrageous rigging. Immediately Buhari and his influential deputy, Major General Tunde Idiagbon came into power, they tried to correct the societal ills and the economic retrogression that have engulfed Nigeria. The Buhari/Idiagbon military junta launched War Against Indiscipline (WAI) in order checkmate corruption, indiscipline and lackadaisical attitude among Nigerian citizens. Several politicians were arrested and jailed by the military administration of Buhari. The 20 month rule of Buhari/Idiagbon witnessed the expulsion of illegal aliens from Nigeria, the sudden change of Nigerian currency, the rejection of IMF economic policies, the closure of Nigerian borders and the much publicized diplomatic face off with Britain over the failed abduction of Alhaji Umaru Dikko (Fawole, 2003). Initially heralded as a messianic regime, the Buhari led military junta became unpopular because of infringement on the fundamental human rights of Nigerians and the high

handedness and conservative approach to political and economic affairs. Buhari's regime was toppled by General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida in a palace coup on August 27, 1985.

### **RE-ENTRY OF MUHAMMUDU BUHARI AS ELECTED PRESIDENT**

Thirty years after Buhari was deposed as head of state, he was sworn in as the 5<sup>th</sup> elected president of Nigeria on May 29, 2015. Gen Muhammadu Buhari (retd) had tried unsuccessfully to become civilian president in 2003, 2007 and 2011 respectively. Being the first opposition candidate to defeat an incumbent, Buhari and the All Progressives Congress (APC), had to tackle burning issues such as Boko Haram Insurgency in Northeast, the Niger Delta militancy, the secessionists' threats by Independent People of Biafra (IPOB), increasing unemployment rates, poverty and poor infrastructures among other problems confronting Nigeria. It must be noted that Buhari's government placed the wiping out of Boko Haram terrorists and corruption as the main agenda of his administration. Few days after assuming the presidency, Buhari visited Niger Republic, Cameroon, Benin Republic, Chad, G-7 meeting in Berlin and the United States. Buhari's main mission was to raise awareness and international co-operation against Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria and West African sub-region. President Buhari ordered the relocation of military command to Maiduguri. It was a courageous move to take the fight against terrorism right to the door steps of Boko Haram. President Buhari championed the creation of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), which is composed of 8,700 standing army officers pulled from member countries of the Lake Chad Basin Commission. The Multinational Joint Task Force has already attracted donations, military platforms and more shared intelligence. Buhari ordered the release of \$21 million to facilitate the establishment of the MNJTF headquarters in N'Djamena. A further \$79 million has been pledged by Buhari's administration (Vanguard, 2015). The MNJTF coupled with the Civilian Joint Task Force have yielded positive results in the fight against Boko Haram

Insurgency. Similarly, 103 out of the 276 Chibok girls that were kidnapped by Boko Haram on April 14, 2014 have been released. The release of the kidnapped girls was done with the help of Swiss government, International Red Cross and the Nigerian government (Vanguard, 2017). The anti-corruption crusade embarked upon by President Buhari has won him a lot of admirers both home and abroad. To buttress this assertion, few days to the 2016 Anti-Corruption Summit held in London, in a video footage, the Archbishop of Canterbury (Head of Anglican Communion), Justin Welby cautioned the former UK Prime Minister, David Cameron about his remarks that some countries such as Nigeria and Afghanistan are 'fantastically corrupt' (Independent, 2016). The 2016 Anti-Corruption Summit is considered by many observers as a step in the right direction towards combating corruption on a global scale. Buhari's zero tolerance towards corruption is seen by many observers as a powerful tool that will restore the dignity of Nigeria as well as facilitate the inflow of massive foreign direct investment. Since 2015, the Buhari administration has kick started investigations and prosecution of high profile Nigerians such as former National Security Adviser, Col. Sambo Dasuki (ret'd), the Senate President, Dr. Bukola Saraki, former petroleum minister, Diezani Alison Madueke, former first lady, Dame Patience Jonathan, ex-governors Babangida Aliyu (Niger) and Sule Lamido (Jigawa) among several other corruption cases. According to the current minister of Information and Culture, Alhaji Lai Mohammed, about 3.4 trillion naira (cash and assets) was recovered during the first year of the Buhari presidency (Thisday, 2016). Additionally, President Buhari's administration has strengthened diplomatic ties with great powers such as China, America, Germany and France. The friendly gestures accorded to the Buhari administration is been reflected in the fight against International terrorism, recovery of looted funds, accessibility to loans and deepening trade deals. In January 2017, Nigeria and other ECOWAS member states played vital roles in resolving the Gambian crisis caused by the refusal of President

Yahya Jammeh to accept the loss of the 2016 presidential polls to opposition candidate, Adama Barrow. The military threats orchestrated by Nigeria and ECOWAS ensured that Jammeh relinquished power peacefully and subsequently went on exile. Adama Barrow took over as president of Gambia on January 27, 2017.

## **MAJOR CHALLENGES CONFRONTING NIGERIA'S FOREIGN POLICY**

Nigeria's foreign policy under the Buhari administration seems to be gathering momentum, albeit, at a slow pace. This is not unconnected with some problems that have bedeviled the socio-economic growth of Nigeria. Under the Buhari led government, Nigeria has not carved specific foreign policy goals and objectives. Currently, Nigeria's foreign policy is vague and incoherent. The undefined foreign policy thrust is affecting Nigeria's engagement with the outside world. Nigeria is merely wavering in her foreign policy approach. With this attitude, foreign nations may find it difficult to deepen their ties with Nigeria. Secondly, coupled with a vague and incoherent foreign policy, the sudden ill-health of President Buhari and management of the episode have generated so much anxiety and uncertainty among Nigerians and the International community. Nigerians have forgotten how the ill-health of late President Umaru Musa Yaradua slowed down the economic progress of the country. At that point in time, Nigeria was quite inactive at the international arena until Dr. Goodluck Jonathan was installed as the Acting President. Thirdly, the decision by the Buhari administration to close some of Nigeria's diplomatic missions is detrimental to Nigeria's foreign policy pursuits. Several Nigerian diplomats and foreign policy experts are not properly engaged in active service for the advancement of Nigeria's national interests. Another impediment to Nigeria's foreign policy is its poor economic state. The Nigerian economy is weak with high rates of unemployment and inflation, poor infrastructure, dwindling oil revenue and weakening currency at the international markets. The worsening economic situation has affected the



payment of salaries and entitlements of civil servants and pensioners. In order to meet up with some cardinal responsibilities, the federal government had to turn to China and London- Paris Club for external loans. For a country with abundant mineral resources, over reliance on foreign loans and foreign aid is inappropriate. Lastly, tensions rising from the agitations of IPOB and Niger Delta militants, the potent threat of Boko Haram terrorists and the Fulani Herdsmen/Indigene clashes have increased the security challenges confronted by the Buhari presidency. These security threats to the peaceful co-existence of the multi ethnic country are sources of distraction to the government at the state and national level. Should these security challenges persist, Nigeria may lose massive foreign direct investment and patronage of her exports abroad.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

In order for Nigeria to assert herself among the comity of nations, this paper shall make recommendations that will promote the national interests of Nigeria. Firstly, the current administration of President Muhammadu Buhari must ensure the injection of professionalism and dynamism into the conduct of Nigeria's foreign policy. Instead of ignoring the importance of foreign policy experts, the government should ensure that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Nigerian Institute of International Affairs (NIIA) and foreign policy experts in research institutes and universities are actively engaged in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of Nigeria's foreign policy on continuous basis. With Buhari's gradual recuperation from illness, it is high time Nigeria allowed seasoned and vibrant foreign policy experts to handle the conduct of Nigeria's foreign policy. Secondly, the current administration must provide lasting solutions to the various security challenges affecting the development of the country. Government should adopt a two way approach to some of these crippling problems; dialogue and the use of force. Those agitating for secession in South East and resource control in the Niger Delta region should be engaged in thorough

dialogue, however, the government should boost the security apparatuses in order to eradicate Boko Haram Insurgency and the growing feud between Fulani Herdsmen and Indigenes across Nigeria. Thirdly, it is quite pertinent for the federal government of Nigeria to embark on programmes and policies that will facilitate rapid development in core areas such as Education, Agriculture, Mining, Manufacturing, Power Supply and Transportation. A robust economy will attract more foreign direct investment as well as help in boosting the capacity of Nigeria to make meaningful contributions in regional and global affairs. Fourthly, Nigeria must leverage on her strategic geographical location, huge population, mineral resources and past contributions at the international level in order to open up new frontiers in her external relations. The gigantic behemoth, Nigeria should spread its tentacles across Europe, North America, South America, South East Asia, Middle East and Africa. Deepening and widening diplomatic relations across the globe would bring about the emergence of Nigeria as a formidable country at the global stage.

## **CONCLUSION**

This research has examined the interconnectedness between personality traits and foreign policy with an emphasis on Nigeria's president, Muhammadu Buhari. The paper reviewed the performance of President Buhari after two years in office. It must be noted that some successes have been recorded however, so much needs to be done in order for Nigeria to fulfill her potential as the Giant of Africa.

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**References** to this paper should be made as follows: Olowojolu Olakunle (2017), Mid Term Report of President Muhammadu Buhari's Foreign *J. of Arts and Contemporary Society*, Vol. 9, No. 1, Pp. 1-12

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