

**PROMOTING GOOD NEIGHBOURLINESS AND THE NATIONAL SECURITY  
IMPLICATIONS: THE LOSS OF BAKASSI PENINSULAR TO CAMEROUN**

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**ABSTRACT:** *The policy of good neighbourliness which Nigeria has adopted in its diplomatic relations with neighbours since independence in 1960 was founded on the premise that its neighbours have nothing to fear from its size and military might. This “big brother” policy grossly undermines national security interest and development. Innumerable cases of harassment and assault of Nigerians ‘sharing borders with its near eastern neighbor, the Republic of Cameroon culminated into the ceding away of the Bakassi peninsular, a part of the Efik Kingdom in Cross River State of Nigeria to the Cameroon in a landmark judgment by the ICJ in the Hague. This foreign policy blunder has far reaching implications on the Nigerian state. This paper examines the policy implications of this rather idealistic foreign policy posturing in a geo-strategic world. The paper opines that maintaining good neighbourliness is good but caution that Nigeria should never again sacrifice its national security interest in pursuit of idealistic foreign policy objectives.*

**KEYWORDS:** Policy, Good Neighbourliness, Idealistic Posturing Strategic Implications, National Security.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The literature of Nigeria’s relationships with its immediate neighbours in the West African sub-region is dominated by two major themes among others: incidences of harassment, molestation and human rights abuses and the “French factor”. Indeed Bassey Ate (1992), has catalogued these “random hostile acts”, which appear as mere incidence meted out against Nigerians by its smaller-neighbours. As noted by Ate, mutual suspicion, distrust and outright alienation characterized the reality of their relations since the formal termination of colonial rule in the sub region. This scenario according to Ate is compounded by the neo-colonial presence of France, a world power in the region<sup>1</sup>. L.S. Aminu (1992), has equally noted the concern by Nigerian policy makes to “the strong French influence in the francophone West and Central African countries”. This jealous paternalistic gesture of France in the West African sub region, according to Aminu, is “one way for France to curb Nigeria’s ambition. Aminu noted that another way is for France to gain a strong foothold within Nigeria’s fragile economy to enable her have some relative influence over some of the direction of Nigeria’s policy posture<sup>2</sup>. France ambitious strides and hegemonic presence in the West African sub-region and the Nigerian economy in particular is not in doubt and should be understood as a strategic encounter in a geo-strategic world, to which world powers engage especially in less powerful areas with minimal opposition.

French investment profile in Nigeria is high; France is the second largest investor in the West African giant economy of Nigeria after the United States. French companies are active in

Nigeria's oil and gas, automobile and construction industries. They are also in maritime business, consultant services, night clubs, imports and hospitality industries. French companies have sizeable investment in chemicals, equipment, down stream and so on, like Peugeot, Total and Lafarge among many others are mentioned. Peugeot was run in partnership between a French firm and Nigerians; Michelin employs about 3,600 Nigerians in Port Harcourt alone. In 2006 alone, trade between France and Nigeria rose by 69% to £2 billion making Nigeria, France largest business partner in sub-Saharan Africa. By 2008, total French investment in Nigeria has hit \$4 billion mark knocking total investment by the United Kingdom.<sup>3</sup> This fact was corroborated by the French Ambassador to Nigeria Yves Gaudenl who asserted that France investment in Nigeria was higher than those in any other West African Country<sup>4</sup> What all of these portends is that France's presence in Nigeria is significant. In strategic terms, the Nigerian market can play a deterministic role in foreign policy formulation. Seen from this angle, the security of France can be upset. And if this is accepted, then Nigeria does not need to put hand in cheek idolizing the implication of France's presence in her natural orbit, rather, what is called for is a pragmatic policy pursuit which would not only place it in the orbit of medium powers but also command the respect of the sub-region and the international community at large. The United States was only 42 years young when in 1823, the Monroe doctrine unilaterally arrogated the Latin America and the Caribbean as the exclusive sphere of influence of the US with a warning to European powers to steer clear. When France ventured into Mexico, as a challenge to the Monroe doctrine, president Andrew Jackson (1829-1837) sent fifty thousand American troops to the Mexican border demanding that France pull out of Mexico. The same way they US used Monroe to justify America's support to Venezuela. France and Britain were forced to recognize the hegemony of the US in the Western hemisphere<sup>5</sup>. It should not be forgotten that France played a major role in the American war of independence or that the John Jay Treaty (1794), had normalized the battered relationship between Britain and its erstwhile colonies – the United States (Ritchie, 1985).

Both the first and second themes identified by this paper i.e., "random hostile acts" by neighbours and the "French factor" as contended in this paper, are largely due to the beggarly and idealistic foreign policy pursuit. This posture, as the national experience has shown, has caused Nigeria so many travails instead of triumph. While this paper is not advocating a war mongering foreign policy posture, it contends that in line with a dynamic international system where interest and the survival instinct dictates policy direction, Nigeria should step up its approach with carrot and stick where and when necessary and not wallow in idealistic objectives even at the expense of its national security. Beside the introduction, this paper has been divided into four subheadings. The first subhead attempts a conceptual clarification of **Foreign Policy, the National Interest, Idealism and Realism**; these concepts are very important to an understanding and interpretation of the international system. The second subhead reviews the principles of Nigeria foreign policy as a basis for understanding the policy of good neighbourliness. The security implication of good neighbourliness as exemplified in the loss of the Bakassi Peninsular to Cameroun is taken in the third subhead. What is to be done constitute the fourth and last subhead before the conclusion.

### Conceptual Clarification

**Foreign policy (FP):** The concept of foreign policy like the national interest has remained polemical as no universally satisfactory definition of the term has emerged. As noted by Olajide Aluko (1981), "Nobody has really formulated a universally accepted definition of foreign

policy and probably nobody will ever succeed in doing this”<sup>6</sup>. In consideration of the above therefore, two definitions are considered.

Cecil Crabb in Aluko (1981) defines foreign policy thus:

... reduced to its more fundamental ingredients, foreign policy consists of two elements: national objectives to be achieved and the means for achieving them. The interaction between national goals and the resources for attaining them...<sup>7</sup>

Joseph Frankel in Aluko (1981), defines foreign policy as a dynamic process of interaction between the changing domestic demands and supports and the exchanging external circumstances<sup>8</sup>.

From the above definitions, certain features of foreign policy can be discerned. These are that (FP) is a dynamic process; that it involves interaction between the domestic and the external environment; and that it involves national goals and the means to attain them.

**The National Interest, (NI):** The National Interest is perhaps one of the most controversial concepts in International relations. The concept over the years have been subjected to many interpretation and mis-presentations, which is why critics have argued that the NI, is more or less what policy makers say it is at any given time (Ojo and Sesay, 2002)<sup>9</sup>. The National Interest of Nigeria as practiced by the government in power, this paper posit, is dramatically opposed to the aspiration and interest of the generality of Nigerians. “The national interest of a nation”, noted Chibuzo N. Nwoke (2013) is the expected value it has to protect and garner in its international transactions, through the instruments of its foreign policy”<sup>10</sup>.

Tunde Adenian (1983) asserted that:

When statesmen and bureaucrat are expected or required to act in the National Interest,... they are being called upon to take action on issues that would improve the political situation, the economic and social wellbeing... rather than pursue policies that would subject the people to domination of other countries...<sup>11</sup>

In practice however, the interest of the dominant class is what is usually presented as the country’s national interest (Enor et al, 2014)<sup>12</sup>.

(1) **Idealism:** The oxford concise dictionary of politics defines idealism as... any behavior shaped by the pursuit of an unattainable objective such as equity or justice or by a general principle such as public service”. (MC Lean and MC Millan; 2009)<sup>13</sup>. Idealist express a tendency toward liberalism, pacifism and believes in the existence of international organizations as a precursor of international order.

(2) **Realism:** The concept of realism whose proponents include E.H. Carr, Hans Morgenthau and John Henz believe in power as the driving force in political life. A country’s national interest can be advanced by force (power). Realist anchor on the premise that in a world of opposing interest and conflict, moral principles cannot be fairly achieved. As neither international law or international organization’s provide adequate restraints on state behavior, they contend, the only effective

regulatory mechanism for the management of power is the balance of power (Enor; et al, 2014).<sup>14</sup>

The realist and idealist conception and approaches to international relations help to elucidate behavior of states in the international system and underscores the relevance of these concepts to this paper.

### **The principles of Nigerian Foreign Policy**

Section 19 of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution has presented the objectives of Nigerian Foreign policy as follows:

- a. Promotion and protection of the National interest;
- b. Promotion of African integration and support for African unity;
- c. Promotion of international cooperation for the consolidation of universal peace and mutual respect among all nations and elimination of discrimination in all its ramifications;
- d. Respect for International law and treaty obligation as well as the seeking of settlement of International disputes by negotiation, mediation, conciliation arbitration and adjudication; and
- e. Promotion of a just world economic order<sup>15</sup>

These laudable and ambitious foreign policy objectives of Nigeria were predicated on the assumption that the national and human endowment of the country since independence is weighty to assume a “manifest destiny” to lead Africa in resolving major socioeconomic and political contradictions which usually accompany nation building experiments; what an apt irony. From an analytical viewpoint, Nigeria’s foreign policy since independence ‘operates within three concentric circles’ comprising the West African sub region, Africa and the outer world. The extent to which Nigeria is able to fulfill or has achieved her FP objectives vary on approaches and different governments. As Nwoke (2013) has argued, “the state of neo-colonialism and dependency is certainly a huge constrain on Nigeria’s capacity to assume a progressive foreign policy posture”<sup>16</sup>. Others have maintained that the state of the Nigerian economy render the country incapacitated in realizing its foreign policy objectives (Saliu; 2006)<sup>17</sup>. The point however is that Africa in general and Nigeria in particular has not been able to draw a line between political independence and National independence, and this has largely undermined the unity and capacity of African states in the international system. The effect of this is seen in idealistic pursuits which avoids confrontation with erstwhile colonial powers. The abrogation of Nigeria-Britain defense pact a few years after it was formulated, the Angolan imbroglio and the nationalization of British petroleum were steps that portrayed Nigeria as having come of age to define and determine its orbit in the international system. Unfortunately, when African leaders as it often happens, collaborate with the very forces inimical to their progress because they do not want to offend or act against their international godfathers, the national interest is often abused or compromised. The West African sub region provides a natural habitat for Nigeria to launch itself into the orbit of medium powers as truly the giant of Africa if she has carefully utilized the opportunities which destiny has placed on its path.

### **Good Neighbourliness and National Security: The loss of Bakassi Peninsular to Cameroun Republic**

The pursuit of good neighbourliness which culminated into ceding away the Bakassi Peninsular to the Republic of Cameroun in a land mark judgment by the Hague in 2002, is a foreign policy

blunder of monumental implications to the National Security. Commenting on this abnormality Jubril Aminu (2005), remarked “Bakassi is one of those unfortunate accidents of history. It is one of our messy situations where a Court Ruling is not enough to settle”<sup>18</sup>. This paper posit that some “accidents of history’ can be avoided if individual interest is separated from the pursuit of public policy. For analytical purposes, the pursuit of the national interest is guided by certain objectives which are core, primary or vital interest, the secondary or middle range interest and the long range or general interest. The vital or core interest refers to basic objectives of a nation’s foreign policy which can drive a nation’s to war if those objectives were infringed. A nation’s territory or vital resource areas, lives of citizens fall under the rubric. The middle or secondary interest are goals geared toward meeting public or private demands of citizens through international action like foreign aid, investment and so on. The long range or general interest involves the pursuit of utopian objectives like maintaining world peace, respect for international laws and conventions and so on. In the conduct of its foreign policy, it appears Nigeria is pre occupied with Utopian or idealistic pursuits even at the expense of its national security. Saliu (2006), asserts that “given the tin threat separating nation-states, the pre-occupation of Nigeria with the maintenance of world peace should be seen as a price she must pay to achieve security in her own territory”<sup>19</sup>. Saliu, however notes that “the high degree of prestige and resource utilization committed to such an objective could be a major threat to the state”<sup>20</sup>. For instance, Nigeria “expended an estimated 12 billion United States dollars to resolve the crisis in Liberia and Syria Leone even when it experienced economic discomfiture at home”<sup>21</sup>. With such huge commitments, it is expected that the country derives benefits that should have direct impact on Nigerians. Saliu observes that the pursue of foreign policies by other nation’s reveal that they seldom commit themselves to the maintenance of world peace unless there is a direct threat to it “which is defined in terms of clear national interest”<sup>22</sup>. Ironically, Nigeria, as exemplified by President Olusegun Obasanjo could sacrifice core objective (territory, the Bakassi peninsular), on the alter of an idealistic pursuit of world peace or observance of international conventions. The republic of Cameroun amply supported by imperial France exploited good neighbourliness at a time when the Nigerian leader compromised the national interest with individual or class interest thereby posing a greater threat to its national security.

Good Neighbourliness in a geo-political world by understanding does not confer any sub-regional neighbor rights to harass, molest or abuse citizens of a ‘big brother’ neither does it imply that a “big brother” should fold its arms in the face of continuous molestation by its neighbours; for, even in heaven, “the kingdom of God suffereth violence and the violent taketh it by force”. When comprador leaders compromise and collaborate with neo-colonial forces, they tend to abuse the national interest in pursuit of individual or class interest which in most cases is antithetical to the development of their states. This point leads logically to the near accommodation of France’s strategic and neo-colonial presence in Nigeria’s sphere of influence.

The “French factor” elicited three paradigms of interpretation all sharing a common belief. One school of thought has it that the “French factor” is inimical to Nigeria’s sub-regional aspiration. The second view holds that the West African sub-region is Nigeria’s exclusive sphere of influence. A third school of thought decries the “French factor” as “a failure of Nigeria to put its priorities in order”. France’s in-road and success in the sub-region, this school contends, is the result of Nigeria’s inability to inspire confidence in the sub-region<sup>23</sup>. While this paper supports the first two views, it however gives half hearted support to the last school of thought. It is true that Nigeria may have lagged in mobilizing its diplomatic ingenuity to bear at all times

in the sub-region owing largely to different approaches by the many different regimes – political and military, it may not be correct to state that Nigeria has not inspired confidence in these states. Nigeria’s “big brother” and “good neighbourliness” policy in the first place, was informed by the contention that Nigeria’s human and material endowment should be harnessed to lead Africa. This “manifest destiny” has continued to play out as expressed in the country’s concentricism, which has been widely criticized at home and undermined abroad by its smaller neighbours of the sub-region.

It was stated earlier that France presence in the Nigerian economy is substantial; the security implication is real and obvious. Incidentally having compromised with neo-colonial forces leaders could no longer push forward proactive foreign policies, which projects the country as a sub-regional force. It is recalled that Nigeria made its mark as a sub-regional force when in 1975/1976, it maintained a policy that confronted imperialism in Angola, South Africa and other parts of the continent. When it returned to its conservative and pro-western position, realistic pursuit took a backward seat thereby accommodating Western initiatives and models of development. This partly explains the substantial presence of Western including France’s strategic engagement in West Africa. The real or imaginary threat of France’s presence was grossly undermined by President Sani Abacha, who returned fire for fire at the slightest provocation from smaller neighbours especially Cameroun. Undoubtedly France has been in a number of developments that may be considered inimical to the progress of Nigeria in the sub-region. In 1961, France insisted in testing the atomic bomb in the Sahara. Nigeria responded diplomatically by closing their embassy in Lagos. France was behind Biafra’s secessionist activities in 1965 and influenced other Francophone speaking countries to recognize the independence of Biafra. Again, France assiduously worked against the establishment of ECOWAS “believing it would further enhance Nigeria’s influence in the sub-region”<sup>24</sup>. It was also perceived that France is behind the establishment of CEAO as a measure to counter balance Nigeria’s soaring influence in the region<sup>25</sup>. In the face of all these, what political cum diplomatic measure can be taken to neutralize France’s influence in Nigeria’s habitat? The attempt to answer this question will constitute the last subhead.

### **What is to be done?**

The “French factor” in Nigeria and the West-central African region has been pervasive and long standing. Basse Ate, has suggested some remedial measures ranging from military to socio-cultural strategies<sup>26</sup> which does not need repetition here. Our modest attempt as to what should be done would be to complement what has been suggested.

The obvious facts about trade imbalances existing between Nigeria and France should be the starting point for a rigorous and pervasive commodification of French markets with primary products from Nigeria. This strategy would not be an easy one going by the infantile state of peripheral industries. The strategy is essentially aimed at exposing the lopsided trading partnership and what is to be done about it. It is meant to bring the two trading partners to a round table. It requires the ingenuity of a radical leadership that is prepared to push through a proactive foreign policy that is a reflection of international politics. Commodification should be extended to the neighbouring Francophone countries. This would not only strengthen ties, but gradually edge out France’s domineering influence in their former colonies.

Again, the policy of good neighbourliness should be tied to material-cum-economic gains to the country as opposed to the ‘father christmas’ African policy that becomes a threat to the security of the nation. Security as used here is not exclusive to military affairs. To some critics who

abhor a “mercantilist foreign policy” for Nigeria, it may be instructive to note that the first industrial capitalist society adopted a mercantilist policy.

France, as has been noted enjoys a wider Nigerian market than all the Francophone West Africa together can offer France. This factor more than any should be gainfully exploited to reduce France’s influence in the sub-region. Indeed, the Nigerian market should be made to play a deterministic role in policy formulation

A common historical experience of colonialism and neo-colonial predatory and lopsided international system should be a driving force for a renewed campaign for African and sub-regional unity as the only way of appreciating African nationalism as bequeathed by the doyens. These campaigns should involve inter-cultural and intellectual exchanges. If African Heads of state can eschew financial corruption, they can ganer resources for this campaign of rebirth.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has explored the poliy of good neighbourliness which Nigeria has pursued in its diplomatic relations with sub-regional countries since independence. It is shown that Nigeria’s big brother and good neighbourliness policy has been grossly undermined as exemplified by the many instances of ‘random hostile acts” meted out against Nigerian citizens who share common border with these countries. The paper posited that idealistic pursuit of the national interest equally undermined the nation’s security; it advocated a proactive policy that once launched the country as a regional power. The ceding away of the Bakassi Peninsular to the Republic of Cameroun, the near accommodation of the substantial presence of France in the Nigerian market and the neo-colonial hegemonic influence of France in the sub-region, this paper contends, is the direct outcome of the approaches which Nigeria has adopted in its foreign relations. The position of the paper is that it is only leaders who compromise their national interest for idealistic pursuit and narrow class interest that could sacrifice a whole territory or part of its nation on the alter of maintaining world peace. The paper made modest suggestions of the way out of neutralizing the pervasive influence of France in the sub-region.

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