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## **NATIONAL ROLE CONCEPTIONS IN FOREIGN POLICY: TOWARDS UNDERSTANDING NIGERIA'S COMMITMENT TO PEACE SUPPORT OPERATIONS IN AFRICA**

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### **Abstract**

The paper expounds the explanatory and heuristic value of role theory in foreign policy analysis. The objective is to determine the extent of role conception in Nigeria's foreign policy and its attendant consequences to national development. The relevant of the paper is to explain the contradiction inherent in the country's foreign policy objectives as manifested in the dispute over the ownership of Bakassi Peninsula. The concern here is not necessary how Nigeria acts in foreign scene, but why. The paper adopted historic descriptive exposition approach in analyzing the issues involved. The findings reveal that Nigeria's self-assigned roles in West Africa sub-region and Africa at large is to say the least not base on quid pro quo basis. The country's human population, natural resources and by extension enormous economic resources made her to perceived an ostentatious role in Africa. It concludes that Nigeria should shift from idealistic to realistic foreign policy objective with high premium on national interest, and the promotion of international peace should not be a basis for dissipation of its energy.

### **Keywords:**

*Role Conception, Foreign Policy, Security, Peacekeeping, Operation.*

### **Introduction**

Scholars have employed varieties of models, theories and approaches to explained the phenomenon of international relations by extension Foreign policy with a view to providing understanding to the behavior of significant actors in the international system (Sekhri, 2009.). It need to be pointed out from the onset that no nation state assume single role in the international system and on that note Nigeria's elite perceived their state as having different sets of

relationships in the World. On the global level, Nigeria has demonstrated a commitment to the attainment the objectives of the United Nations Organization, at the continental level, Nigeria is one of the founding members of Organization of African Unity now known as African Union (AU) and at the sub-regional level she played a pivotal role in the establishment of Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Since 1960, Nigeria has always declared Africa as a centerpiece of her foreign policy. On achieving political independence she perceived the urgent need to play a stabilizing role in Africa and has since then been at frontline in issues that concern Africa. Her active commitment to African's affairs have earned her accolade of the giant of Africa (Mbachu, 2008)

Nigeria's commitment to Africans affairs spread across different spheres of endeavours including economic, political and military. However, in the area of peace and security, her roles were more pronounced, conspicuously glaringly noticed. The country made her position clear in a statement credited to a Minister of Foreign Affairs to the UN general assembly that the peace of Africa is the peace of Nigeria (Mbachu, 2008). It is against the above backdrop that this paper seeks understanding of the Nigeria's commitment to the security of Africa using the national role conception. To achieve the above objective, it is important to ask the following questions. One, why did Nigeria become so committed to African's security to the detriment of her national security. Two, what were the benefits of her commitment to Africa's affairs? To have a proper grasp of the focus of this paper, it is good to begin by understanding the models in foreign policy analysis used in this paper which is National Role Conception Approaches.

### **Understanding National Role Conception Approach**

Role is a concept that was initially developed in sociology and social psychology to denote an actor's characteristic patterns of behavior (Aggestam, 1998). Holsti (1987) was credited to have been the first person to used the concept of role in Foreign Policy analysis in a seminar article title "National Role Conception in Foreign Policy", his inquiry was into how foreign policy makers perceived the role their states play in the international system. To arrive at the typology of National Role Conceptions, he reviewed large number of speeches, parliamentary debates, radio broadcast, official communiqués and press conferences of seventy one governments found in 972 different sources. These sources provided evidences of seventeen (17) role conceptions, articulated during the period 1965 – 1967 (Walter, 1987). The reason why Holsti's work was seen as breaking new grounds on the conceptualization of role in Foreign Policy was that he adopted to explore what role conceptions policy makers themselves perceived and define (Aggestam, 1998). Holsti's findings show that foreign policy makers expressed different and more roles for themselves in foreign policy than the ones stipulated by academics (Holsti, 1987).

In a simple parlance, role conception is asset of norms expressing expected Foreign Policy behavior and action orientation. Role conceptions are the Foreign Policy pronouncement of a nation. It is also seen as a "Road map" that Foreign Policy makers rely on to simplify and facilitate an understanding of complex political reality (Goldstein and Keohane, 1993). Foreign affair is a broad phenomenon that required a thorough statement of rule governing its understanding. Thus, foreign affairs like any other kind of thinking requires a conceptual map which as maps do, simplifies the landscape and focuses on the main feature (Robert, 1966). The

notion of role rests on the analogy with the theatre in which an actor is expected to behave in predictive ways according to a script (Aggestam, 1989). According to Graber (1976) actors do not actively involve in categorizing themselves, they may often act with reference to a particular role which furnish them with an action orientation, when it is communicated and expressed in speeches, it points to the intention of an actor, if not necessary the final outcome of an action.

As pointed out by Sekhri (2009) employing the notion of role in the study of international relations does not mean a description of international relations as a theatric show in which every international unit is an actor playing role or an array of roles. Factors such as domestic needs and demands, trends in the external environment and others shape foreign policy orientation, create role perception and place the state in a position whereby the government is expected to carry out certain role performance. Thus, a particular position which a nation performs in international affairs is known as Role Approaches, Role Perception or Role Conceptions (Sekhri, 2009). Holsti (1987) simply define Role Conception in this way:

A National Role Conception includes the policy makers own definition of the general kinds of decisions, commitments and the functions, if any, their state should perform on a continuity basis in the international system or in subordinate regional system.

In the field of international relations, role theory assumes that states are active who behave consistently with specific role which they identify (Adigbuo, 2011). Individuals who made foreign policy in the name of the state(s) do so, on the basis of their states in the world and which roles would be acceptable to their constituents. Adigbuo (2011) further expounds the definition of national role conception to mean a foreign policy makers' position of their states' position in the international system. By this he means the perceptions of the kinds of decision, role, commitment and long term functions associated with these international positions.

National role conceptions approach affords us a clear understanding of foreign policy which goes beyond the explanation of foreign policy base on the search for national interest and security. The national conception is capable of providing understanding of Nigeria's commitments in the peace and security in Africa. To say the least through this approach, one can appreciate the reality of Nigeria's acceptance of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) judgment of 10<sup>th</sup> October, 2002 which awarded the ownership of about 1,000 square kilometer Bakassi Peninsula to Cameroun Republic.

### **An Overview of Nigeria's Foreign Policy since Independence**

Since 1960 Nigeria has always declared Africa as the centerpiece of the foreign policy. The country's geographical size, population, abundant human and natural resources endowment give her distinct advantages over other countries in Africa. The human population and natural resources made her perceived a leading role in the affairs that concern Africa. This line of thought found expression in the statement credited to the first Nigeria's Commissioner of External Affairs Jaja Wachukwu thus:

Our country is a largest single unit in Africa... We are not going to abdicate the position which God Almighty has placed us... The whole black continent is looking up to this country to liberate it from the thralldom (Mbachu, 2008).

The above was the kind of role perception which the makers of Nigeria's foreign policy thought about the country and it garner support from large section of academic of different disciplines notably Social Sciences and Humanities. For instance, George Obiozor (1999) says that the size of Nigeria has given her a leadership position in Africa and that it is a responsibility imposed on her by history and destiny which the country should willing meet the challenges of this responsibility. With this kind of role conception, as soon as Nigeria achieved independence, she joined the ranks of the newly independent African nations with a common aspiration to cut the umbilical cords of colonialism with which they had been tied for almost 100 years. Among other issues, Nigeria became committed to eradication of racialism and colonization from Africa (Akinyemi, 1987).

The Foreign Policy objective of Nigeria was focused of the liberation of African nations from all forms of foreign domination and achievement of better life for the people of Africa. Over the years leaders of the country always believed that they had a common cause to fight in the Africa countries. They believed that Nigeria should leverage super abundance resources and by extension wealth to pilot the affairs of the Africa continent. Nigeria's leaders believed in the idea of Pan Africanism and thought that with a good Afrocentric posture build on unity, good neighbourliness and cooperation, Africa will experience prosperity. The Afrocentric tradition is conspicuously stipulated in section 19 of the 1999 constitution as Amended which includes:

- Promotion and protection of national interest
- Promotion of African integration and support for African unity
- Promotion for international co-operation for consolidation of universal peace and mutual respect among all nations and elimination of discrimination in all its manifestations
- Respect for international law and treaty obligations as well as the seeking of settlement of international dispute by negotiation, mediation, conciliation, arbitration and adjudication; and
- Promotion of a just world economic order. (1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as Amended)

Nigeria foreign policy postures have been influenced by her military strength. It is worthy to mention that the effective pursuance of a country's foreign policy is fundamentally dependent upon her economic and military strength. In addition, Nigeria adopted a foreign policy concept of concentric circles which she regards the West Africans sun-region as the first line in the defence of her inter-state relations. On that note, West African sub-region became the core area of concentration for her diplomacy. The implication of this concept concentric circle is the sub-region was first center of Nigeria's attention, Africa commands the second place of priority while the World at large is the third area of emphasis (Mbachu, 2008).

A cursory look at the foreign policy which was tailored to ensure the integration of Africa is to say the least idealistic, grandiose, universalistic and unachievable by any single country. In the first place, international cooperation comes about whenever nations perceived that certain mutual interest cannot be accomplished or protected by other means. It does not in fact have to be a cardinal objective of any foreign policy. It is not convincing for Nigeria to have the defence and promotion of World peace spelt out conspicuously as a foreign policy objective. Nigeria's foreign policy objectives are not only universalistic but contradict the golden law of international politics which postulates that in inter-state relations there are no permanent friends and no permanent enemies, but permanent interests. In spite of numerous reviews and reconsideration of the Nigeria's foreign policy over the years, it has never fully divorce its national interest from its role within the continent. For instance, in the 1970s, the Federal Government set a panel to review the Nigeria's Foreign Policies and the panel among other main issues states that "the promotion and defence of justice and respect of human dignity, especially the dignity of the black men" as one of the strong pillar of Nigeria's Foreign Policies objectives (Adeyemi, 1989).

In a nut shell, the promotion of international peace and security should not have been the basis for which any nation has to dissipate its energy. The defence of the dignity of Africa and promotion of peace in the World as enshrined in the Nigeria's Foreign Policy objectives are largely unrealistic ideals. More worrisome is the fact that Nigeria seems to foster universal roles at the expense of her national interest, therefore, dissipating energies and scares resources on being a Big Brother to her neighbours. The country sacrificed human and material resources in the name of peace and security in Africa as we shall proceed to see.

### **Nigeria's Commitment to Peace and Security in Africa**

From day one after attainment of independence status, Nigeria's policy on external relations was focus on African States i.e the pursuance of the welfare of sister states in Africa. Nigeria by omission or commission became the self-appointed policeman of West Africa in particular. Nigeria's stance on peace and security of Africa was contained in the several of speeches the leaders made in the United Nations (UN) Assembly. The country matched words with actions as she swamped into action by participation in peace keeping in Congo few Months after attaining independence status. Nigeria participated in the UN international peacekeeping in Congo not only through contribution of troops but also had a Nigerian Major General J.T.U. Aguiyi-Ironsi as the Commander of the United Nations Operation in Congo (UNOC). Many other Nigerian soldiers took part in this peace support and peace building program for Congo. Among them were Olusegun Obasanjo, Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu, Joseph Akaahan, Theophilus Yakubu Danjuma, Liga Adingi, Kyenge Chonghul, Hassan Katsina, Yakubu Gowon, Benjamin Adekunle (Gwar 2014). The country also deployed police officers led by Assistant Commissioner of Police Louis Edet to participate in the operation. Nigerian participation in the UN operation in Congo (UNOC, 1960-1964) was bore out of the country's commitment against anti-imperialist foreign policy in Africa and in pursuit of international peace security and World order.

Nigeria contributed more than 20,000 troops and Police Officers to the peacekeeping in several parts of Africa and beyond. According to the UN peacekeeping Report, Nigeria took part in all the peacekeeping missions in Cote d'Ivoire, Sudan, Eritrea, the Democratic Republic of Congo

and the Western Sahara, while committing 2,462 soldiers to UN missions across the globe (Gwar 2014). This has help Nigeria to forge defence and security alliances with the United States and European Union so as to improve its efforts through training and mobilization of troops and resources to secure the much needed peace for the thriving of democracy and development. From 1960 – 2004, Nigeria took part in 24 out of 51 peacekeeping operations mounted by the UN and Organization of African Unity (OAU) which later became African Union (AU) and three under bilateral agreement with the West African sub-region. Nigeria produce a total of 25 peace support operation force Commanders and military observers including Major General J.T.U Aguiyi-Ironsi for UN operation in the Congo UNOC in 1960-1964, General Martin Luther Agwai commanded the AU Hybrid Mission in Liberia UNMIL in 2006-2008, Major General Moses Bisong Obi for the UN African Mission in Darfur UNAMID. During President Obasanjo's time as the Chairman of AU, the AU Commander was also a Nigerian named Major General Collins Ihekire. He facilitated peace talks and negotiations between volatile groups especially the Sudanese government and the rebel forces at Darfur (Gwar 2014). Nigeria is said to be the fourth largest contributor to UN peace operation since 1960, thousands personnel were committed to the business of ensuring peace in Africa, thousands lost their lives in the process and over ten billion US Dollar were expended (Omagu, 2015).

Nigeria's role in West African sub-region saw to the formation of ECOMOG which was used to contain the civil wars that erupted in Liberia and Sierra Leone in the 1990s. From 1990 – 1997, Nigerian troops were among the 12,000 of ECOMOG peacekeeping forces under Field Commanders of Nigerian military officers such as Major Joshua Dogonyaro, Major General John Mark Inienger, Major General Timothy Shelpidi, Major General Victor Malu and Major General Tunji Olurin. The troops pushed back the rebels both in Liberia and in Sierra Leone until UN forces arrived to lend a helping hand. Nigerian government did all these on the notion that the crises in Liberia and Sierra Leone could jeopardize the stability, prosperity and security of the sub-region and Nigeria could not be indifferent to such a prospect.

In 1981, political antagonism coupled with frail economy resulted in bloody civil war in Chad and Nigeria got involved to find solution by pressuring OAU who raised a peacekeeping force handle the issue. The OAU automatically gave Nigeria the headship of the peacekeeping force in Chad and Major General Geoffrey Ejiga of Nigeria commanded the peacekeeping force numbering 3000 soldiers.

In a similar vein, Nigeria contributed greatly to the restoration of peace in West African sub region. Indeed, the country's contribution to the success of ECOMOG has been unquantifiable. Nigeria's manpower and logistic contribution were vital to the operational capability of the entire sub-regional force. Nigeria's intervention in Liberia and Sierra Leone was at a very great cost in term of human, material and financial resources.

The thrust of the issue is that Nigeria's national security was not considered before embarking on peacekeeping operations in Africa. Although it's proper to help in keeping peace in a sister country, Nigeria's leaders literally wholly took the burden upon the country by assuming the role of big brothers to other countries in African. Below is Nigeria's peacekeeping operation in Africa in chronological order:

s/n	Country	Mandate	Date
1	Congo	United Nations Operation in Congo (UNUC)	1960 – 1964
2	Tangayinka (now Tanzania)	Peacekeeping under Bilateral Agreement	1964
3	Guinea	United Nations Security Force in West New Guinea (UNIPOM)	1962 – 1963
4	Angola	United Nations Angola Verification Mission UNAVEM I,II,III	1989
5	Namibia	United Nations Transition Assistance Group UNTAG	1989 – 1990
6	Western Sahara	United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO)	1991 -1996
7	Somalia	United Nations Operation in Somalia (UNSOM)	1992- 1995
8	Mozambique	United Nations Operation in Mozambique (UNOMOZ)	1992 – 1995
9	Rwanda	United Nations Assistance Mission in Rwanda	1994
10	Chad	Peacekeeping Under OAU and ECOWAS	1981 – 1982
11	Liberia	ECOMOG	1990 – 1997
12	Sierra Leone	ECOMOG II	1997 – 1999
13	Sudan	African Union Protection Force (AUPROFOR) in Darfur Region of Sudan	2004 – 2012
14	Somalia	UN Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM)	2013
15	Central African Republic	UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Central Africa Republic	2014

Source: Mbachu, O. (2008). *Nigeria's Strategic Interest in Africa: A Critical Analysis of Contemporary Strategic Studies*, Medusa Academic publisher Ltd

Since independence in 1960, Nigeria took bold steps to fight for the sovereignty of African States. For instance when France tested atomic bombs in the Algerian Sahara in December 1960, Nigeria cut off diplomatic relations with France and ordered the French Ambassador to Nigeria and all his aid to leave the country. Nigeria did not just stop at that but also ensured that all French aircrafts and ships were disallowed the use of the country's port. The government of Nigeria views the testing of the weapon of mass destruction in Africa by France as the reflection of the latter's disregard for Africa and intransigence to the plight of her people. One may wonder how the testing of bomb in faraway Algeria has become a source of concern to Nigeria. It shows the extent of the commitment of Nigeria to the integrity and sovereignty of African State, however, it has great implication to the domestic security of the country.

In 1983, Decree 19 restructured the country's security services into three separate entities namely: Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA) – responsible for military intelligence, National Intelligence Agency (NIA) – responsible for foreign intelligence/counterintelligence and State Security Service (SSS) – responsible for domestic security/intelligence. The intelligence activities of the three agencies are co-ordinated by the office of National Security Adviser (NSA) and the office is directly under the Presidency. There exist growing issues that challenged the unity of the country that had been gross over by the security agencies and it continues to metamorphoses in different forms eating deep into the fabric of the unity of the nation.

Nigerian government and even embassies were good in rendering assistance or been benevolence to other countries as the country has spent tens of billions of dollars in peacekeeping but condone ruthlessness to its citizens at home. Nigeria parades a robust profile of international peacekeeping experience since 1960, yet peace has continually eluded the country. The Murtala/Obasanjo regime of 1975 – 1979 spent 75% of the country's foreign policy in solving Africa's problems without any real benefit to Nigeria because of the lack of clarity in defining the national interest. (Okpokpo 2007) However, one may say that Nigeria has benefitted through the receipt of military assistance from the United States of America as in 2000 the sum of 66 million dollars as military aid was given to Nigeria and also benefitted from the US sponsored African Contingency Operation Training and Assistance (ACOTA), which gave training support to African countries that actively participated in international and regional peace support operations. In addition, all Troops Contributing Countries (TCCs) have also been reimbursed by the UN which helped the funding and wherewithal to run modern armed forces and further pay for the services of individual peacekeeping operations, but despite all these, there had been complaints of ineffective monitoring, inefficiency, misappropriation and corruption at the highest level (Gwar 2014). As a mark of her commitment to keeping peace since 1960, Nigeria has been elected to the non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council four times which is an endorsement of her remarkable commitment to promotion of peace and stability in Africa and other parts of the world. All these remarkable achievement could be replicated on the country's domestic security as we shall proceed to see.

### **National Role Conceptions and its Implications on National Security**

As observed above, the notion of national role conceptions focuses on the policymakers' own definition of the kind of decisions, commitment and actions suitable for state and how state should function or perform on a continuing basis in international system or regional system (Holsti, 1987). It has been pointed out in the precedent section that the foreign policy objectives set to promote national interest and at the same time equally ensure the integration of Africa, promote international cooperation, respect for international law and promote a just world economic order is unachievable. The dispute between Nigeria and Cameroun over Bakassi Peninsula presented a clear evidence or picture of the pretentious nature of the foreign policy objectives of the country.

Nigeria's claim of territoriality over Bakassi is based on antiquity. The Bakassi was part of Akwa Akpa area and on the strength of the "treaty of protection" the British colonialists signed with the Akwa Akpa area which the colonialists later addressed as Old Calabar, the area including adjoining territories was brought under the British sphere of influence. However, it was further stated that in 1913, the British government entered into an agreement with Germany and ceded Bakassi area to Cameroun which was a German colony. Following the defeat of Germany in the First World War, she lost all her colonies including Cameroun which was shared between France and Britain. The British government decided and merged her portion of Cameroun with Nigeria and these territories included the Bakassi. When Nigeria attained independence on October, 1960, Bakassi was clearly under Cameroun. Even when plebiscite was held in 1961 to clarify the wishes of the people of Cameroun, the people of these areas voted to join Northern Cameroun (Tsuma and Ochoga, 2015).

However, the root of the contest is that the colonialists did not actually clarify the maritime boundaries and the navigable portion of the boundaries and the navigable portion of the Calabar estuary. This made the Cameroonian government to argue that Nigeria had no legal basis for contesting the Bakassi peninsula even though technically, the Anglo-German treaty of 1913 did not clearly define the navigable of the water. The Bakassi Peninsula is more of strategic importance to Nigeria than Cameroon. Nigeria has military installations in Calabar, the Navy has Forward Operation Base (FOB) at Ibaka in Akwa Ibom State with the Calabar channels as the sea ward exit. The court divided the strategic Calabar channel into two ceding the right side to Cameroon and the left side which is shallow to Nigeria and by implication the Nigeria Navy cannot go through the deep waters. If Nigeria Navy cannot go through the deep waters, means they cannot make any movement, on the other hand Cameroon has no facilities and no resident nationals on their side.

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) judgment over the ownership of Bakassi was accepted by Nigeria's officials from the point of political innocence. Generally nations scarcely give up their territories on the basis of legalistic sentiments, unless force to do so. In reality, whenever there is a challenge to the status quo in territorial matters, the response is to demonstrate firmness rather than make concessions. As an advocate of global peace and support for African unity, Nigeria conceded her territory to her neighbouring country to foster unity and cooperation among African States. Remarkably, it has been noted that Nigeria is the only major country in spite of its size and resources that subjected itself to the ruling of ICJ on border dispute with Cameroon. Nigeria's national interest was sacrifice on the altar of her conception of role in foreign scene.

### **Conclusion**

Role theory in this context is suggestive of general orientations and continuing types of commitments, actions and functions of a country towards another in international scene. However, predicting nation's behavior from the knowledge of national role conception may be difficult. National role conception identified as foreign policy pronouncement and foreign policy decision may run into conflict. Nigeria has been committed to ensuring peace and security as it is said to be the fourth largest contributor to UN peace operations. Nigeria parades a robust profile of international peace keeping and all she could gain from her commitment was been elected to the non-permanent member of the UN Security Council four times since attainment independence status. The contention here is that Nigeria's self-assigned role in West Africa sub-region and also in Africa was responsible for her self-style international sacrifice in the name of peace and security. The image Nigeria has created for itself by wielding tremendous influence abroad was not base on quid pro quo basis.

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