

INNOVATION AND NIGERIA'S LEADING POSITION IN AFRICA: PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES

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The end of the Cold War heralded twists and turns in international political systems with a shift from the US-led unipolar system to new world orders emanating from different regions of the global community. The US lackluster zeal and sometimes lack of capacity in tackling major global challenges has reciprocally induced the proliferation of a range of regional actors like China, Brazil, Russia, European Union (EU), Nigeria and South Africa. Expectedly, there is a high level of responsibility to provide the right leadership framework to foster regional and international stability and stimulate growth and development in these regions and the entire international system.

In view of the above, this article analyzes Nigeria's hegemonic position in Africa, putting into context Nigeria's economic size and influence, the immensity of Nigeria's population, the abundance of mineral deposits, especially crude oil and natural gas reserves, and military capabilities. The study examines the power dynamics of the African continent with insights from Nigeria's foreign policy. Also included in the study is the critical examination of Nigeria's perceived hegemonic influence in Africa using hegemonic stability theory influence as a theoretical framework.

The paper further argues that although Nigeria has great potentials in innovation and science diplomacy, its innovation capabilities lack the necessary components needed for continental hegemonic disposition, considering the fact that there is not enough empirical evidence to indicate that it contextually suits the African continent. Nigeria's approach towards science and diplomacy is being influenced by its past, present and future projections as well as its local and external environment.

Keywords: Nigeria, hegemonic stability theory, regional hegemon, regional power, innovation, foreign policy

The end of the Cold War and the fall of the Berlin Wall led to a shift from the US-led unipolar world order to a range of regional powers across the globe. Countries like China, Brazil, India, Russia, Iran, South Africa and Nigeria became regional powers, and the European Union - a power bloc. These changes have contextually led to an interest in research to understand the influence and limitations of these powers and their roles in international systems [1; 3].

The new powers predictably were imposed with greater responsibilities to advance the right momentum and leadership orchestration needed to stimulate international stability and foster growth and development in their respective regions. The heightening disinclination and increasing paucity of concern to interfere in civil, political and security matters in Africa and other developing countries have further put enormous pressure on these regional powers. This means the regional actors are at the forefront addressing vital socio-economic issues to achieve political stability in the regions.

Nigeria being the 'giant' of Africa because of its abundance of human and material resources has always been saddled with the leadership role in the continent. But Nigeria's ability to assume this vital position has always been challenged because of its poor human development indicators, civil unrest in some parts of the country and economic disparity, reliance on foreign 'super' powers, among others.

Some scholars have argued that South Africa is better placed to be the powerhouse of Africa than Nigeria because of its better economy and stronger military power since these indicators are significant when assuming leadership position [4; 6].

Furthermore, this study comparatively interrogates Nigeria leadership capabilities putting into context its prospects and challenges in innovation and science diplomacy. For further elaboration on this argument the study will critically analyze the concept of structural power and hegemony in a regional context, and also consider some notions on the effect this situation has for Nigeria and the continent.

STRUCTURAL POWER AND REGIONAL HEGEMONY

According to some of the main exponents of the concept of structural power and regional hegemony,

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structural power, in short, bestows the power to influence how things shall be done, the capacity to configure frameworks within which states relate with one another, relate to people or relation to corporate enterprises [7; 13]. The comparative power of each state or party is more, or less, if one state or party is also influencing the surrounding frameworks of the relationship.

Scholars in their quest to distinguish between leadership and dominion and describing 'consensual hegemony' as a form of leadership rather than dominion prioritized the significance of ideas vital to the hegemonic project [6; 8; 15]. These prepositions comprise of elements that make the constituent state to have a feel of the system being in their favour since the hegemonic state seemingly acts with the consent of the other states to make the system functional. In the process, the hegemon as part of its responsibility devotes resources needed to sustain the project - security, economic and intellectual.

It can be argued that Nigeria has assumed most of these responsibilities on the continent of Africa consensually with a varying range of success and some degree of setbacks [4; 9]. Full compliance is not always expected in relations between states and constant intervention is also not needed by structural power to enforce states compliance on every issue. The focal point is that the hegemon often times is selective, reluctant in intervention and act based on the perception on the level of necessity [7]. As a fundamental prerequisite for exercising power, the hegemon possesses the ability to provide the needed material and idealistic resources to influence the states or institution within the system to do the bidding of the hegemon consensually.

Most regional hegemons are second-tier and as a result are subsumed under a 'superior' power and sometimes encounter counter-hegemonic struggles in the form of regional animosities or conflict of global order based on difference of interest or conception [4; 23]. The US remains unchallenged at the top of the pyramid of power and authority since after the end of the Cold War and has used its influence to seek the cooperation of other regional players to maintain order and stability in the global system [22; 24]. Nigeria, although branded a second-tier hegemon by some analysts, has always been an ally of the US and has partnered with the US and other Western allies through the necessary frameworks to maintain the US-led unilateral world order.

NIGERIA'S FOREIGN POLICY

Foreign policy can be regarded as preconceived clear-sighted sovereign state's national objectives

being achieved through specific actions and roles in relation to external affairs. Simply put; it is the relationship between states in the international system [9; 15; 16]. Foreign Policy and National Interest are inextricable in external relations. For Nigeria, the cornerstone of its foreign policy is its national interest; the Nigerian state's principal interest in pursuit of its foreign policy is the promotion of its national interest [1; 5].

Historically, Nigeria's foreign policy can be divided into two distinct periods: pre-independence and post-independence eras. Nigeria was under the British rule after the former amalgamated the Northern and Southern protectorates for its administrative convenience [3]. The amalgamation was done in 1914, and Nigeria remained a British colony until 1960 when it gained its political independence. Nigeria's foreign policy throughout the colonial was to serve solely the interest of Britain [4].

However, after independence on October 1st 1960, there was a shift from British interest to Nigeria's interest, even though the newly independent Nigeria's initial foreign policy was pro-British. Nigeria took its destiny in its hands with a foreign policy suitable for Nigeria's national interest. Different foreign policies have emerged under successive administrations with varying ideological fabrications [3]. Nigeria had been governed by both civilian and military leaders from 1960 to 1999 when the military finally handed over to democratic government and since then Nigeria has achieved relative political stability needed to promote its national interest and drive its foreign policy on the path of progress [2; 11; 12].

To get back on track as a regional hegemon after a long military rule, Nigeria embarked on image recovery in relation to other states and international institutions like the then Organization of Africa Unity (OAU), now African Union (AU), of which Nigeria was a founding member, Economic Community of West Africa States (ECOWAS), where Nigeria played a significant role in the course of its formation, and United Nations (UN) among others [15; 17]. There was the need to quickly position Nigeria as a country where there is respect for human rights; governance was on the basis of the rule of law, and successive administrations would strive to improve the living standards of the citizens' thereby restoring confidence internally and externally. One of such instances was the withdrawal of troops from the oil-rich Bakassi peninsula and ceding the peninsula to Cameroon as a form of border dispute resolution with Cameroon. This was done with good fate by Nigeria because

Nigeria has by far greater military and economic power when compared to Cameroon. This among other instances manifested Nigeria's resolve in dispute resolutions in Africa [1; 3].

Nigeria's foreign policy like most developing countries is geared towards the national economic development of the country in order to enjoy better economic and political clout in global affairs. A critical analysis of Nigeria's foreign policy is indicative that the country's foreign policy is not ultimately influenced by a single factor but by a host of internal factors and dynamics of international affairs.

INNOVATION IN NIGERIA'S FOREIGN DIPLOMACY

Innovation is the pragmatic application of new ideas or invention into the marketplace in form of processes or products. Innovation is playing crucial roles in international diplomacy especially as policymakers across the globe are constantly searching for new ways to impact its dynamics in achieving national and mutual interest between states [19]. Although there are insufficient published blueprints for innovation and foreign policy, the number of international collaborations in bilateral and multilateral support in network, programmes and finance is constantly expanding.

In this era of projected global gloomy economy across the globe, the rising influence of Nigeria as a regional hub for innovation in Africa has been discussed internationally [14]. There is a high optimism about Nigeria's innovative capabilities to achieve economic prosperity and political stability to enhance its position as a regional hegemon if the country fully harnesses its potentials. In international relations, Nigeria's approach towards science and diplomacy is being influenced by its past, present and future projections as well as its local and international environment in spheres of economy, energy security, biotechnology and health. Nigeria has since realized the need to shift from the dependency on traditional commodity markets to present-time economic frameworks that anchor on technology-driven development [18; 19].

Policy makers and analysts steering Nigeria's foreign policy have highlighted the significance of innovation especially in areas of science, technology, products and processes being the major vehicles needed to drive economic prosperity and political stability [20; 21]. However, domestic realities from a perspective of a developing country such as high poverty level, unemployment, inequality and insecurity in parts of the country have become

stumbling blocks from reaping the benefits from policies and strategies of innovation [23].

Albeit a wide range of strategies with increased prioritizing of innovation is being applied by Nigeria in international diplomacy, it is still far from achieving its goal. Empirically evaluating Nigeria's innovation policies and strategies is a daunting task [19; 22]. Their impacts are most times long term and are mostly indirect. A survey carried out recently indicates that there is more than a 40% increase in internet penetration from 2012 to 2017, with about 90 million internet users. This feat was achieved as a result of deliberate national policies, programmes and strategies by the authorities to increase productivity across sectors to realize national interest ambitions. Another key indicator that buttresses Nigeria's innovation capabilities and potentials are the increasing number of publications on innovation and diplomacy in Nigeria, which is on the rise since 2010, with great emphasis on the significance of technology and innovation in the context of economic competitiveness [18]. Also, specific academic courses, conferences, workshops, and training sessions are being initiated to specifically highlight the relevance of innovation diplomacy.

CONCLUSION

The swift switch in foreign relations since the end of the Cold War from a unipolar world led by the US to a multipolar world led by a few countries (USA, China, Russia, and EU) has led to the emergence of new regional powers across the globe. In Africa, Nigeria has emerged as the regional hegemon even though Nigeria is internationally ascribed as a second-tier power. Nigeria's leadership capabilities are most times restricted because of its reliance on 'stronger' foreign powers in the international system. This means that Nigeria has not been able to fully play the role of a substantive hegemon in Africa. Also, Nigeria cannot unilaterally influence most critical issues without the cooperation of other actors within the region due to the compelling need to collaborate with external powers to achieve its foreign policy objectives even though Nigeria is recognized as a major representative of Africa in the international system.

Innovational policies and programmes targeted at increase in Nigeria's innovation capabilities and economic opportunities through the growth of knowledge-based economy and impelling blueprints and stratagems for knowledge-based competition for national interest, regional interest and international relations. The need for innovation in

national politics and foreign relations has become an indispensable topic in political, security, biotechnology, health, economics and external relations discourse. As a result, there is an increasing demand for innovation, even though the

concept of innovation and science diplomacy seems to be at an infant stage in the region. This paper postulates that with over 90 million internet users, Nigeria's innovation capabilities, although limited, are on the rise.

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