

Pax Nigeriana Project: Issues, Challenges and Prospects

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Abstract

Nigeria is generally perceived as a big brother in Africa. By virtue of this, there is a belief in Nigeria's manifest destiny to play leadership role in the West African sub-region in particular and Africa in general. This leadership role is taken as given when seen from the perspective of Nigeria's credentials. Based on content analysis of secondary sources, this paper examines, among other things, issues, challenges and prospects of Nigeria's quest for leadership in Africa. Nigeria's quest for Pax Nigeriana, is viewed against the backdrop of her comparative advantages and challenges. We conclude that in spite of the rivalry being propelled by South Africa and other potential African countries, the balance of evidence seems to suggest that the prospects of Pax Nigeriana may be realisable.

Introduction

The notion that Nigeria is saddled with the responsibility of the leadership of Africa by providence is waxing stronger after fifty-five years of political independence and a century of nationhood. Nigeria's Pan-African commitment as 'regional police' manifests at both the West African sub-regional and African continental levels. This dual regional role has been central to her foreign policy objectives and indeed her identity as an African state. This regional performance in West Africa via the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) with its headquarters in Abuja, Nigeria, appears generally uncontested. However, Nigeria is in a fierce contest with other regional stalwarts¹, such as Ghana, Liberia and Ethiopia in Africa leadership at the continental level. Cravo particularly explore reasons for both optimism and pessimism regarding the considerable potential of four such sub-Saharan African countries—South Africa, Nigeria, Angola and Kenya—described as emerging powers in Africa.

The orientation, widely described as *Afrocentric*, may be said to be rooted in the belief in the Pax Nigeriana project, which confers on Nigeria the responsibility of playing the 'big brother' to other African countries. This paper therefore examines, among other things, issues, challenges and prospects of Nigeria's clamour for regional leadership in Africa and the contest between Nigeria and others for leadership in what is seen as the Pax Nigeriana project.

On Pax Nigeriana

Professor Ali Mazrui, is often acknowledged as the exponent of Pax Africana. Pax Africana perhaps first made its debut in his book, "Towards a Pax Africana" in 1967.³ Pax Africana is the idea that challenges Africans to take the responsibility for the peace and security of Africa. Its 'Africa by Africans' stance readily brings to mind Marcus Garvey's 'Africa for Africans' crusade.

The coinage of the concept, Pax Nigeriana is also often said to be his brain-child. While delivering a speech in commemoration of the 70th birthday of General Yakubu Gowon on 19th October, 2004, Professor Ali Mazrui used "Pax Nigeriana" as an expression to depict the leadership stance of Nigeria's Foreign Policy⁴. Justifying his adoption of the concept, Mazrui made reference to Nigeria's potential and exceptional leadership role in maintaining peace in West Africa as a brand of Pax Nigeriana⁵. However, the usage of the word may be traced back to much earlier period. Nigeria's former External Affairs Minister, (1985-87), Professor Bolaji Akinyemi, reportedly defended a doctoral thesis at Oxford University in 1969 titled "**Pax Nigeriana: Nigerian Attitudes to African Issues**"⁶. Admittedly, Pax Nigeriana was derived from, and akin to 'Pax Africana', justifying the ascribed leadership role of Nigeria in the maintenance of peace in Africa⁷. But the overall adoption of both concepts, 'Pax Nigeriana' and 'Pax Africana' is in reference to the earlier concepts such as *Pax Romana* and *Pax Britannica*. As expressly stated by Bolaji Akinyemi:

The concept of Pax Romana or Pax Britannia was that of peace imposed on others by Rome or Britain in their respective empires. Hence, the ancient usage of this concept has implied the imposition of a certain standard of behaviour by one state on the conquered people of another state. However, the concept of a Pax Nigeriana does not imply the imposition of a Nigerian peace on non-Nigerians. To the extent that between 1958 and 1966, African states, without European intervention, were searching for norms of behaviour to guarantee peaceful relations among themselves, these years were a formative period. To the extent that this search developed into a struggle between two sets of political principles identified with Nigeria and Ghana respectively, and to the extent that it was the political principles that were identified with Nigeria that were adopted by African states and embodied in the OAU charter, a Pax Nigeriana in Africa can be spoken of.⁸

According to the Online Etymology Dictionary, *pax* was coined in the mid-15th century from the Latin lexicon, *pax* (genitive *pacis*) means "peace", and in Ecclesiastical Latin, "kiss of peace". When capitalised, 'Pax' is the name of the Roman goddess of peace. Its prefixed usage with adjectives from national names, on the Pax Romana model began in 1933; such as Pax Britannica, 1872; Pax Americana, 1886, with reference to Latin America. It is relevant to add that different powers had held global hegemony at different times. Egypt, for long, for instance remained un-contended as the cradle of man's civilization until recently when certain studies began to debunk as *prima-facie* that popular age-long belief hitherto accepted. It suggests that Mesopotamia's civilization might have developed side-by-side if not earlier than the Egyptian civilization⁹. Be that as it may, the Pharaohs of Egypt, and the kings of the different Babylonian powers had enjoyed their sway successively. The Greek powers also had their fair share of global hegemony.

Over time, when the concept of 'power shift' swung in favour of the Roman Empire to lead the world, Edward Gibbon in his The [*History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*](#) (1776–88), dubbed her global hegemony's streak as 'Pax Romana'. The protracted interlude between 27 BC and 180 AD saw relative peace and minimal Roman military expansion. Thereafter, 'Pax Britannia', patterned after Pax Romana, followed between 1815 and 1914. British supremacy over enormous chunk of territory and races marked the pre-World War I epoch as the British 'imperial century'¹⁰. We may also speak of America's global hegemony and position as 'Police of

the World' in the post-World War II era as a 'Pax Americana'. It describes the period of relative peace in the Western world since the end of World War II in 1945, a period that coincided with the military and economic dominance of the United States of America. The point must be made that ever since its debut, the dust raised by the concept of 'Pax Nigeriana', has not settled. It is however paradoxical that the country's global and Africa peace efforts, it may be said, have however largely gone under-reported and squarely unacknowledged.

Nigeria's Perceived 'Manifest Destiny' and Scope

A general belief in Nigeria's Manifest Destiny to play leadership role in Africa is palpable. Nnamdi Azikiwe, the first President of independent Nigeria, while addressing a public gathering in London on 31 July, 1959, reportedly argued that:

...it should be the manifest destiny of Nigeria to join hands with other progressive forces in the world in order to emancipate not only the people of Africa but also other peoples of African descent from the scourge of colonialism... Nigeria should be in the vanguard of the struggle to liberate Africans from the yoke of colonial rule...¹¹.

The notion that Nigeria was destined to lead the rest of sub-Saharan Africa and champion the cause of the rest of the black race is of remote antecedence, ante-dating Nigeria's attainment of political independence in 1960¹². This is perhaps, best encapsulated within the larger framework of Nigeria's overall orientation and commitment to Africa in her foreign policy statements, which dates back to independence in 1960. Ever since, Nigeria's leaders have consistently pursued foreign policy options in favour of Africa's interests. Hence, the notion that Nigeria is a natural leader of Africa¹³. Although Bach¹⁴ thinks of Nigeria's 'manifest destiny' within the scope of the West African sub-region, Nigeria's former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ibrahim Gambari, who promoted its formal adoption in 1984, located Nigeria's national interests at four fundamental hubs, viz: Nigeria and her neighbours, ECOWAS, Continental African issues and the International stage¹⁵. From all indications, there is strong evidence to suggest a pan African outlook in Nigeria's leadership profile.

Nigeria's Credentials

As stated above, South Africa is bedevilled by a number of baggage, which would appear to have diminished her quest to take leadership role in Africa. It is relevant at this juncture to also assess Nigeria's credentials in her quest for Pax Nigeriana. In point of fact, Nigeria's leadership credentials are derived basically from demographic, economic and military gaps between her and most of the other African states. Nigeria, with a land area of 351,649 sq miles (**910,771 sq km**); total area of 356,667 sq miles (**923,768 sq km**)¹⁹ and an 853 kilometres long coastline, is arguably the tenth largest state in the continent²⁰. Although, Nigeria does not have the largest land mass in Africa, she has one of the largest and best arable and usable lands in Africa. Much of the land owned by countries such as Angola and Morocco fall within the arid wastelands. Nigerians never lost awareness of the advantages accruable from this mega size and the peculiarities of the natural resources of their country.

The dynamics of the country's population from the initial 88 million in 1991 and approximately 140 million according to the 2006 national population census (Federal Government of Nigeria²¹, and the current projection of 170 million, attests to Nigeria's abundant human capital.²² With

almost half of West Africa's population and one-fifth of Africa's²³, Nigeria has been consistently reputed as the most populated country in sub-Saharan Africa. With a young and fast-growing population, depicting a large reserve of human resources, Nigeria has one of the highest rates of urbanisation globally²⁴. It is taken as given that geography matters. Sub-Saharan Africa is considered almost solely as a site of poverty and conflict²⁵. There is no doubt that Nigeria as a relatively wealthy country when seen from her potentials in human and natural endowment²⁶. Thus, hemmed in among poor and politically fragile neighbouring states in need of foreign aid, Nigeria is destined to be her brother's keeper by extending bilateral assistance. Nigeria, it must be said, is however, often compelled to shoulder leadership role to safeguard her national interests²⁷. The point must be made that Nigeria has a vibrant, yet unharnessed young population which could be properly engaged in other African countries, with a proper and visionary foreign policy.

With 40,710,000 fit for service, 130,000 active frontline personnel, 32,000 active reserve personnel and 3,456,000 reaching military age annually²⁸, Nigeria's military is said to be the largest in West Africa²⁹ and fifth Strongest Army in Africa³⁰. Her leadership and messianic thrust in the conduct of African affairs and resolution of conflicts throughout Africa devoid of external military intervention, have undoubtedly, consummated the concept of Pax Nigeriana within the context of Pax Africana. Nigeria's support against the Apartheid regime in South Africa and other liberation movements is particularly notable on a continental scale. ECOMOG (Economic Community of West African States' Cease-fire Monitoring Group) missions is an *ad hoc* instrument established in 1990 to respond to the civil war in Liberia. Its intervention has since spread to Sierra Leone (1991), Guinea-Bissau 1998-1999, Cote d'Ivoire (2002) and Liberia (2003) under Nigeria's leadership. Hastrup & Lucia maintained that Nigeria provided between 70 to 80 per cent and 80 to 90 percent of human and financial resources respectively for these initiatives.³¹ There is no denying the fact that Nigeria is one of the African countries pursuing a change of status from developing countries to an emerging power. Obviously, this is not unconnected with the economic potentials and natural endowment of the country with the appellation, "giant of Africa".

In the West African sub-region, an estimated 60 per cent of the population and over 50 per cent of the potential for primary and manufacturing production are domiciled in Nigeria³². Nigeria has the largest oil reserves as well as being the largest oil producer in Africa. Her proven recoverable natural gas reserves, the largest in the continent, is put at 187 trillion cubic feet³³. Nigeria is also the fourth leading exporter of Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) worldwide. In addition, it has the second largest global deposit of Bitumen (second only after Canada), with a projected reserve of about 26 billion tonnes. This is beside other mineral resources such as coal, limestone, iron ore, silica, lignite, industrial clay, feldspar, phosphate, tar sand, kaolin, gypsum, marble, lead and zinc, tin and columbite, gold, decorative rocks and aggregate including granite³⁴. This point was amplified by Cravo when he averred that by 2013:

... Nigeria also holds the largest natural gas reserves in Africa... It is also considered one of the continent's largest (potential) consumer markets with significant and increasing middle class, while the country is also characterised by an important entrepreneurial dynamic that helps create the conditions for an increasing economic role in Africa and beyond ... Nigeria's huge economic potential is mostly supported by an important and promising agriculture sector... This is all matched by the assumed

desire of the Nigerian government to be among the top 20 economies in the world by 2020....³⁵

From her position as the biggest economy in Africa and having overtaken South Africa, Nigeria is predicted to have the highest average GDP growth throughout the world in the next four decades³⁶. Thus, with clear objective factors such as her demographic advantage, military power, physical size, and huge economy, Nigeria's manifest destiny embedded in Pax Nigeriana should not only be replicated in the West African sub-region, but the whole of Africa³⁷.

Nigeria's Pax Nigeriana policy aimed at creating and consolidating a peace architecture in Africa basically focuses on soft power, which adopts such means as conflict mediation, resolution and arbitration, economic integration, and development promotion in the continent. In political and security terms, Cravo argued that Nigeria has been alive to her regional responsibility by means of such multilateral fora as the United Nations, UN, African Union, AU, ECOWAS and NEPAD³⁸. The point was made earlier that Nigeria has been actively involved in international peace missions in Liberia (ECOMOG, 1990-99; UNMIL, 2003), Sierra Leone (ECOMOG, 1996-99; UNAMSIL, 1999-2003), Sudan (2005), and Darfur (2007) to ensure economic and political stability nationally and regionally. Being the biggest economy in West Africa, with about 75 per cent of the economic strength of the sub-region, Nigeria funds 70 per cent of ECOWAS's budget. Nigeria also contributes financially to the African Development Bank (ADB) in support of her regional neighbours through the Nigerian Trust Fund.

Challenges

Nigeria's capacity for a Pax Nigeriana in Africa has not always been without serious challenges. The impressive record of Nigeria as an *Eldorado* of human and material resources in relation to most other African countries may becloud the unwary observer about the potential challenges of playing the big brother. As shall be demonstrated presently, there are internal and external factors militating against Pax Nigeriana in Africa. For ease of analysis, we harp on the internal factors first.

Internal

Nigeria is bedevilled by a number of adverse domestic socio-economic challenges such as massive poverty, unemployment, under-employment, youth restiveness, widespread infrastructural decay and corruption³⁹. Furthermore, Nigeria has deep and complex internal issues to contend with in the area of national security which manifest in different forms across the different regions of the country. Such issues as the unabated Niger-Delta crisis, the Boko-Haram insurgency basically in the north, herdsmen menace and cattle rustlers, the prevalence of abductions and kidnappings, the lingering National Question. All these factors have conspired to undermine Nigeria's capacity to assume sustainable leadership role in Africa⁴⁰. Indeed, the internal challenges confronting Nigeria's leadership drive in Africa are well illustrated by Cravo et al, when he opines that:

... Nigeria has also often been referred to as “a giant with feet of clay” or the “crippled giant” ... mostly characterised by a fragile economic, political and social internal structure that has not permitted the realisation of its role as Africa's leader and a true emerging power. Among the most significant internal challenges that Nigeria has to address are those related to the much needed consolidation of democracy and good governance,

including fighting corruption in governmental structures; a more equitable distribution of the national wealth and resources mainly derived from oil production and exports; and more active and efficient conflict resolution mechanisms to attain the necessary internal stability to allow it to become a world power, the continent's leader, and an example for the promotion of South-South interests and development.⁴¹

The heavy, almost sole-reliance on oil export (up to 95 per cent) which makes it vulnerable to fluctuations of oil prices has worsened the dynamics of violence and instability which negatively affects Nigeria's relation with her oil prospecting companies. Domestically, with the drop in oil income which undermines her foreign policy, Nigerians have criticised government of prioritising regional security, politics and stability above pressing national issues such as unemployment, social inequality and poverty⁴². The phenomena of paradox of plenty, resource curse and the concept of negative development outcome could be used to explain the contemporary economic situation in Nigeria. As it were, resource curse explains the attendant negative growth and development outcomes which characterise mineral and oil-led development. Sadly, enough, Nigeria has calibrated her developmental initiatives on revenue derived from sale of crude oil⁴³. There is also the leadership question which has dodged the country since independence. This position was well captured by Chinua Achebe when he insisted that the trouble with Nigeria is purely and squarely caused by inept leadership⁴⁴. Thus, the inability to provide viable leadership within the country may be a serious minus for Nigeria in the quest for Pax Nigeriana. Closely tied to this, is the resurgence of ethnicity which is threatening the fragile country⁴⁵. For Nigeria to assert herself and to play a leading role in Africa, the festering crisis of ethnicity must be checked.

Nigeria faces limitations which impinge upon her material powers and political legitimacy as a regional actor and metaphorical 'big brother' in West Africa and beyond. These enormous internal challenges Nigeria is bedevilled with, raise serious questions of how fit Nigeria is to perform as a regional security actor. The internal contradictions are so pronounced that scholars like Karl Maire claimed that the house (Nigeria) has fallen⁴⁶. While this may be an extreme categorisation and conjecture, we note however that Nigeria's multi-ethnic states forced into a nation through the consummation of a marriage of convenience to become the house that Lugard built for a century now has been plagued by series of hiccups. Although perceived to have remained a toddler in the development arena despite the pains and enormous discomfort consequent upon the huge sacrifices made by the component units, the geographical expression that became known as Nigeria has made giant strides in spite of its onerous challenges. These challenges are neither peculiar to her nor insurmountable. As rightly enthused by Ogbogbo, a good number of countries we look up to today have continued to face the threats of balkanisation⁴⁷. Whereas some of them have been able to manage the differences arising from the plural nature of their societies, some still have to contend with the challenges arising from their amalgamation. In the United Kingdom for instance, the Scottish, Irish and a few others are still fanning the embers of secession to pull out of the union.

External Threats

Nigeria's quest to stamp her authority on the African continent is increasingly being challenged by the rising profile of South Africa. Earlier on, we isolated some of the limitations of South Africa in her quest for African leadership. Nevertheless, there are strong indications that the increasing affirmation of a democratic and multiracial South Africa, which emerged with a

strong economy, is a threat to Nigeria. The Arab World, in the spring of 2011, was buffeted by popular demonstrations and rebellion, generally dubbed as *the Arab Spring*. The events which erupted in Tunisia but which spread to Yemen, Syria, Libya, Egypt, Bahrain and Algeria with its escalation of insecurity in Africa had among its demands the quest for greater political participation and accountability. The events precipitated regime change in Yemen, Egypt, Tunisia and Libya. The demise of Gadaffi in Sirte on 20th October, 2011 and the ripple effects of the Arab Spring in other areas created a significant vacuum which heightened competition for continental leadership in Africa. Nigeria's sensitivity and responses to political developments the world over has therefore become more pronounced and imperative. For instance, emerging sources of insecurity have exacerbated existing threats to Nigeria's national and regional security in Africa. Africa is further faced with transnational organised crimes and terrorism such as the Boko-Haram in Nigeria, Al Qaeda in the Maghreb (AQIM)⁴⁸.

An Appraisal of Nigeria's Commitments to the Regional Bodies

Nigeria's role in the continental is best understood within the larger context of Nigeria's overall orientation and commitment to Africa in her foreign policy. This orientation, widely described as Afrocentrism, dates back to independence in 1960, and emphasises that Nigeria's political leaders pursue foreign policy options designed to promote the interests of Africa⁴⁹. The policy, as stated earlier, is driven by the belief in a Pax Nigeriana, which stresses that Nigeria should play the *big brother* role to other African countries in terms of peace maintenance at the continental level. It would appear, to a large extent, Nigeria has been able to transplant and experiment the national ideas and ideals inherent in her Foreign Policy to West Africa via the ECOWAS. She has been encouraging the same since the post-Cold War era, when atrocities on the continent had triggered Nigeria's desire, if not action, to engage in Africa beyond the West African enclave⁵⁰.

One of the ways Nigeria has fulfilled her obligation to continental and regional bodies is through the payment of obligatory dues. Nigeria along with South Africa, Libya, Egypt and Algeria are the major financiers of the AU. The *Big Five* contributes 75 per cent of AU's operational budget⁵¹. Furthermore, extended scholarships to Africans in colonised territories and invested resources in conflict resolution and Peace Support Operations (PSO) across the continent. Hence, Nigeria provided material and other support for the democratic processes in selected African countries. Possibly in recognition of the contributions to Peace Support Operations, the then Nigerian President, Olusegun Obasanjo became the pioneer Chairman of the Peace and Security Council (PSC), established in 2003 but which became fully operational on 16 March, 2004. This organ of the AU was responsible for tackling peace and security in Africa. In the period under review, the Nigerian President was also the head of AU. In his dual capacity as head of both AU and PSC, Obasanjo held peace talks and mediated in the early years of the Darfur crisis in Sudan.

The role of Nigeria in Liberia is sufficiently familiar. As it were, Nigeria largely provided and funded the armed forces for the ECOMOG missions in Liberia and Sierra Leone in the 1990s. But for Nigeria, the global community's resolve to liquidate Charles Taylor's government by external military aid might have remained a mirage. Although the U.S., former global enforcer in Liberia mobilised a fleet of warships and placed a siege on Liberia, she refused to go any further. The US flotilla only put forward some momentary appearances and left the military action to Nigeria. Nigerian soldiers, deployed in their thousands, risked their lives to restore peace, democracy and handed over the cruel Taylor to justice at the International Criminal Court (ICC)⁵². It is instructive to add that Nigeria was also instrumental in the restoration of the popular mandate in Côte d'Ivoire. The former Polish Ambassador to Nigeria, Grzegorz Walinski

claims that Nigeria must have deployed more than 250,000 Nigerian soldiers to the United Nation's sponsored missions worldwide and had spent about \$13 billion on peacekeeping operations since 1960. Going by Nigeria's massive investment in this regard. Viewed from this perspective, it would not be too much to talk of Pax Nigeriana in Africa.

Prospects

With the successful democratic transition following harrowing decades of military dictatorship, better leadership and ongoing crusade for positive change being chanted by the incumbent administration, there is prospect of Nigeria taking her rightful place in continental affairs. Nigeria is indeed taking giant strides on the regional and global scenes. She has provided aid, absorbed other countries debts, given succour to the displaced and the homeless, while her troops carry on campaigns in peacekeeping operations in several countries including East Timor, Sudan, Kosovo and Mali. Her role in quelling military insurrections in Sao Tome and Principe, Niger, Guinea Bissau, Sierra Leone, and the civilian equivalent in Togo and Ivory Coast, among others have all added verve and legitimacy to Nigeria quest for *Pax Nigeriana*. The prospect of Pax Nigeriana is also plausible when seen from the perspective of the rising profile of Nigerians in international affairs and in the comity of nations. We note that the appointment of a number of cerebral Nigerians such as Adesina Akinwumi as the 8th President of the African Development Bank and others to key agencies of the AU, UN and the International Monetary Fund, IMF, has bolstered the country's image. The appointment of Arunma Oteh, as World Bank Vice President and Treasurer and Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala as member of the Board of Gavi, Vaccine Alliance, founded by Bill and Melinda Gates are strong indication of Nigeria's commitment to gender equity.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have attempted an appraisal of the Pax Nigriana project. This we did, against the backdrop of the anatomy of the contending issues, challenges and prospects. We note that right from the formation of the Nigerian state, it has been taken as given that Nigeria has a divine obligation to play the role of a big brother in Africa. This role is particularly instructive because of her comparative advantage in size, natural and economic endowment and military prowess. The desire to carry along most African states and to intervene to keep the peace in truculent parts of Africa has inadvertently fan the flames and reignited the cltiche of Nigeria's 'Manifest Destiny' to actualise Pax Nigeriana in Africa. There is no denying the fact that remains South Africa, Nigeria's fiercest arch-rival for continental leadership has some records of influence to peddle. But the balance of evidence would seem to suggest that that the prospects of Pax Nigeriana is real in spite of internal and external contradictions that have conspired to diminish Nigeria's leadership and /or potentials in international affairs.

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