



An Assessment of President Shehu Shagari's Foreign Policy Legacy: Continuity and Change in International Relations, 1979 to 1983

Danyaya Muhammad Shehu PhD

Federal University Birnin Kebbi, Kebbi State, Nigeria

ABSTRACT: This paper evaluates the foreign policy legacy of President Shehu Shagari, who led Nigeria from 1979 to 1983. The paper examines the continuity and change in Nigeria's international relations during Shagari's presidency, with a focus on his administration's approach to Afrocentrism, economic diplomacy, and conflict resolution. The paper argues that Shagari's foreign policy legacy was marked by significant achievements, including the promotion of African unity and cooperation, the strengthening of Nigeria's economic ties with other countries, and the resolution of several regional conflicts. However, the paper also highlights the challenges and limitations of Shagari's foreign policy, including the impact of the Nigerian Civil War, the country's dependence on oil exports, and the complexities of navigating Cold War geopolitics. Overall, the study provides a distinctive assessment of Shagari's foreign policy legacy and its ongoing relevance for Nigeria's international relations today. The paper employed historical research approach in its analysis.

KEYWORDS: Shehu Shagari Foreign Policy, International Relations, Afrocentrism, Conflict Resolution, Economic Diplomacy, African Unity

INTRODUCTION

In the context of this paper, Shehu Shagari's foreign policy refers to the diplomatic approach and international relations strategy employed by president Shehu Shagari, the president of Nigeria's Second Republic (1979-1983). His foreign policy sought to balance Nigeria's national interests with its commitment to African solidarity, economic development, and international cooperation. Foreign policy is a critical aspect of international relations that determines and shapes the pattern, nature and character of nation- states interaction with states and non-states actors at the global stage. It must however be pointed out that, the focal objective underpinning the formulation and implementation of foreign policy at any period is to achieve the country's national interest. As such, the policy makers are always conscious of this fact whenever deciding on the nature of the policy to be formulated so as not to jeopardize its interest.

It must however be emphasized that the foreign policy of a country is a response to an array of factors. As opined by Northedge, (1968), foreign policy is the relationship between the inside (domestic) and the outside (external) environments of a state. Among these factors, leadership is the most sensitive factors that shape and influence the foreign policy of a country. Thus, by implication, foreign policy is for the most part dictated by the ideological perception of country's leadership in line with the current internal and external conditions. Meaning to say, the success or otherwise of a nation's foreign policy depends to a large extent, on the

nature of the leader and his ability to evolve useful initiatives and actions in his policy that in turn put the country on the ladder of reputable region not just between another country but in the comity of nations.

However, since the emergence of Nigeria as an independent sovereign political entity in 1960 till date, the country has witnessed the assumption of many leaders at the helm of affairs with each directing his foreign policy focus based first, on his initiative, ideas and preference and then, the options opened to him in consideration of the internal and external factors within the environment.

Alhaji Shehu Shagari came into power as the first civilian administrator of Nigeria on 1st October, 1960 after about 13 years of military rule in Nigerian politics. Similarly, Shagari ascendancy to power was part of the testament to the promise by the military regime headed by Maj. Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo to hand over power to the civilians. The Shagari's regime was bent on directing the pattern of Nigeria's affairs in general and foreign policy in particular until when it was finally overthrown by the military on 31st December, 1983 thus ushered in the re-intervention of the military in Nigeria's political landscape. Since then, the attention of scholars, diplomats, statesmen, public commentators, analysts and the like has been focusing on seeking to know the nature of foreign policy adopted by president Shehu Shagari. The aim of this paper therefore, is to provide a fair assessment of President Shehu Shagari's foreign policy between 1979 to 1983, in relation to international relations.

Conceptual Clarification

As has been said, 'the pursuit of logic is the pursuit of truth', this paper deemed it pertinent to begin by conceptualizing the two key concepts for logical presentation and better understanding. These key concepts are foreign policy and international relations.

Foreign Policy

The concept 'foreign policy is an intricate and diverse term that can be define and approached in different ways, depending on the theoretical perspective, historical context, and practical applications. Therefore, there is no one 'right' definition that captures all aspects of foreign policy. Scholars and practitioners may have different understanding of foreign policy, and their definitions may reflect their specific areas of expertise, ideological belief, or analytical frameworks. Some may focus on the state's role in international relations (as the case of this paper may be), while others may emphasize the impact of globalization, non-state actors, or domestic politics on foreign policy. The diversity of definitions and approaches to foreign policy reflects the complexity of the phenomenon itself. Foreign policy involves multiple actors, interests, and context, making it challenging to reduce it to a single definition or theory.

In academic and practical discussion of foreign policy, it's essential to acknowledge and respect the different perspectives and definitions recognizing that each contributes to a deeper understanding of this multifaceted concept. Let us now look at few definitions of the concept offered by some renowned scholars. According to Henry Kissinger (1977), foreign policy is the art of relating a nation's objectives to its capabilities and its environment. Dissecting this definition, Kissinger emphasizes on the significance of three fundamental keys of foreign policy, which are; objectives, capabilities, and environment. This particular approach takes into cognizance of a realistic and pragmatic approach to foreign policy on the account of nation's strengths and weakness, as well as the opportunities and challenges presented by the international environment. Overall, Kissinger's interpretation provides a framework for thinking about foreign policy as a strategic and dynamic process that requires careful consideration of a nation's objectives, capabilities and environment. It further involves setting goals and priorities, assessing and adjusting to changing circumstances, making decisions and taking actions to achieve objectives and lastly, evaluating and learning from outcomes.

Similarly, Joseph Nye (2002), conceptualized foreign policy as the process by which a nation's leaders and government official's interest with the international environment to achieve their goals and protect their interest. What may be deduced from this perspective is that foreign policy is a dynamic and ongoing process, involving series of actions,

decisions, and intentions. Foreign policy is also made and implemented by a nation's leaders and government officials, who play a crucial role in shaping and executing policy. In a nut shell, the definition explained that foreign policy aims to accomplish specific objectives, such as promoting national interest, security, advancing economic interests, or protecting human rights and seeks to safeguard a nation's interests, values, and citizens from external threats or challenge.

International Relations

International relations (IR), is a field of study that examines the interactions and relationships between different countries, governments, and non-state actors in the global arena. In other words, it is an interdisciplinary field that draws on political science, history, economics, sociology, anthropology, and other disciplines to understand the complexities of global interactions. As for whether international relations as a field of study is entitled to single definition, the answer is no. International relations like the concept of foreign policy, is a diverse and multifaceted field that can be defined in different ways and approaches. One may argue that international relations is a complex and dynamic field that resists a single definitive definition.

Kenneth Waltz (1979), a prominent international relations theorist defined international relations as the 'analysis of the behavior of states and other actors in the international system, with a focus on the interactions among them that lead to conflict, cooperation, or indifference. Waltz is of the opinion that not only states, but also other actors, such as international organizations, non-governmental organizations, and transnational corporations, play important roles in the international relations. He viewed international relations as a system, which implies a set of interconnected and interdependent parts. This system is characterized by anarchy, meaning the absence of a central authority. Waltz's definition of international relations also focuses on the behavior of states and other actors, including their actions, decisions, and interactions. He examines how these interactions lead to different outcomes, such as conflict, cooperation, or indifference. He further highlights the three possible outcomes of international interactions. In is point of argument, conflict refers to the use of force or coercion, cooperation involves working together to achieve goals, and indifference means a lack of interest or engagement.

Katzenstein, (2009), viewed international relations as the 'study of the interactions among states, markets, and societies in the global arena'. By interaction, Katzenstein emphasizes on the dynamic and ongoing interactions between different entities in the global arena. To him, the state represents the traditional actors in international relations, including nation-states and government. Societies also encompass the diverse range of non-states actors, including civil society organizations, social movements, and individuals. Generally,

Katzenstein's definition highlights the complexity and multiplicity of actors and interactions in international relations, moving beyond the traditional focus on state-to-state relations.

Relationship between Foreign Policy and International Relations

There is a significant relationship between foreign policy and international relations. Foreign policy is a subset of international relations, and the two fields are closely intertwined. Foreign policy refers to the specific strategies, action, and decisions made by a state or nation to interact with other states, international organizations, and non-state actors in the international system. It is also a key instrument of international relations, as it shapes a state's interactions with others and influences the global environment. International relations, on the other hand, is a broader field that encompasses the study of all interactions among states, markets, societies, and other actors in the global arena. It includes foreign policy, but also extends to other areas such as international economics, global governance, security studies, and environmental issues.

In other words, foreign policy is a critical component of international relations, as it determines how a state engages with others in the international system. Effective foreign policy can promote cooperation, prevent conflict, and advance a state's interests, while ineffective foreign policy can lead to conflict, instability, and negative consequences.

The relationship between foreign policy and international relations can be seen in several ways among which are:

- i. Foreign policy is a tool of international relations which is used to achieve international relations goals, such as promoting peace, security, and cooperation
- ii. International relations shape foreign policy. The international environment, including global events, trends, and actors, influences state's foreign policy decision
- iii. Foreign policy (Palmer & Perkins, 2010).
To sum it up, foreign policy and international relations are closely linked, with a foreign policy being a critical component of international relations. Understanding the relationship between the two is essential for analyzing and addressing global challenges.

Background to Nigeria's Foreign Policy under Alhaji Shehu Shagari Regime

Historically, president Shagari's regime of 1979- 1983 emerged immediately after the then military regime of General Obasanjo who successfully handed over power back to civil administration after the 1979 presidential election that brought about the second republic.

When President Shagari came into office in 1979, after thirteen years of military rule, he inherited a foreign policy that required firmness and dynamism. One that focused on issues such as decolonization and independence struggle for African countries like Namibia, fight against racism in South Africa, conflict resolution in the Libya- Chadian War and Cameroon border conflict in 1981 among others. From the very time president Shagari assumed as the executive president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, he categorically stated that "it is our national wills that Africa shall remain the cornerstone of our foreign policy (Adeniji, 1986). He also noted that Nigeria's foreign policy would be based on the advancement and defence of the causes of Nigeria before the world community of nations. In relation to this, Gambari stated as quoted by Jubril, (2004) that:

president Shehu Shagari's administration inherited a high degree of national consensus which emerged behind the main features of Nigerian foreign policy goals and objectives. These include support for the liberation movements in Southern Africa, opposition to racism and racial discrimination throughout the world, reasoned support for regional economic cooperation such as ECOWAS, the pursuit for New International order, Africa as the central focus of the country's foreign policy and the operationalisation of a true non-aligned foreign policy.

The above Shagari's foreign policy objective indicated how committed president Shagari was as far as an international relation is concerned. The ideology of liberation movement, opposition to racism and racial segregation is a question of global concern.

Success of Shagari's Foreign Policy

Shagari's regime was commended for supporting the liberation struggles in Southern Africa up to the point of independence. It took an active part in the Lancaster House proceedings that led to the independence of Zimbabwe. The government equally gave large financial support to the new government. According to Bar and Yange (2016):

At the independence anniversary of Zimbabwe in 1980, the president declared the whole event as a victory not just for Africa alone but the Third World as a whole. A five million dollar grant was quickly made to the new government of Robert Mugabe

To Shagari's credit, he spearheaded Africa's commitment to peaceful settlement of inter- state disputes like the Somalia/Ethiopia, Morocco/Polisario Movement over western Sahara; and the Hissene Habre/Guokoni Weddeye crises in Chad. This was no doubt a mark of accolades to his administration. In addition, the Shagari's administration also

demonstrated his zeal in the pursuit of the goal for the complete economic independence of Africa through cooperative integration and self-help. This led to the signing of the Lagos Plan of Action by the OAU Heads of State Summit in 1980. It was supposed to be the blue print for the Economic Community of Africa as lamented by Mord (2015):

The President's pledge to the decolonization of Africa was glaring when he organized and hosted the African Economic Summit in Lagos under the aegis of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) known as the Lagos Plan of Action in 1980s

Similarly, the Shagari's regime made an attempt in bringing to the fore the campaign of reparation for Africa for the exploitation and plunder of the continent in the past by Western Countries. In his speech at the UN General Assembly on October 7, 1980, argued that:

This is one way of trying to redress the imbalance in the asymmetrical world economic order which exists in favor of advanced nations and to the disadvantage of Africa and the Third World

To sum it up, the Shagari's foreign policy successfully promoted African solidarity and unity, particularly through Nigeria's leadership role in the organization of African Unity (OAU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). His government also actively supported the fight against apartheid in South Africa, providing financial and diplomatic support to the African National Congress (ANC), and other anti-apartheid movements. The Shagari's regime was also credited for earning international recognition for Nigeria's contributions to the global peace and security, particularly through its participation in United Nations peacekeeping missions in several places. Overall, president Shagari's foreign policy successes helped establish Nigeria as a respected player in international relations.

Criticisms of Shagari's Foreign Policy

Scholars debated extensively on the weaknesses of Shagari's foreign policies which adversely affected Nigeria in many angles. In terms handling border and other regional crises, the Shagari's regime was found to be inactive. His regime was vehemently criticized for ineffective handling of the Chadian crisis. Shagari's government was accused for its inability to effectively address the Chadian crisis which led to the influx of refugees and instability in the region.

The Nigeria-Cameroon border crisis was also an event which revealed the ineptitude and ineptness of the Shagari's regime in protecting the national interests of Nigeria and asserting the true posture of the country as the leadership of Africa. The immediate cause of the border crisis in May 1981 was the deliberate killing of five Nigerian soldiers by Cameroonian

gendarmes on May 16, 1981. And as revealed in extant literature's on Nigeria's foreign policy, after the incident, the then Nigerian external affairs Minister, professor Ishaya Audu in a press statement described the incident as a cold-blooded murder and threatened that Nigeria would not take the issue lying down (Aluko, 1981). For so many weeks, there were clamors for war or at least reprisals against Cameroon but Nigeria did only accept a public apology from the country. Although this was a typical manifestation of upholding the principle of peaceful settlement of disputes, it was a negation of the attempt to assert her claim to African leadership.

In terms of Nigeria's Afrocentric bent in her foreign policy, Shagari's policies towards African countries contradicted with this philosophy. This was best evidenced in the expulsion of three million illegal alien largely Africans from Nigeria. This mostly created a collision between Nigeria and her western neighbor, Ghana which became pejoratively christened as "Ghana must go". Thus, critical minded analysts and countries questioned the reality of the acclaimed brotherhood spirit of Nigeria.

It could be remember that Shagari earlier in his inaugural speech on 1 October, 1960 reiterated his commitment towards upholding the notion of Afrocentrism as a guiding principle of Nigerian foreign policy in dealings with her neighbors where he stated: T

Africa remains the cornerstone of Nigeria's foreign policy. My administration is committed to the cause of the total Liberation of Africa and the abolition of racism in all its manifestations

While it is true that the administration contributed to a certain extent in the liberation struggle as earlier presented, it was an abysmal failure in terms of maintaining closer cooperation's with his African counterparts. One reason responsible for this was the downturn in the economic buoyancy of the country which attracted national uproar. Suffice to state also that despite the massive exodus of exposure that hampered the foreigners in Nigeria, there was no clear symbol of change that prevailed and this policy tended to be castigated across the nooks and crannies of Africa and beyond.

As if that was not enough, the Shagari regime perpetuated western hegemonic influence as the United States came to gain momentum in disguise affecting the direction and conduct of Nigeria diplomacy which also cut across Africa as a whole. As was envisaged from the example of the USA, the 19th OAU Heads of State Summit slated for Tripoli in Libya, did not hold due to the inability of Nigeria and other African countries to attend. The US must have convinced these conservative African leaders to beware of the radical Gaddafi, which a successful Summit would have conferred. This nearly killed the OAU. From this scenario, it could be seen that there was a sharp departure from the radical, dynamic and

proactive foreign policy that characterized the previous military regime to an inactive, redundant and conservative foreign policy which was seemingly a replica of the Balewa regime.

The above challenges further exacerbated the criticisms that were leveled against the regime and this was compounded by external borrowings as the administration had spent recklessly and coupled with the global depression that was sweeping across Africa, the Shagari government was soon in trouble. This provides the moral justification for the military to find their way into the political terrain of the country and against this background, on 31st December, 1983, Alhaji Shehu Shagari was overthrown by Maj. Gen. Muhammadu Buhari thus marking the end of his administration.

CONCLUSION

From the forgoing, it is crystal clear that Shagari's foreign policy legacy is complex and dynamic one, marked by both significant successes and challenges. On the one hand, his government's commitment to African solidarity and unity helped to promote a sense of shared identity and purpose among African nations. His support for anti-apartheid movements and his government's role in the fight against apartheid in South Africa are also notable achievements. This helped significantly in building diplomatic relations in the international arena.

However, Shagari's foreign policy was not without its challenges. His administration's handling of the Chadian crisis and the Bakassi Peninsular dispute with Cameroon were particularly problematic, and his reliance on oil diplomacy limited the diversity of Nigeria's foreign relations. Additionally, his government's management of foreign debt and promotion of economic development were not as effective as they could have been.

Despite these challenges, Shagari's foreign policy legacy continues to shape Nigeria's relationships with other nations and regional organizations. His commitment to African solidarity and unity, for example, helped to lay the groundwork for Nigeria's current leadership role in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Looking at the future, Nigerian foreign policy should build on Shagari's legacy while addressing the challenges and limitations of his approach. This will require a more diversified foreign policy that promotes economic development and reduces dependence on oil diplomacy. It will also require more effective management of foreign debt and a strong commitment to promoting Nigerian interests abroad.

Overall, Shagari's foreign policy legacy is an important part of Nigeria's history and continues to shape the country's relationships with other nations and regional organizations. By learning from his successes and challenges, Nigeria can

build a more effective and sustainable foreign policy for future.

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