

The Influence of Leadership Personality on the Nigeria's Hegemonic Decline in West Africa

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Abstract: Nigeria has been described as the West African Hegemon since from her independence in 1960. Beginning from 1994 however, the country's hegemonic status started declining due to several factors both within and outside Nigeria. This study employs the individual level of analysis propounded by Kenneth Waltz as an analytical framework to explain the role played by Nigerian leaders toward the country's hegemonic decline in the West African sub-region. The study reveals that the personalities of the country's leaders have impacted significantly toward the status decline of Nigeria's hegemony in the region. The study concludes Nigeria require leaders with high moral and ethical background as well as educated and internationally recognized leaders in order to be able to regain her declining image within the region.

Key words: Nigeria, Hegemony, West Africa, decline, leadership, recognized

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria's hegemonic power has been undergoing a decline, since 1994 when General Sani Abacha took over power through a coup de 'tat. The country's international image since then became a subject of intellectual discussion because of her strategic importance of in the West African sub-region. With the strongest economy and the largest population in the sub-region, the country occupies an important place in the regions political and economic development. The country contributes the highest amount in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) by providing 1/3 of the organizations finances, since its inception in 1975 (Adebajo, 2000; Gambari, 2008).

The country's role in West Africa is guided by her foreign policy objectives of maintaining a good neighborliness within the region which is one of the four circles guiding the Nigerian foreign policy since independence. The other three are; Africa being the center piece of her foreign policy, participating with other countries of the world through other world organizations such as UN to maintain international peace and cooperation and maintaining a non-align in world affairs. This study would analyze the impact of the personalities of four Nigerian leaders who ruled the country from 1994 to 2015 using the individual level of analysis of Kenneth Waltz as an analytical framework.

Regional hegemonic theory: Regional hegemonic theory draws largely from the hegemonic stability theory which

applies to the global hegemonic practice because the regional hegemonic theory "does not have any analytical instruments that could be used to explain the conceptual dilemmas between regional powers, pivotal states and middle powers" (Nolte, 2010). The regional hegemonic theory gained greater prominence after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the ascendance of US as the sole global hegemon. Regional powers thus, emerged and dominated their own blocs in order to fashion out the new world order which emphasized the "liberalization of goods, services, trade and labor" (Rosecrance and Stein, 1973).

Regional power according to Osterud is a state "which is geographically part of a delineated region; able to stand up against any coalition of other states in the region; highly influential in regional affairs and contrary to middle power, might also be a great power on a world scale in addition to its regional standing" (Ogunnubi and Uzodike, 2016). Lemke and Reed defined regional hegemons as "local dominant states supervising local relations by establishing and striving preserve local status quo" (Lemke and Reed, 1996). Regional hegemons are "powerful actors that wields superior level of influence within a delimited region which it belongs power" (Ogunnubi and Uzodike, 2016). Like global hegemons a regional hegemon must therefore, be preponderant in military capability more than any country or coalition of countries in the region have a strong economic base and political stability. It is also necessary for a regional hegemon to have the willingness to project its powers as well as the legitimacy to dictate for other countries in

their region of influence. These three indices are essential for every aspiring regional power before achieving hegemonic power status. A regional hegemonic power must also possess the necessary foreign policy machineries to be able to prevail on the foreign policy outcomes of other countries in the region.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Analytical framework: The individual level of analysis otherwise referred to as the personality level of analysis is one of the three levels of analysis propounded by Kenneth N. Waltz. The other levels are the Domestic level and the systemic or international level of analysis. The personality level argued that the behavior of a country's leader influence the foreign policy outcomes of their country. It argued that the ideological bias, the family background, the professional background as well as the educational level of a leader determine his foreign policy decisions (Waltz, 1959).

Personality refers to "the general tendencies of human beings to respond across times and situations" (Tella, 2016). Different people have different attitudes and behaviors because their personalities differ. Leaders fashion out the foreign policy objectives of their countries according to their idiosyncrasies. Authoritarian regimes are more open to the dictates of their leaders because of the lack of institutional mechanisms to regulate their conducts. In democratic societies however, the leader's personality may not impact more on the foreign policy of the country because oppositions and public opinion occupy a significant place in the governance structure. Aggressive leaders are characterized by domineering influence, patriotic and nationalistic outlooks and exhibit Machiavellian style of leadership (Smith, 2012). Having explained the regional hegemonic theory and the analytical framework, the study would dwell into discussion on the personality of Nigerian leaders from 1994-2015 and how their personalities impacted on the country's hegemonic power decline within the West African sub-region.

General Sani Abacha regime (1993-1998): Sani Abacha was born in Kano state, North-Western Nigeria. He was a Kanuri by tribe from Borno state North-Eastern Nigeria. Sani Abacha was raised as a Muslim although he did not acquire deep knowledge of Islamic religion beyond the elementary level. After graduating from secondary school, he joined the military and received his training at the UK Mons Defense Officers College in Aldershot before being commissioned in 1963 (CT., 2016; Idachaba, 2001). General Abacha was a career military officer and one of

few generals that never skipped any rank before attaining the position of a four star general (CT, 2016; Olamilekan, 2015).

Nigeria under Abacha was labeled the most brutal and autocratic in her political history. A professional military officer his actions speaks more of him than his words as he hardly appear in public. He clamped down on opposition politicians and pro-democracy activists and civil society organizations were intimidated by security operatives. Ken Saro Wiwa an environmental activist was executed along with eight others against international pressure on the Nigerian military junta not to carry out the execution. General Olusegun Obasanjo former Nigerian military ruler was jailed alongside his deputy general Shehu Musa Yar'adu who later died in prison detention; for allegedly plotting to overthrow the regime. Professor Wole Soyinka a Nobel laureate and Chief Anthony Enahoro, the person who moved the independence motion for Nigeria in 1953 all fled the country because they were targeted by the regime. Chief Mashood M.K.O. Abiola, the winner of the annulled June 12th 1992 general elections in Nigeria considered by both local and international observers as the freest and fairest in the country's election history was also arrested and his wife Alhaja Kudirat Abiola was assassinated in what appeared a state organized killing (Egwaikhide and Isumonah, 2001; Olamilekan, 2015).

General Abacha's foreign policy behaviors were influenced by his professional background as a military officer who believed in regimentation and the use of force to achieve targeted objectives and low level of both western and Islamic education which narrowed his world views. As a result of his attitudes toward diplomacy and foreign relations, Nigeria was declared a pariah state in 2006 by the international community in response to his stubborn refusal to listen to pleas to stay action on the execution of Ken Saro Wiwa. Nigeria was consequently suspended from the British Commonwealth of Nations in November, 1995 at Auckland, New Zealand (Kolawole, 2005). Nigeria was sanctioned by Western countries and pressures mounted on the junta to respect International Human Rights Conventions and return the country to democratic path; a call which Abacha ignored completely and went ahead to organize a self-succession transition (Egwaikhide and Isumonah, 2001). The result of General Abacha's foreign policy damaged the country's international image and as such contributed toward her decline of the hegemonic power status in the West African sub-region.

Chief Olusegun Aremu Obasanjo: Obasanjo emerged winner of the presidential election organized in 1999 to

end the era of military rule in Nigeria. His administration lasted for 8 years from May 29th 1999 to 2007. Born on 5th March 1937 of a poor farmer family in Ogun State South-Western Nigeria Obasanjo attended a Christian missionary school but could not afford university education because of the poor financial position of his parent. He joined the Nigerian army in 1958 and received his military training in UK. He was former military ruler from 1976-1979 and was the first Nigerian military ruler to hand over power to a democratically elected government (Durotoye, 2014).

Obasanjo is an aggressive leader with a challenger personality (Ajetunmobi and Osunkoya, 2011; Oviasogie and Shodipo, 2013). His domineering influenced and military experience helps to shape his tough leader attitudes that are fearless. Obasanjo never submit himself external control by individuals, groups or even circumstances (Ajetunmobi and Osunkoya, 2011). These qualities helped him to bring his country out of international isolation. However, his personality also influenced his political behavior in the country which negatively affected her international reputation and damaged the little achievements recorded between 1999 and 2004. Under the Obasanjo administration there were cases of excessive human rights violations mostly committed by the government throughout his 8 years rule. Obasanjo ordered the massive killing of civilians at Zaki Niam in Benue state North-Central Nigeria because some soldiers were attacked and killed by civilians during a communal crisis in 2000 and another mass execution of similar nature in Udi in bayelsa state South-Southern Nigeria in 2001 (HRW, 2001). His administration also recorded the highest number of political assassination in the country's history mostly his from the opposition either within his ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) or from the opposition political parties (Durotoye, 2014) there was infrastructural decay in the country during his administration despite an increase in the country's revenues due to rise in international crude oil price and many industries folded up because of poor electricity supply (Durotoye, 2014). Obasanjo's attempt to change his country's constitution in order to "elongate" his tenure beyond the prescribed 8 years was indeed a clear manifestation of arrogant and aggressive personality which was widely condemned by international community and resisted by Nigerians internally. This move was described by US diplomats as "immoral amendment of the constitution" (Adebajo, 2008). He argued in support of his tenure elongation move claiming, "I believe that God is not a God of abandoned projects. If God has a project he will not abandon it" (Adebajo, 2008).

Nigeria's hegemonic power continued to decline throughout Obasanjo's 8 years rule. Major human right issues inherited from the Abacha regime such as the execution of Saro Wiwa, the assassination of Kudirat Abiola were not resolved despite agitations. The situation further worsened under his administration and the security situation in the country also deteriorated as various militia groups emerged across the region of the country employing violent tactics of unleashing terror on innocent citizens (Reed and Mberu, 2015). Election rigging became widespread under Obasanjo with the 2007 general elections adjudged by international observers as the worst in the country's history (Adebajo, 2008; Tijani, 2015). The country's corruption index was disturbing under his administration (Alabi and Fashagba, 2010). The president himself was not exonerated from corruption charges as he traded blames with his deputy Atiku Abubakar over the Halliburton contract scandal with each blaming the other of receiving bribe (Uchegbu, 2009).

President Umaru Musa Yar'adua's: Yar'adua was born of a muslim aristocratic family of katsina state North-Western Nigeria in 1951. The title of his family in the Katsina emirate council was the Matawallen katsina (the custodian of the treasury) a title which Yar'adua inherited after the death of his father. His father was a federal minister in Nigeria's first republic and his immediate elder brother General Shehu Musa Yar'adua was general obasanjo's deputy between 1976 and 1979. Yar'adua was the first Nigerian president to hold a university degree and is well versed in Islamic religion. His family background and religious orientation coupled with his educational qualification combined to make Yar'adua a much disciplined leader. He was the first elected governor in the country to ever declare his asset publically while he was governor of Katsina state. Despite the notorious record of corruption by political office holders in Nigeria's fourth republic he was never indicted by the anti-corruption agencies (Bloomfield, 2006). His election as Nigeria's president in 2007 was marred by massive election fraud. He immediately set-up a committee on assuming office to investigate the allegations and carried out electoral reforms as a result of which his party lost some governors and senators positions in election tribunal because of his pledge not to interfere with the legal process unlike his predecessor. President Umaru Yar'adua's suffered severe kidney disease which affected his performance as president. Most of international events that requires his attention were either not attended or his deputy represents him. In 2009, when a

Nigerian Umar Abdulmutallab attempted to blow-up a US plane on Christmas day; the US added Nigeria on the terror sponsors countries, a move which observers blamed on the inability of president Obama to speak directly to his Nigerian counterpart on the issue because he was away on medical trip to Saudi Arabia (Ayam, 2010).

Nigeria continued to decline in her hegemonic power status under the Yar'adua's administration. He ordered the Nigerian police to use every means necessary to suppress the insurgent Boko Haram while on his way to Brazil a move which was considered by analysts as the catalyst for the transformation of the group into a full blown terrorist organization. This attracted international condemnation and contributed toward the country's hegemonic power decline in the West African sub-region.

Goodluck Ebele Azikiwe Jonathan: He was the first Nigerian president to hold a PhD and was born in Bayelsa state South-Southern Nigeria. His father is a poor Canoe maker and Jonathan received his early education in a Christian missionary school. He taught at Rivers state College of Education for a decade (1983-1993). Jonathan became Nigeria's president in May 2010 when his predecessor died of a kidney failure (Akinkunde, 2015; Mark, 2015). Goodluck Jonathan was relatively not known in Nigeria's political arena until his election as deputy governor of Bayelsa state in South-southern Nigeria in 1999 and his subsequent emergence as a governor following the arrest and prosecution of his predecessor governor Alamiyeseigha on charges of money laundering in December, 2005. He was later picked together with Umaru Yar'adua to contest the 2007 presidential election by chief Olusegun Obasanjo during their party's primaries in December, 2006 (Bloomfield, 2006).

Jonathan administration was characterized by excessive official corruption and impunity. Although, Nigeria recorded the highest GDP growth during his tenure poverty level continued to rise unabated. Nigeria's ranking in the corruption perception index continued to rise (Ahad, 2015). His ministers were accused of aiding and abating corruption throughout his 6 years rule an allegation which he ignores despite its sensitivity (Owen and Usman, 2015; WB, 2016). Nigeria continued its lateral hegemonic power decline during Jonathan's administration and as such foreign investors stayed away from the country because of excessive corruption, insecurity which the government could not contain, balance of payment deficit which continued since 2009 despite oil price rise in 2010 and general failure of governance in the country. His insistence to run again for a second time despite an agreement he signed with his

Northern political allies resulted in the colossal failure of his party during the 2015 general elections and the ascendance for the first time in Nigeria's political history of an opposition party to power (Ahmed and Eje, 2015; DiCicco and Levy, 1999; Olasile and Adebayo, 2016; Owen and Usman, 2015).

CONCLUSION

Nigeria has gone through various set of leaders ranging from the military to the democratically elected. In all the leaders who ruled the country from 1994-2015, each has contributed his quota toward the country's hegemonic power decline within the West African sub-region. The personality of these leaders had compounded the governance deficit in the country which led to image crisis for the country within the international environment. The documented cases of gross human rights violation in all the previous administrations from 1994-2015 and endemic official corruption have resulted in an increase of the poverty level in the country as well as infrastructure decay. The result of these is increased insecurity, low foreign investment and general lack of development in a country that claimed to be the "giant of Africa" (Adebajo, 2000).

Nigeria needs to be focused in choosing its leaders because the personality of the leaders depicts the fundamental cornerstone of the country's regional leadership approach. It is evident that Nigeria is on a lateral decline in her hegemonic power status in West Africa and the implications of this for the entire region cannot be over emphasized. There is no country in West Africa that indicates capability and willingness to replace Nigeria in the event of total decline thus, the question of power shift in West Africa does not even arise. It is therefore instructive for Nigeria to live up to expectation by reviewing the process of leadership recruitment in the country in order to save the region from being isolated or sidelined in the scheme of international development.

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