Regional Hegemony and Leadership Space in Africa: Assessing Nigeria's Prospects and Challenges

Jude Odigbo[1], Joseph Effiong Udaw[1] and Adaona Frank Igwe[1]

Abstract

Nigeria's claim to regional primacy is derived from her strategic location and resource endowment. Her continental engagements and efforts towards peace and stability in Africa seemed to have brightened her position as a pivotal state on the continent. This paper examined Nigeria's role in Africa especially her effort in crisis management vis a vis peace keeping interventions and her capacity to ascend leadership position in Africa. It critically looked at her foreign policy adventures over the years since her return to democracy. The paper observed that Nigeria's foreign relation modalities since her return to civil rule over a decade has depreciated her global stature. It argued that in spite of Nigeria's regional efforts, incessant domestic instability has contributed to gross underutilization of Nigeria's natural potentials to emerge a regional leader in Africa. The paper concluded that Nigeria's leadership prospects in Africa will depend on the management of her internal socio-political and economic challenges. The study adopted hegemonic theory of state. While relying on sequential technique of qualitative research, the study recommended good governance as an antidote to numerous development setbacks and as a requisite determinant for regional leadership for Nigeria.

Keywords: Regional hegemony, Leadership, Nigeria

1. Introduction

The enduring nature of the British influence on Nigeria's foreign policy and its ruling elites continued until the late 1960s when the lessons of the civil war of 1967-1970 compelled Nigeria foreign policy elites to reappraise its stand towards external relations (Nuamah 2003: 4).

---

[1] Department of Political Science, Federal University Wukari, Wukari-Nigeria.
Email: judeodigbo@yahoo.com, judeodigbo@gmail.com, Phone: +2348037549721

The renewed commitment and strategies for cross-border interactions with its West African neighbours and Africa at large formed the basis of Nigeria's foreign policy objectives. Several decades in her post-independence, Nigeria appears to pursue an afrocentric foreign policy anchored on its resolve to champion the course of Africa and collaborate with other African States to advance a unified agenda in the ever-dynamic global community. Against the prevailing condition of the international system of the time however, new challenges have demanded significant directional change in the focus of Nigeria's foreign policy.

Though, there seems to be conflicting scholarly views on the prevailing nature of the international system (Rouke 2007). The emergence of a new world order (unipolarity) following the demise of bipolar system has evolved a dramatic consequence on the nature and degree of problems in Africa. The contemporary global system and indeed Africa in particular has continued to witness increasing challenges, ranging from terrorism, climate change, environmental hazards, and population explosion, inter and intra state conflicts and refugee crisis, fratricidal wars of varying propensity to HIV/AIDS among others. For instance, the revolutionary spring that engulfed some states in the North Africa beginning from Tunisia in 2010 exposes major weaknesses of the continent as regards to effective collective problem solving. In fact, such gap provided opportunity for the West to not only reaffirming neo-colonist postures but to expand their capitalist exploitative tendencies while assuming frontline status in resolving the crisis. Thus, the interventions may have succeeded in halting the crisis, by eliminating old regimes (as in Ivory Coast, Libya etc) but appeared not to have paved the way for genuine political reforms and transformation (see Nwanegbo and Odigbo 2012).

Consequently, there is a dramatic shift in the hitherto centralist perspective towards solving the problems of the international space that focuses on the United Nations and other international formations. Emphasis now rests on the role of the "Strong Nations" to oversee the affairs of their environment as manifest responsibility.

Indeed, the obvious lack of a nation with unquestionable command of influence in the continent appears to have created leadership gap and augmented the inability of Africa to deal with persistent conflicts that engulfed many states in Africa.

This paper attempts to examine Nigeria's capacity to ascend leadership position in Africa bearing in mind her fragile economy and perennial political instability, civil unrest, insecurity that characterized the Nigerian political system. It critically examined Nigeria's foreign policy since her return to democracy in 1999. Our focus on Nigeria is to determine the extent Nigeria could provide leadership for peaceful purposes in Africa having successfully managed ECOMOG in peace keeping in West Africa.

1.2 Regional Hegemony and Leadership: Conceptual and Theoretical Discourses

The end of the cold war between the West (specifically the United State) and the East (the USSR) and the subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union has a dramatic effect on global power structure and hierarchy. There is preponderance of scholarly debates on whether the collapse of the Soviet Union initiated the emergence of a unipolar or multi-polar world (see Rouke, 2007). Thus, scholars have been more divergent than consensus in their submissions as regards to the pros and cons of a Nation emerging a global hegemon. The major view of the concept of hegemony connotes "dominance" of one power in and over the international system (see Rouke, 2007; Kegley, 2006; Kindleberger, 1973; Keohane, 1980). While some scholars have remained skeptical on the potential dangers and gains associated with unipolarity, some have argued that hegemony would ensure durable peace on the globe (Rouke, 2007; Keohane, 1980). Wohlforth posited that a unipolar system will be peaceful but only so long as the hegemonic power acts like one (cited in Rouke, 2007:90). The concept suggests that hegemonic structures of power, dominated by a single country are most conducive to the development of strong international regimes (Keohane, 1980:131-162). Hegemony is also viewed as the "ability of one state to lead in world politics by promoting its world view and ruling over arrangements governing international economics and politics"(Mingst, 1999:34; Kegley, 2006:309). At the developing stages of the concept, the U.S.A was persistently been used in analyzing the concept sequel to her global exploits and the ability to laying the law down to others through its dominant and assertive tendencies since the demise of the former USSR, which, appears to have placed the country as a global hegemon.

Thus, scholars like Landsberg, 2007:4; Wight, 1978:63 who have argued on hegemony in regional context have upheld the domineering tendencies of a hegemon as major characteristics but have analyzed regional hegemon from the standpoint of "pivotal state", "middle power" when related to global power hierarchy. According to Landsberg (2007:4) in his analysis of South Africa as a pivotal state argued that:

"a pivotal state is one that in comparison to its neighbours isipso facto, a powerful state. From such relative powerfulness flows the capability to influence other states, events and regions. The pivotal state is influential in a region because the internal development in such a state, or lack thereof, is so significant that it typically holds major implications for states in its immediate region. Thus, if such a state were to experience positive developments this will typically have a positive demonstration effect on the region. Conversely, if such a state experiences negative developments on the home front, this negatively impacts the broader region".

Landsberg (2007:4) further argued that while a regional hegemon is a powerful state that enforces rules through dominance, the pivotal state is one that acts in the regional interest in collaboration with others. In his view, the pivotal state works in collaboration with others, builds partnerships with and amongst its neighbors and is instrumental in the construction of regional societies. Also, wight (1978:63) in his distinction between regional great powers and middle powers, argued that the interests of regional great powers are focused on a limited region where they can act on their own accord, regional great powers therefore, are potential candidates for the status of middle powers in the international system. Wight's view of middle power is basically from the standpoint of middle powers relative power status comparatively to the great powers.

Thus, he argues that:

A middle power is a power with such military strength, resources and strategic position that in peacetime the great powers bid for its support, and in wartime, while it has no hope of winning a war against a great power, it can hope to inflict costs on a great power out of proportion to what the great power can hope to gain by attacking it" (Wight1978:65).

However, Keohane (1969) definition of a middle power expresses the reality of a middle power state inability to act alone.

According to Keohane (1969: 296), a middle power is "a state whose leaders consider that it cannot act alone effectively, but may be able to have a systemic impact in a small group or through an international institution". The impacts of a state on global politics speak volume of her status in the global power distribution and these efforts would be recognized by other states. Recognition by other states serves as one of the criteria for state to claim middle power or regional leadership. Nolte (2007:15) in his comparative analysis of regional powers proposes ten indices that qualify a state to claim regional power. He posited that a regional power is a state:

• that is part of a region which is geographically, economically and politically delimited;
• which articulates the pretension of a leading position in the region (self-conception);
• which influences in a significant way the geopolitical delimitation and the political-ideational construction of the region;
• which displays the material (military, economic, demographic), organizational (political) and ideological resources for a regional power projection;
• which is economically, politically and culturally interconnected with the region;
• which truly has great influence in regional affairs (activities and results);
• which exerts this influence also (and more and more) by means of regional governance structures;
• which defines the regional security agenda in a significant way;
• whose leading position in the region is recognized or at least respected by other states inside and outside of the region, especially by other regional powers;
• which is integrated in interregional and global forums and institutions where he articulates not only its own interests but acts as well, at least rudimentary, as a representative of regional interests.

On the other hand, scholars have earlier engaged the debate on leadership from several perspectives. While some provided idealistic view of leadership, others gave prescriptive approaches on what actually constitutes leadership. Essentially, people may disagree about the best process or pattern of achieving leadership. But what seems undisputable is the essence of leadership as an essential ingredient in the process of state-building vis-à-vis regional integration and development.

As Okadigbo, rightly observed leadership is the process through which one individual consistently exerts more influence than others in the pursuit of group behaviour (cited in Olegbenla 2007:100). Leadership should conform to basic fundamental qualities to be able to exert influence. These qualities tend to drive the action and inaction of a leader. Seteolu identifies six salient features of leadership with its theoretical underpinnings. According to him,

These include trait, behaviour, attribution, charismatic, transformational and visionary. The trait theory is associated with confidence, iron will, determination and decisiveness. The behavioural theory appraises the conduct specific leader exhibits such as initiatives, experimentation, generating and implementation of change. The attribution theory depicts the intelligence, personality, oratory virtue and aggressiveness of leaders. The charismatic theory shows leadership features such as self-confidence, vision, articulation, conviction and extraordinary behaviour. The transformational theory is tinged on the charisma, inspiration, intellectual stimulation, vision, pride, respect and thrust. The visionary leadership deals with the ability to explain and strengthen the vision through skill floral and written communication behavior (cited in Olegbenla 2007:101).

Following from the above, it is important to note that the emergence of an individual nation capable of providing acceptable collective mobilization for common wellbeing of the people in Africa is required for progress in Africa. As a matter of fact, this could be seen as a requisite condition for development in Africa especially when put into consideration recurring conflicts facing the continent. In many societies in Africa, politics tends to be conflictual which virtually constrained state active engagement of its external environment. Mostly, the practice in Africa has being that domestic ideologies of the state are being frequently hampered, in some cases personalized by the national leadership. In this view, Thomson (2000:5) observed that government in Africa today is far removed from Weber's model state, where politicians and bureaucrats clearly separate their private and public interests, and the 'national good' is served through neutral, legal/rational institutions. In fact, it could be argued that Africa appears to have failed in emulating Western form of governance. It is still unable to develop its pattern of governance or develop domestic template for leadership. For Abubakar (2004:153) one of the major problems of African political formations in the post-colonial period is the monopolization of the political space by the leadership in the name of nation-building and development.

Indeed, such desperations created internal hostile atmosphere and appears to have motivated little concern on regional or continental project.

The absence of a recognized and accepted strong Nation to chart the course of the continent and provide conscious leadership for regional development may have increase the magnitude of problems in Africa. As can be seen, most of the crises tend to be exacerbated by external influences and interferences, making the conflicts more complex than ever. For instance, it could be stated that NATO's intervention in Libya may have ended the crisis but inflicted massive damage on Libya. This is mainly because AU response was not adequate enough to ensure cease-fire by both sides. Obviously, the more critical question however is whether condemnation alone of Gadhafi's actions was adequate response to the threat that Libyan citizens faced from their own government (Tungwarara 2011:4). For him,

The situation warranted invocation of principle (h) under article 4 of the AU Constitutive Act which provides for "the right of the Union to intervene in a Member State pursuant to a decision of the Assembly in respect of grave circumstances, namely: war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity". Singular pursuit of a political solution to what had rapidly turned into a military situation did not demonstrate a commensurate response to the threat faced by Libyan citizens. There appears to have been a lack of coherence and effective coordination between the different institutions of the AU (Tungwarara 2011:4).

Essentially, it could be stated that if there is any fundamental lesson that Africa could learn from the recent Arab Spring in the North Africa, it is that of poverty of leadership in Africa. Achieving peace and development in Africa is a herculean task that demands the emergence of a strong nation to overseeing the cooperative good of all.

1.3 The AU Regional Challenges

The OAU, presently the AU since its formation in 1963 has engaged various peace initiatives in Africa. The establishment of the AU is necessitated by the need to promote regional co-operation, maintain peace and security and to ensure sustainable development. The AU framework is also consistent with the provisions of the United Nations charter.

According to article 51 [1] nothing in the present charter precludes the existence of regional arrangement or agencies for dealing with such matters relating to the maintenance of international peace and security as are appropriate for regional action, provided that such arrangement or agencies and their activities are consistent with the purposes and principles of the United Nation (see AU 2002 charter).

Since 1963, AU has placed restrictions on how member states involve or intervene on domestic state affairs, until in 2002 when the AU new deal opens a new chapter to allow AU intervene in situations of crisis, illegal or unlawful change of government etc. Nwosu (2005:231) posited that the AU provisions for intervention in internal affairs of member states as contained in the article (H) remains a major "structural revamping of some of the provisions of the OAU charter that rendered the organization so inefficient". Thus, contrary to belief that the AU new deal will ensure adequate security and sustainable peace in Africa, experiences since its ratification have proved otherwise. The AU seems unable to resolve crisis in Sudan, Somalia, Ivory Coast and Libya. The massive financial difficulties of the AU's mission in Darfur (AMIS II) and the resultant deterioration of the situation in the border region between Chad and Sudan have clearly shown how dependent Africa's organizations remain on the continuation of the international community's financial support (Franke, 2001:1). He further stated that the same operation could also serve to demonstrate the current insufficiencies of Africa's military capabilities and the fact that without the logistical assistance by EU and NATO, African troops would not have been able to deploy to Darfur.

Cases abound where intra-state crisis tend to overwhelm AU capacity. It is important to note that the Ivory Coast crisis could not have been sorted out if French former President, Nicolas Sarcozy did not want to massage French foreign policy ego and reaffirm their commitment and control over their former colonies in Africa. The Libya crisis dwarfed the AU and its peacemaking diplomacy and augmented the conflicting western interest that exacerbated the crisis which plunged the country into months of fratricidal war. These crises have continued to impact negatively and unabatedly retard development in Africa. This is because AU appears to lack outstanding force with overwhelming capacity to maintain peace and security in the region. In other words AU seems to be less proactive as regards to matters affecting the continent. In many cases it appears to lack adequate inward mechanisms to crisis resolution and peace enforcement.

As can be seen, the deep-rooted Anglophone and Francophone rivalry, dependency and suspicion among member states tends to have paved way for the Western countries to assume a major player status on issues affecting Africa.

1.4 Peace Building in Africa: The Nigerian Role in West Africa

Experiences on ending wars, conflicts and violent conflicts have shown that conflict does not always end until a completely fresh environment are built from the wrecks of the devastated society, to a state where everyone feels accepted, making the societies acceptable and feeling accepted in it (Nwanegbo and Odigbo, 2013b). It is a major practical step and planned efforts to transcend immediate political difficulties through technical collaboration designed to find solutions to common socio-economic, physical and environmental problems affecting the city" (UNDP, cited in Nwanegbo and Odigbo 2013b). In his view, David (1999:27) explains three basic steps in building peace. These according to him include:

The rehabilitation, reconstruction, and reconciliation of societies that have suffered the ravages; The creation of security – related, political and/or socioeconomic mechanisms needed to build trust between the parties and prevent the resumption of violence; An external (foreign) intervention (national multilateral or UN) to create conditions to peace (David 1999). It is important to note that peacekeeping and peacebuilding are both essential in getting rid of conflicts and subsequent management. In fact, quelling crisis is critical and necessary condition prior to building the peace. It generates platforms for erecting peaceful structures to build trust and confidence.

In this direction, Nigeria's exploits in the areas of peace keeping in Africa especially in the West African region remained highly commendable. After her involvement and assistance to MPLA's struggle for political power and control in Angola against the Western supported UNITA group, Nigeria relaunched herself again and aptly demonstrated leadership qualities in the formation and management of the ECOWAS cease-fire monitoring group (ECOMOG) in maintaining peace and stability in West African sub-region. The ECOMOG framework played a crucial role in resolving crisis in Liberia, Searia-Leone and partly the 2002 Ivory Coast crisis. This is not impossible given Nigeria's undiluted effort and commitment to regional peace and stability.

For instance, after the formation of ECOMOG outfit in 1990, of the 6000 troops needed, Nigeria contributed 5000 (84%), and between 1991 and 1993 when the ECOMOG troops rose to 12,000, Nigeria contributed the lion share of 10,000 troops amounting to about 80% of the number and in 1995,1996 1997 when the force standing was 8,000, 7,000 and 11,000 respectively, Nigeria correspondingly contributed 6,000, (75%) 6,000 (85%) and 9,000 (82%) troops (Ajayi 2004:205). Thus, according to Onuorah and Nwakpa, Nigeria as at 1999 had expended about 8 billion U.S dollars (759 billion Naira) on ECOMOG force (cited in Ajayi 2004:205). The huge sums of money and human resources injected into the ECOMOG force enhances the force capacity to achieve a measurable success in Liberia and the reinstatement of president Kabbah who was ousted by rebel forces in Sierra-Leone.

However, contrary to ECOMOG success in the West Africa sub-region under the tutelage of Nigerian soldiers, (Fernanda 2004; 15; Susanne 2003:4), have argued that fear of Nigeria's domination has restrained other member states from active involvement and participation in the force operations. ECOMOG peace engagement in Liberia generated tensions and division between the Francophone and Anglophone member states. The division obviously manifested sequel to the significant political, economic and military weight of Nigeria that had already increased the existing fears of regional hegemon (Fernanda 2004:15). The Nigerian military capacity dwarfed the combine military strength of the West African states and this serves as a major headache to member states and the problem of motive and operational strategy in Liberia deepened the problem of intervention agreement reached by ECOWAS.

Indeed, Nigeria's efforts and peace engagement in Africa and particularly in West Africa, since it declared Africa the center peace of her foreign policy, has not been accorded commensurate recognition. Arguably, these commitments have enhanced Nigeria's status in the global power matrix and as well position her as an important member of the global community especially within the context of maintaining regional peace in Africa.

1.4 Revival Years: Nigeria's Foreign Policy under Obasanjo (1999-2007)

Nigeria under Abacha's dictatorship struggled amidst international sanctions and was seen as a pariah state. Flagrant abuse and violation of human rights that culminated in the hanging of the environmentalist, Ken Saro-Wiwa attracted the wrath of the international community.

In 1999, when the country was returned to civil rule, President Obasanjo was saddled with lots of responsibility. First, among them is to stabilize the polity and return the country back to acceptability among the committee of nations. A task that seems tedious but arguably would initiate a platform for foreign investment and development. Beyond development issues, it would revive poor perception of the country and Nigerians in general.

On assumption of office in May 1999, Presidents Obasanjo embarked on foreign trips with a view to reviving Nigeria foreign policy and extricates the country from a recluse state. The administration engaged foreign creditors on the need to set aside Nigeria's debt. The advocacy on debt forgiveness was sustained till 2005 when the Paris Club announced the forgiveness of virtually half of the debt and rescheduling guidelines on how Nigeria would remit the balance. In the African continent, the Obasanjo government was contributive to the transformation of the OAU to African Union (Kolawole, 2004:263). The height of Nigeria's foreign policy success under Obasanjo was the successful hosting of the All African Games and the administration's insistence on democratic governance in Africa. For instance, the Obasanjo government contributed to the reversal of military coup that took place in Sao Tome and Principe in 2003 in which, President Frederique de Menezes was ousted in a coup detat while attending Leon Sullivan Summit in Nigeria.

Within eight years of active engagement on global issues and particularly West African sub-region, Obasanjo's led administration revived Nigeria foreign policy posture from isolated state to a universal acceptability. However, in spite of these giant strides in refocusing Nigeria foreign relations, the decision of the administration to grant political asylum to the former Liberian president Charles Taylor generated serious controversy and questioned the rationale of accommodating Taylor against popular agitations.

1.5 Years of Stagnation: Nigeria's Foreign Policy under Yar Adua (2007-2010)

Nigeria under the leadership of Obasanjo blossomed in the international arena. The country plays a pivotal role in peace keeping and democratization process in Africa. This automatically earned her huge and towering influence in Africa. The emergence of Yar Adua administration tends to have stultified this ever increasing growth of Nigeria's influence.

Nigeria's foreign relations under president Yar Adua could be described as most unattractive period in the history of Nigeria. Adeniyi (2011:132) argued that it was a when Nigeria's seat in the international arena was mostly empty due to the illness of the president which compelled him to travel less. This coincided with an era faced with the need for a holistic reappraisal of the Nation's foreign policy objectives.

In light of this, the former foreign affairs minister, Ojo Mmaduekwe advocated "diplomacy of consequence" that will be citizen-centred, in which reciprocity will be the guiding principle for external relations (Punch newspaper 30, 2008). Thus, under the citizen diplomacy experiment, Nigeria's capacity to protecting her citizens from external and domestic unjust treatment appears to have increasingly diminished. Both at home and in diaspora, Nigerians struggle for survival with little or no attention to better the lots of people. Security system in Nigeria appears to have deteriorated. As can be seen, police brutality has become a norm in Nigeria. For instance, Elechi (2003:6) stated that at least 225 criminal suspects had been shot dead between March and June 2002 while in 2000, the Police reported killing 509 persons and injuring 113 in pursuit of robbers in Lagos state alone. In fact, hundreds are gruesomely murdered in Nigeria and abroad.

It appears that governments in Nigeria do not value the citizens, they seem to exist like institutions on their own, some oblivious of people's need. It is important to note that citizenship diplomacy approach devoid of concrete strategy that would prioritize citizen welfare may not adequately address the pressing challenges. Dickson (2010:1) argues that the adoption of citizen diplomacy by the Federal Government does not seem to have changed the poor perception about Nigeria because of the inability of Nigeria's leadership to clearly define her national interest.

As part of the measures to respond to these challenges, President Yar Adua underscored the need to reinvigorating Nigeria's foreign policy process. He argued that:

"sustaining Nigeria's involvement in peace making and peace keeping in troubled and conflict areas of our continent, advancing Nigeria's and Africa's role and stature in the UN and other international organizations and promoting co-operation with the West African region and affecting productive collaboration with our neighbours in the Gulf of Guinea are our immediate foreign policy challenges"(NBF topics: 2009).

Arguably, the administration seems incapable of furthering this interest or engaging a holistic directional change. In fact, it appears that there is a need for a clear-cut departure from the hitherto Afrocentric policy that has a monumental cost on the country, especially in terms of human and material resources which has bestowed little or no gain to Nigeria. While peace engagement appears essentially desideratum, the need to chart a new course towards reducing unbearable financial burden and undue flamboyancy that Nigeria faces during peace engagements must be emphasized. This is because economic diplomacy is the bedrock for vibrant and sustainable foreign policy, capable of containing new emerging foreign policy challenges (see Newswatch 30 May 2011, Ajayi, 2004: 209).

However, in spite of its docility the administration was able to navigate through two major challenges. First, is Yar Adua's insistence that the United States African Command would not be relocated to African shores from Germany at the displeasure of the USA and the receiver of Dalai Lama in Nigeria against the wish of China (also see Adeniyi, 2011). It is important to note that in spite of expression of intention to change strategies and refocus external relation modalities, Nigeria's foreign policy under President Yar Adua was docile, stagnant and devoid of persuasive effort to attract global respect.

1.6 Setbacks to Nigeria's Regional Aspirations

The internal dynamics and socio-economic conditions of a state to a greater extent determine the actualization of her external policy agenda. Nigeria has over the years grappled to surmount domestic hindrances to assume regional leadership. Evidently, internal pressures arising from quest for political power by classes, regions and zones tend to have depreciated the relevance of national identity and national unity in Nigeria. Post- independent Nigeria has remained a dysfunctional state. People languish in abject poverty and unemployment amidst plenty resource endowment. The political leaders seem to have failed to explore options to develop strong democratic institutions to enthrone good governance. Institutions with values would assist galvanize available human and material resources to create wealth for public good. In other words corruption, bad leadership climaxed in democratic governance that preaches zero tolerance for corruption with the two anti-craft agencies (EFCC and ICPC) struggling to make a mark. For instance, a former speaker of the House of Representatives was severally accused of financial mismanagement.

Among the series of alleged financial scandals was that the speaker's unilaterally obtaining 10 billion Naira loan from a commercial bank without the knowledge or approval of the House (Nation newspaper 24 may, 2011). Also, the #255 million armored vehicles purchased for the minister of Aviation has cast serious doubt on the willingness of Jonathan's administration to fight corruption.

Paradoxically, political leaders in Nigeria flamboyantly display affluence in a country where majority live below a dollar per day. Over ten million Nigerians were unemployed by March 2009 and unemployment is running at around 19.7 percent on average according to Aganga the former minister of finance (see National Bureau of Statistics report 2009). This figure is augmenting yearly with less realistic effort to abate the rampaging unemployment problem. For instance, Ladan (2012:4) posited that unemployment has risen to 23.9% in 2011 with the youths constituting over 75%. These multitudes of unemployed youths constitute internal threat to national peace and security. In fact, unemployment has the potency of binding people with one perception. It could also give a notion for identity. These perceptions and identity tend to work against the state especially when it appears that the state is responsible. Its immediate but grave consequences are un-relented armed struggle, civil unrest and militancy. For example, Niger Delta crisis and youth restiveness which have been attributed to long years of neglect, lack of development and accumulated grievances (see International Crisis Group 2007; Asuni 2009) contributed to drop in oil production between 2000 to 2007 and affected the economy that is driven by oil proceeds. Presently, Boko Haram's kamikaze attacks on defenseless innocent citizens develop yet another internal security challenge. These crises to a greater extent are not unconnected to unemployment problems, inordinate ambition of some ruling elites and inability of the ruling class to tackle the development challenges confronting the Nigerian state over the years. These are symptoms of leadership failure.

Indeed, Collier (2009: 3) argued that elections are institutional technology of democracy that has the potentials to make government both more accountable and more legitimate, and should sound the death knell to political violence. The 2011 general elections in Nigeria was adjudged the freest and fairest election in the annals of Nigeria's history but the orgy of violence that accompanied the election outcomes in some states in Northern Nigeria remains unimaginable. Lives and property worth millions of Naira were destroyed in unprovoked election violence. Since then the North, specifically the North East is still under security threat.

It is important to assert that political violence seems to have remained one of the variants of power struggle in Nigeria. Consequently, it appears to have diminished the country's political relevance in a contemporary world that views violence as barbaric and primitive. For Collier (2009:9) political violence is not just a curse for the societies in which it occurs it is an international public bad. The political violence in Northern Nigeria raises another fundamental question on how people conceive leadership and the essence of governance in Nigeria.

Thus, in spite of her population, in spite her abundant human and material resource endowment, domestic pressure, political unrest, structural inadequacies and lack of visionary leadership have hampered preponderant opportunity towards regional leadership. The fundamental mistake of Nigeria's approach to state building has been to forget that well-functioning states are built not just on shared interest but on shared identity, shared identity does not grow out of the soil, it is politically constructed and is the task of political leadership to forge it, (Collier, 2009:9). Unfortunately, leadership is a big challenge in Nigeria (see Okunade, 2008; Achebe, 1983). Bad leadership has hugely contributed to gross underutilization of Nigeria's potentials towards achieving her regional aspirations in Africa. This has created avenue for other emerging regional powers from Southern and Northern Africa (especially South Africa and Egypt) to remain in contention on who leads Africa.

1.7 Conclusion

From the analysis, it is our view that the emergence of a regional hegemon would help achieve peace and development in Africa. We looked at Nigeria's overwhelming capacity in conflict management in Africa which appears to have brightened her hegemonic ambition. Its efforts and contributions towards regional peace, its enormous human and material resource endowment, its experience and military strength in conflict management (especially in West African sub-region under the auspices of ECOMOG) have given her an edge over other state rivalries as regards to regional leadership. The work concludes that a strong state assuming leadership position in Africa will assist to tackle incessant intra-state and inter-state conflicts that engulfed the continent in her post colonial era, having looked at the constrains of the AU and the Nigeria's exploits in the ECOWAS sub region.

Undoubtedly, Nigeria has sacrificed a lot comparatively to other African States, in terms of peace keeping, military training and technical assistance to other African states but her aspirations and claims to regional leadership cannot be achieved unless she addresses domestic challenges that bordered on bad governance, poor infrastructure, insecurity and official corruption which have crippled domestic governance and hindered her ascendancy to regional leadership in Africa since independence. For Nigeria to ascend leadership position in Africa, it must enthrone good governance. This would develop democratic institutions capable of tackling numerous development challenges confronting Nigeria. It would also help to entrench democratic culture and reduce abuses of public office and systemic corruption that have hampered progress over the years.

References

Abubakar D. (2004), "Leadership and the Challenges of Rebuilding a Nation" in A. A Agbaje, L. Diamond and E. Onwudiwe, Nigeria's Struggle for Democracy and Governance. A Festschrift for Oyeleye Oyediran: Ibadan University Press.

Adeniyi O. (2011), Power, Politics and Death. A Front-row Account of Nigeria Under the Late President Yar Adua. Lagos: Kachfo Limited.

Achebe, C. (1983), The Trouble with Nigeria. Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers Ltd.

Ajayi, K. (2004), Power Politics: Nigeria and Peace Keeping in the West African Sub-Region in Kolawole D. (eds) Nigeria's Foreign Policy since Independence: Trends, Phases and Changes. Ibadan: Johnmof Printers Ltd.

Asuni, B. (2009), Understanding the Armed Groups of the Niger Delta. New York: Council on

Foreign Relations. pp.215-219.

Collier, P. (2009), Wars, Guns and Votes, Democracy in Dangerous Places. New York: Harpercollins Publishers.

David, C.P. (1999). "Does peace building build peace?" In Security Dialogue; Volume 30, No. 1, March 1999. London. Sage Publication.

Dickson, M. (2010), Citizen Diplomacy in President Umaru Musa Yar Adua's Nigeria, 2007-2009: An Assesment. International Journal of Politics and Good Governance: volume 1, No. 1.3 Quarter 111.

Elechi O. (2003), Extra-Judicial Killing in Nigeria: The Case of Afikpo Town. Being a paper for Presented at the 17th International Society for the Reform of Criminal Law. Hague: August 24-28.

Fernanda, F. (2004), Security Management in Sub-Saharan African. The Role of the European Union. Paris: Institute for Security Studies.

International Crisis Group (2007), Nigeria: Ending Unrest in the Niger-Delta. Africa Report No 135.

Kegley, W.C. (2006), World Politics: Trend and Transformation. South Carolina: Wadworth.

Keohane, M. (1980), "The Theory of Hegemonic and Change in International Economic Regimes, 1967-1977" in O. R Holsti, R.M Siverson, A. L. George (eds) Change in the International System. Boulder: Co Westview Press.

Keohane, R. O. (1969), Lilliputians' Dilemmas: Small States in International Politics, in: International Organization 23:2 (Spring), p. 291-310.

Kolawole, D. (2004), From Isolation to Globalization: The Transformation of Nigeria's Foreign Policy Under the Obasanjo Administration, in Kolawole, D. (ed) Nigeria's Foreign Policy Since Independence: Trends, Phases and Changes. Lagos: Julius and Julius Associates.

Ladan, T. (2012), The Functioning of the Local Government System in a Federalist Constitution: Controversies, Comparisons and Consensus. A Paper Presented at the 13th Anniversary and Extraordinary General Assembly National Conference on Rediscovering the Nigerian Local Government System in the Emerging Constitution: Enugu. November, 28.

Landsberg, C. (2007), South Africa, the Pivotal State in Habib .A. and Landsberg .C. (ed) Hegemon or Pivotal?, Debating South Africa's Role in Africa. Johannesburg: Centre for Policy Studies.

Mingst, K. (1999) Essentials of International Relations. New York: WW Norton and company, Inc.

Nolte, D. (2007), How to Compare Regional Powers: Analytical Concepts and Research Topics. Hamburg: German Institute of Global and Area Studies

Nuamah, R. (2003), Nigeria's Foreign Policy after the Cold War. Domestic, Regional and External Influences. United Kingdom: International Peace Academy, Oxford.

Nwanegbo J. and Odigbo J (2012), Appraisal of the Arab Spring and Democratization Project in North Africa. Journal of Peace and Development Studies Vol. (1) No 1 pg 130-140.

Nwanegbo J. and Odigbo J (2013b), Post-Independence Peacebuilding in South Sudan: Looking Beyond Ephemeral Peace. International Journal of Social Science Tomorrow Vol. (2) No 1 pg 1-10.

Nwosu, C.O. (2005), The African Union and the Challenge of Crisis Management: The Case of Togo in Okereke O. (ed) Issues in African Politics.

Okunade, B. (2008), Leadership: The Big Challenge. An Inaugural Lecture Delivered at the University of Ibadan, November 6th.

Olegbenla D. (2007), Leadership, Governance and Corruption in Nigeria. Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa. Vol. (9) No 3 pg 97-118.

Rouke J.T (2007), International Politics on the World Stage. New York: Mc Graw Hill Companies.

Susanne, E. (2003), Assessment of the U.S. Peace Keeping in West Africa :Is it on the Road to Stability? A Thesis Presented to the Faculty of the U.S Army Command and General Staff College. Seattle: Seattle University.

Thomson A. (2000), An Introduction to African Politics. London: Routledge.

Tungwarara O. (2011), The Arab Spring and the AU Response. Open Society Institute.

Wight, M. (1978), Power Politics, in, Hedley Bull et al., (eds), London, Royal Institute of International Affairs.

The Nation Newspaper 24 May, 2011.

N. B. F Topics 17 April, 2009.

Newswatch Magazine 30 May, 2011.

Punch Newspaper 30 September, 2008