

NIGERIA AND FRANCE RELATIONS IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM: ECHOES FROM HISTORY

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Abstract

The paper did set out to examine Nigeria – France relations from its inception up to the new millennium and the lessons herein for African policy managers. By the reasons of the colonialism and imperialism, World War II, and the changing global political and economic dynamics, France had been effectively positioned for involvements in the Africa. The interference and involvement in Africa is traceable to the Berlin conference of 1884 -85 where modalities for carving up of the African continent was done. In other words, the European colonial project in Africa did principally accounts or marks the beginning of France’s relations with Africa. This European colonial project in Africa was primarily design to “inferiorize” the Africans and Africa, in order to position the continent for the taking – economically, socially and politically. But the snag in France’s foreign policy projections in post-colonial Africa, especially, in the sub-region of West Africa where Nigeria holds sway, the pendulum of relationship had continually swung between “friendship” and “foe” or rivalry and enemy, and reactionary and proactive, thus the question - why the continued to and fro swing of relationship between the two states. Other additional questions includes why and what reason(s) underpinnings this froze relationships. The attempt at proffering answers to the questions raised necessitated the reconsideration thus the recommendations canvassed herein.

Keywords: Geo-politics, Geo-strategic Agenda, Colonialism, Imperialism, International System.

I. Introduction

Since the British edging out France in the colonial contest for Nigeria, the French had not hidden their intent of caging the country - socially, politically and economic. Because of this intent, France had designed her geo-strategic agenda(s) especially as it concerns West Africa sub-region by retaining political, social and economic influences in all its former colonies in the region with the prime motive of curbing the hegemonic presence of Nigeria. This motive was encapsulated in the policy of “La francophonie” that was to promote and enhance French culture and language in the region. The projection of this policy by France in the sub West African region had resulted in the clash of interest between France and Nigeria, thus, the rancorous and froze relationship between the two. To scholars like Renou (2002), Nwokedi (1996) and Ravenhill (1985) they equated France’s traditional African policy projection to the Monroe doctrine of the united states of America, with a caveat that though both doctrine might be different in purpose, they are justify by reasons of geography and history - the exclusive control by France and the united states of America of what they consider their private backyard(arrire - cours). This posture of France became manifest and reflected in a number French phrases and expressions used in describing francophone Africa countries, such as “domaine reserve”(private matter), chasse – garde (exclusive hunting ground) or pre – carre(natural preserve) that connotes the “backyard” being “off limit” or out of bounds to other countries. It is within this purview and posture of France in the West African sub region that Nigeria and France relations can best be understood.

The French Policy Projections in Africa

Africa, to french policy makers and managers is considered and seen as a footstool. Like already stated, the premise of this thinking stemmed from one of the core tenets of colonialism in Africa – inferiorize, dominate and exploit the Africans. The trust of France’s foreign policy projections in Africa did necessitate a salient question which is – how

important is Africa to France's global image? In attempting to answer the question necessitated Renou (2002) declaring inter alia that the foreign policy objectives of France that hitherto made Africa important can be encapsulated and categorized under three headings (1) maintain an international status, independent of America and the soviet(Russia) influences (2) securing a permanent access to strategic resources and (3) benefitting from a monopolistic situation. From Renou (2002) viewpoint the inter play of these underpins was accelerated by the fast changing global dynamics in politics and economics. From the end of the Second World War and the consequent emergence of the United States of America and the defunct Soviet Union at the helm of global politics left France and Britain leaking their wounds. Faced with diminutive and diminishing international status due to collapsed of colonial enterprise under the auspices of the mantra of the united states of America – the right of colonial people to self-determination, the French policy makers and managers deemed it fit to develop a policy intended at retaining the exclusiveness which France had enjoyed in francophone Africa during the colonial time. The system of close or special relationships according to Renou (2002) was seen as an opportunity not only to remain influential on the African continent, but also to enhance the world status of France in the specific context of the ideological wars (imperialism) from the two powers - United States and Soviet Union. Again, another salient point to note in the analysis of Renou (2002) was the acknowledgement by African leaders of the potential “treat” of communism and the Soviet Union in the post-world war II world. Whatever these treats were in the perceptions of African leaders might be, it was not far from what kwame Nkrumah rightly tagged neo – colonialism. With France feeling had done by the changing global dynamics of politics, she felt the urgency of maintaining her status which has direct correlation to the subjugation and exploitation of Africans. The exploitation of Africans by France became manifest with the statistical revelations of Renou (2002) showing France's reliance on Africa's mineral imports -100% uranium on Gabon, Niger, South Africa,90% of bauxite on guinea,76% of manganese on Gabon, south Africa, and 59% for cobalt. The import of this reliance on Africa's mineral imports is that whatsoever that threatens the privilege position of France in these countries and other countries considered as the “backyard” of France was considered a threat to the national interest of France. The “alculturization” efforts of France in Africa created or gave birth to conditions necessary for the emergence of the institutional framework and policy known as “la francophone”. By 1995, 49 countries in the world with an estimated population of more than 450 million inhabitants had amongst them more than 200 million French speaking inhabitants. Nowhere else in the world has “la francophone” taken roots as in Africa. Aside its cultural underpinnings and achievements in the West African sub region, “la francophone” at the operational level of society is; a negotiated transition to independence; mafia style relationships between heads of states and governments; permanent military control; and the preservation of markets for French companies. From the standpoint of the projections of France's foreign policy into Africa that is premised on “inferiorizing” the Africans and their states, it was only a matter of time for a clash with those of independent states of Africa. By reason of history, geographical size, location and population, the Nigerian state was positioned for a confrontation with French (France) foreign policy foray into the West Africa sub region.

Nigeria and France Relations

Nigeria's and France's relations date back to the colonial period -scramble for African territories (1884 - 85). The scramble for African territories as licensed by the Berlin conference clearly shows the vulnerability of African states within the global system, as they were been incorporated into the global system as collectives of inferior states. African states were “balkanized” and “carved” into states at the whims and caprices of European powers that were involved in the scramble and colonial project – Germany, France, Portugal and Britain. The historical and sociological moments of the time made the acquisition of

territories/colonies overseas a thing of national “honour” and “prestige”. In West Africa, it was straight contest between Portugal France, Britain and Germany. It was in this vein that Crowther (1978) note thus;

...Between 1885 and 1906 most of what is now described geographically as west Africa was formally occupied by four European powers: Britain, France, Germany and Portugal from it they created a series of colonies all but one of which, Portuguese guinea have today become independent states: Mauritania, Senegal, Mali, Guinea, Niger, Ivory Coast, Upper Volta, Dahlonaga, Togo, Port Guinea Nigeria Ghana, Gambia and Sierra-Leone. The greater part of this area was occupied force of arms and where occupation was peaceful it was usually because African leaders having seen the success with which European led forces overcame their neighbours, decided resistance would be futile...

Though Portuguese Guinea later gained independence just like all other West African States, but the salient point to note here is the fact that Nigeria gained independence in 1960 and became a republic in 1963. Again, as already noted the changing dynamics of global politics from 1945 till date had left France’s ego bruise. The dominant position France enjoyed had been greatly eroded and waned by emerging powers like the United States of America and the Soviet Union. In continental Europe, the recent emergence of united Germany had further weakened and changed the dynamics of European politics at the detriment of France. United Germany is pushing to be first among equals (numero uno) in Europe. In the current European Union, united Germany controls an estimated 22% to 25% of the E.U’s trade, while leaving the remaining 75% for the rest of the countries in the E.U to share. Premised on the rapid changing dynamics of global politics and economics, it became apparent that France needs a change of strategy to stay relevant in the global scheme of things. The new strategy adopted by French policy makers was the development of “la francophone” that targeted how France would remain relevant in the consciousness of her former colonies – socially, politically and economically. The interpretations and manifestations of the policy foray of “la francophone” and France in the West African sub region is what had reconfigured in the desire of France in curbing the rising power and influence of Nigeria. This desire of France is what is at the heart of the rancorous and cagey relationship between France and Nigeria, as all immediate neighbours of Nigeria that were colonized by France became ready tool and pond in the chess game France toward Nigeria. In other words, the cantankerous relationship of France and Nigeria had enveloped Nigeria’s immediate neighbours that are predominately francophone countries. The rancorous relations between Nigeria and France are predicated on geo- politics and economics. The role of geo-politics in the relationship is what Ate (1992) captured in the following words:

The problem of Nigeria and its immediate neighbours is, however, far more profound than is conveyed... for it touches on issues that are fundamental, being structurally related to the pattern of African territorial politics, East-West security politics in the cold war, French hegemonic presence, and indeed to the dependent development strategy adopted by African states in post-colonial era.

Aside the issues of geo-politics, Ate (1998) did raise other salient issues – Africa’s development “problematique” and Africa’s territorial politics in order to broaden the scope of his arguments and analysis. What Ate (1998) did inadvertently was to envelope Nigeria and France relations within the larger framework of Africa’s development and underdevelopment “problematique”. Akinterinwa (2005) gain impetus from an earlier analysis and work of Ate (1998) to argue thus that France is an important country to Nigeria and that France is Nigeria’s sixth neighbor based on the principle of “contiguity” and “propinquity”. Akinterinwa (2005) further noted:

The relations between Nigeria and France have been difficult and interesting, friendly and hostile, vertical in nature and characterized by pledges to lay stronger foundations for a better entitle between the two countries... and asked the following questions: To what extent can Nigeria and France further come closer to one another in the near future? Within the framework of ECOWAS and the African Union for Nigeria and within the

framework of the European Union for France, to what extent can both countries foster better cooperation?

From the logic of Akinterinwa (2005), the cagey relationship or the to and fro relationship can be made to be of mutual benefit and cooperation to both countries, with the carpeting of “negative” geo strategic agendas. The simple acknowledgement of geo strategic agendas and politics by Ate’s (1998) meant his contextualizing and categorizing Nigeria and France relationship under two headings – (i) independent French policy towards Africa (ii) French involvement in Africa in the context of collective western strategy and interest, coordinate through NATO and the European Union. The crux of the matter in the perception(s) of both Ate (1998) and Akinterinwa (2005) is that the back and forth movement of relations between Nigeria and France is premised on the foundation of “superiority and inferiority” and “master” and “servant” relationship. Though France is far off (Europe), the operators of the Nigerian state had failed to take into cognizance the principles of “contiguity” and “propinquity” as an important factor in her determining the thrust of relations with France. The neglect and non-appreciation of these principles according to Akinterinwa and Akindele (1998) was principally responsible for the cagey Nigeria’s relations with her immediate neighbours, especially, those neighbouring states perceived to be weaker militarily vis-a-vis Nigeria. Nigeria’s immediate neighbours are Benin, Niger, Chad, Cameroon, and Equatorial Guinea (neighbours defined by contiguity). But the salient point to note here is that in 1933 when President Roosevelt of the United States decided to improve relations with Cuba by abrogating the Platt Amendment pact of 1901, and through the abrogation of the pact, she did inadvertently bring Cuba under American political economic and military domination and sphere, thus, ideology becoming criteria for defining who a neighbour’s (geo-politics and strategic agenda). It is in this vein that Akinterinwa and Akindele (1998) noted that the notion of a neighbor can best be explained within the context of geographical, historical and ideological ties especially as exemplified by the case of America, France and Germany. Akindele and Akinterinwa (1998) noted thus that:

Without doubt, territorial contiguity and territorial propinquity pose enormous problems for the conduct and management of intra-group inter-community, interethnic and international relations. These problems need to be addressed, not only because they raise tantalizing challenges for scholarship and policy making in international relations, but also because they can constitute major obstacles to the realization of sub-regional security, in spite of their merits.

In relations to the problems identified by Akindele and Akinterinwa especially when cognizance is extended to the West Africa sub-region, one comes to term with certain indisputable facts that the West Africa sub-region houses nine Francophone countries, five Anglophone and two Lusophone states. By the reasons of these countries being in the West African sub-region of Africa, they are recognized and considered important circle in Nigeria’s external relations and France. Again, Akindele and Akinterinwa gave reasons for the importance of these states to Nigeria external relations as follows (1) consideration of west Africa as a potential market (2) belief in a strong and United West Africa enhancing Nigeria’s leadership status (3) United West Africa cannot be easily wished away in the global area. Against these backdrops of the importance of Nigeria’s neighbours to her external relations, Issues raised by the paper are the problems associated with the concept “propinquity”, “international boundaries” and competing imperial agendas specifically France and Britain. Simply put, all of these problems can be encapsulated under the problems “geo-politics” and “geo-strategic agendas”. Be that as it may, these problems can best be understood and effectively situated from the lens of history.

The Patchy Relationship between France and Nigeria: Echoes from History

The overthrow of colonial yoke by Nigeria in the 1960 ushered her into the global system as a player, with the listed been the foreign policy objectives of the Nigerian state (i) protection of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Nigerian state (ii) promotion of

socio-economic wellbeing of Nigerians (iii) enhancing Nigeria's image and status in the world state (iv) respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of other states (v) noninterference. In the internal affairs of other states (vi) promotion of the Unity and solidarity of African states (viii) total political, economic, social and cultural emancipation and rejuvenation of Africa (viii) an unflinching commitment to the elimination of apartheid and racism (ix) emancipation of countries still under colonial as well as the removal of remaining vestiges of colonialism in Africa (x) promoting international cooperation conducive to world peace and security.

These foreign policy objectives cut across the analysis of Ojo (1990), Fawole (2003), Chibundu (2009), Bukarambe (2000), Ate (2000) and Akindele (2005). The projection of these foreign policy objectives of the Nigerian state in the global system meant path crossing and conflict with those of other countries, especially, France by reason of "contiguity" and propinquity (geo-politics and geo-strategic agenda). Akindele (2005) did attempt helping the paper by positing that:

France has a policy on Africa and this policy attitude is quite different from the policy attitude vis-à-vis Nigeria. While the policy attitude towards other countries, especially the francophone, is largely predicated on colonial linkages that of Nigeria is based on geo-political considerations.

These geo-political considerations are intricately woven around the historical experiences and geo-strategic considerations (agenda) of France. It is these geo-strategic agendas and considerations are what Charles de Gaulle quoted in Ate (1992) echoed when he stated that in (1994) that French civilization – would prevail in Africa because it brought with it two previous boons: respect for the human personality and material welfare. This typical messianic rationalization of French values and superiority best explains the continued French intervention in West Africa through Nigeria's contiguous neighbours that were ex-colonies of France. If the analysis of Ate (1992) was not explicit enough, Akinterinwa (2005) did go a step further by noting inter alia that since the adoption of the October 4, 1958 constitution that established the fifth republic, all known French leaders particularly Mitterrand and Charles de Gaulle had continually seen Africa as an instrument for attaining France's foreign policy objectives of a "great power" and "grandeur", thus Mitterrand's declaration that "without Africa, there will not be a history of France in the 21st century". In marrying the positions and perceptions of Akinterinwa (2005) and Ate (1992) on French policy in Africa, certain glaring facts comes to the fore and these facts are (i) France deals with Africa from a position of superiority (ii) considers Africa as market (iii) footstool for repair of her waning global image (iv) to "inferiorize" the Africans and to continually tie African states, especially ex- colonies to apron string of French economy. The emergence of Nigeria as a regional hegemonic or power block in the West Africa sub-region did not go unnoticed by France, thus the clandestine and proxy facts and politics been deployed by France to curtail Nigeria's rise. Part of these clandestine and proxy tactics became manifest in 1975 when France played the proverbial "hand of Esau" in an attempt to jeopardize Nigeria's effort at spearheading the move for the formation ECOWAS. To the French, the ECOWAS formation and efforts meant a bigger and wider umbrella for "Pax Nigeriana" and this should be contained. The 2000 judgment of the international court of Justice in the case between Nigeria and Cameroon concerning the maritime and continental boundaries also gave credence to containing "Pax Nigeriana". The genesis of this case lies within the purview of the usage treaties as an instrument of penetration and occupation of African territories during the period colonialism and imperialism. The sore point of this case concerns the Bakassi peninsula that was peopled by the Efiks of Nigeria. The (ICJ) court in his judgement ceded the right of sovereignty to Bakassi to Cameroon on the premise of the Anglo-German treaty of 1913. Nigeria as a state was born in 1914, thus the question - can a state give what she does not have, or can a people exist without a land. All of these questions cast a great aspersion on France-Nigeria relations. Cameroon's colonial master (France) was the hand of "biblical Esau" in this case. Herein are the noticeable "coincidences" in the case – Obasanjo

announced to the world that (i) Nigeria would accept the adjudication of ICJ on this matter in Paris, after a meeting with the French prime minister (ii) the President of the court was a French citizen and Jurist (iii) France never hid her interest in this case. Though the Nigeria state through a combination factors – local and international – robbed Nigeria of victory in the case, but the salient fact to note is that France was the “hand of the biblical Esau in the pot” (Dienye, 2005). Another case in point was the Laurent Gbagbo and Allasane Quattara case. Though, Nigeria opted for a peaceful resolution of the crisis through the already agreed and existing ECOWAS framework but France had other means and thoughts concerning the crisis in mind. The French storm Cote d’Ivoire and arrested Gbagbo. The kernel of this case is that France knew Gbagbo was angling in on the “security pact” she had with all Francophone countries. The security pact tied all former French colonies economically, politically and socially to the apron string of France and allowing Gbagbo to continued, would have amounted to jeopardizing France’s interest in the region and enhancing Nigeria’s status and “Pax Nigeriana”.

II. Conclusion

The new millennium is presenting Africa and France new challenges that include the rising anti French sentiments sweeping across Africa especially in the West African sub region. Some former colonies of France are jettisoning France and severing ties with France. Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger have did led the way in severing all ties with France as these west African states had referenced how the destructive policies of France had made poverty legendary in their various states. All of these states are now reassessing their realities in the new millennium which become an imperative for African states.

Though the back and forth relationship between both countries had robbed Nigeria-France of mutual benefits but yet Nigeria cannot wish away the realities of her historical moments of being colonized and rape, just like her neighbours that were colonized by France . During the colonial era; an era that started, caused and programme African states to be “recipient” of “history” had not wane in post-colonial and modern periods. Though, certain sociological and historical realities had changed over time, the core mandate of colonialism and neo colonialism remain same, thus, the simple question to the protagonist of co-operation “can a leopard lose its spot”. If no then Nigeria needs to “dine with France with a long spoon”. Again, it has become imperative that this paper concludes with the thoughts of Cooper quoted in Mbeki (2012) who noted thus:

How should we deal with the pre-modern chaos as manifested in various areas of the world? What form should intervention take? The most logical way to deal with chaos and the one most employed in the past is colonization. But colonization is unacceptable to postmodern states... it is precisely because of the death of imperialism that we are seeing the emergence of pre-modern world... all the conditions for imperialism are there, but both the supply and demand for imperialism have dried up. And yet the weak still need the strong and the strong still need and orderly world. A world in which the efficient and well governed export stability and liberty and which is open for investment and growth. What is needed then is a new kind of imperialism, one acceptable to a world of human rights and cosmopolitan value.

The echoes of history demand that Policy makers and managers of the Nigerian state must start seeing through the policies of France in Africa and West African sub-region, thus, fashioning out an adequate and effective response.

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