

Book Review

Gulliver's Troubles: Nigeria's Foreign Policy after the Cold War

Adebajo, Adekeye & Mustapha, Abdul Raufu (eds) 2008

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Reviewed by Garth le Pere *

This elegant book covers an expansive thematic mosaic. Its sixteen chapters provide incisive analytical coverage, conceptual insights and empirical richness, pointing to the factors and imperatives which have shaped Nigeria's foreign policy since the end of the Cold War. That it succeeds so admirably is a tribute to the editors and well-chosen authors. Each chapter helps to impose order on this complex mosaic.

Nigeria is no ordinary country: it is Africa's most populous and its third largest economy. Its polity experiences ongoing fragility and its democratic base is rather tenuous, yet it exercises tremendous power and influence in its sub-region, in Africa and on the global stage. It is the sixth largest oil exporter in the world, yet the scourge of poverty

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and underdevelopment afflicts the majority of its 130 million people and this has been exacerbated by perennial bad governance and debilitating corruption. In its 48 years of independence, the country has had a chequered political history, punctuated by seven military regimes and failed attempts at forging a calculus of democracy. The country's citizens have acquired a dubious reputation for ingenuity in creating niches in the global criminal underworld. Thus it is hardly surprising if, in the words of its former foreign minister Ibrahim Gambari, the country '...has teetered between confidence and conflict, and between exuberance and exhaustion'.

This backdrop frames the historical and contemporary issues that have informed and animated Nigeria's conduct in African and global affairs. There is an excellent introduction by Adekeye Adebajo. His teasing polemic sets the normative mood for the book: 'Over its nearly 50 years of independence, Nigeria has been reduced to a giant with clay feet'. How the giant has performed is defined by three concentric circles which also provide the book's explanatory and organisational framework: the domestic, regional, and external. In the domestic context, five chapters present different dimensions of Nigerian politics that have been consequential for its foreign policy conduct. Abdul Raufu Mustapha's chapter examines how the country's 'fractured' nationhood, its social cleavages and troubled identity have negatively shaped and influenced its foreign relations. This is nicely complemented by Ibrahim Gambari's reflective chapter on major historical turning points in Nigeria's domestic politics and the evolution of theory and practice in its foreign policy. The other chapters are equally instructive in chronicling the politics of the foreign service and the making of the Nigerian diplomat in a country with over 250 ethnic groups; the interface between security prerogatives and foreign policy, especially the prominent role of the military and the emergence of ethnic militias; and the way in which oil wealth has created pathologies of inequality, exploitation and repression that bring Shell

and political elites into direct confrontation with restive minorities of the Niger Delta.

The regional narrative is captured by four finely nuanced chapters that locate Nigeria's foreign relations in its African neighbourhood. In this regard, Akinjide Osuntokun's chapter is especially relevant in its treatment of how the differing colonial progenies – British, French, Spanish and Portuguese – have influenced Nigeria's regional outlook. Regionalism comes under the spotlight in Kate Meagher's perceptive chapter on informal economic networks, with Nigeria providing much of the gravitational pull for informal trade. This, however, has its own foreign policy challenges as far as formal trade and monetary integration regimes are concerned. An equally absorbing chapter is Adebajo's careful deconstruction of Nigeria's attempt to bring and maintain peace in Liberia and Sierra Leone, highlighting what he calls 'the myths and realities of Pax Nigeriana'. The strategic-political interface between Nigeria and South Africa is brought to life by Chris Landsberg through the prism of the countries' collaboration in putting together the new architectures of the African Union (AU) and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD).

Nigeria's independence in 1960 was the pivotal moment which defined its international role. As the 99th member of the United Nations (UN), Nigeria has been steadfast in upholding principles of multilateralism and it was especially its bold anti-colonial and anti-apartheid stances that earned it great respect and admiration. Its international profile was profoundly influenced by interactions with the UN, the Commonwealth and the European Union (EU), or what Martin Uhomoibhi, in his chapter, calls 'a triple web of interdependence'. Nigeria's aspirations to a permanent seat on the UN Security Council will always be coloured by its fragile ethnic and social fabric and unstable domestic environment. But crucially, Nigeria has also championed the cause of developing countries through the Non-Aligned Movement and the Group of 77 (G-77) where

their marginalisation on world affairs has been an ongoing concern. The remaining chapters are critical and refreshing appraisals of important bilateral relations. Kaye Whiteman looks at relations with Britain which he describes as ‘...a complex mixture of the circumstantial and the continuous...moving from reasonably cordial to differing levels of animosity and tension’. The boundaries of relations with the United States (US), according to Gwendolyn Mikell, are circumscribed by the ‘sphere of influence’ of Britain. Yet through policy players on both sides, important links have been forged in support of economic diplomacy, security cooperation and democratisation but also with Nigeria as a strategic supplier of oil. Relations between Nigeria and France are rooted in the tense and acrimonious politics of *Françafrique*. Thus, as Jean-François Médard reports, relations ‘...have been characterised since the outset by distrust, hostility and conflict’. With great foresight, the editors have included a chapter on China. Sharath Srinivasan skilfully synthesises the logic of China’s strategic engagement in Africa but unfortunately, does not provide enough of an empirical account of how this has played out in Nigeria.

There are challenges aplenty for Nigeria’s foreign policy, especially with a change of guard since the significant but deeply flawed elections of April 2007. Critically, how it meets these challenges will depend on how it balances the demands and dynamics of the three concentric circles that underpin its foreign policy. It is almost axiomatic that as Nigeria goes, so goes Africa. This book is path-breaking in helping us to understand why this ‘giant with clay feet’ will continue to shape the fortunes of our continent and indeed, the world. As such, it will be a standard reference on the subject for many years to come.