

## Foreign Policy and Nigeria's External Affairs Ministers

In theory and in practice, Africa has always been the primary focus of Nigeria's foreign policy. History and the political realities of colonial and post-colonial Africa dictated much of this trend. In other words, African-nationalism and Pan-Africanism were two of the factors that helped shaped the thinking, the disposition and implementation of the country's national security and foreign policy agenda. In spite of the occasional call for a rethink, there has been no noticeable change in Nigeria's foreign policy protuberance. And even though the formal colonization of the continent has ended, the Cold War as we knew it is over, and Communism has collapsed, Nigeria has not been proactive and forward-thinking in her approach to national security and foreign policy issues. Nigeria, it seems, is trapped in time.

The world is changing; and so we are confronted with old and new concerns that are related to ethnicity and subnationalism, poverty and hunger, weak institutions and poor governance, corrupt leadership and criminalities, and ecological difficulties associated with the activities of the multinationals. Also, there is HIV/AIDS and several other human and basic security concerns. And then there are the global problems that pertain to fragmenting states, terrorism, and the exploitative and predatory policies of the Western world. And then there are the (sometimes) dangerous and unconscionable activities of the new but powerful states like China, Israel and India. The aforementioned are enough to cause a shift in Nigeria's involvement in the world, but that has not been the case.

Ebenezer Okpokpo, writing in the *African Studies Quarterly* (1999), posited that "the scope of Nigeria's foreign policy should no longer be limited to continental affairs. It should be focused worldwide and geared toward the promotion of our cultural heritage, and scientific, economic and technical cooperation with viable partners. Its goal should aim at enhancing our national development, and military arrangements with NATO countries in order to give peace a permanent character in our societal needs and our sub-region." A future treatise -- "*Nigeria's Foreign Policy Ten Years Into the 21st Century*" -- will critically examine and build upon the points made by Okpokpo.

My task here -- to be concluded in part 2 -- is to achieve two basic objectives: (1) engage in a brief study of the men and women that have been at the helm of Nigeria's foreign policy; and (2) attempt to understand why, in more than two decades or so, Nigeria has not had illustrious external affairs ministers; and why the country also seem to manages its foreign policy from the desk of the President. Furthermore, in view of the loud silence coming out of Abuja vis-à-vis regional, sub-regional and global events, one could be forgiven for believing Nigeria does not have a foreign/national security policy.

Of all the External Affairs Ministers Nigeria has ever had, Jaja Nwachukwu, Arikpo Okoi, Joseph Garba and Bolaji Akinyemi seem to be the most noteworthy. Okoi holds the distinction for being Nigeria's longest serving External Affairs Minister (1967 to 1975) yet, not much has been written about him. Not much is known about him. Of the four Nwachukwu and Okoi are, in the estimation of many, the "first amongst equals." Dr. Jaja Anucha Nwachukwu was also Nigeria's first Speaker of the House, and was also, at various times, Nigeria Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the United Nations. It was said that he was never tainted by corruption, ethnicity, or by self-aggrandizement. Not only was he loved, he was well respected at home and abroad.

I never met or saw Ambassador Nwachukwu. But his excellent and enviable reputation preceded him. In another time and place, he would have been enshrined in the nation's consciousness, monuments built in his honor. Ambassador Joseph Garba was Nigeria's External Minister from 1975 until 1978, and was also at the United Nations from 1984 until 1989. Joseph Nanven Garba was born in 1943, at Langtang, Plateau State. He became, at 19, the youngest officer in the Nigerian Army. Sadly, he passed away at 58 without achieving his dream of becoming Nigeria's President. He will forever be linked to the coup that displaced the well-loved and well-respected General Yakubu Gowon; but more than that, he will be remembered for his vigor, his vision and strength in Nigeria's Foreign Service.

Professor Bolaji Akinyemi was a scholar, a teacher and a diplomat. He was, from 1975 until 1983 -- before General Babangida appointed him Nigeria's Foreign Affairs Minister -- the Director-General of the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs. He is credited with creating the *Technical Aid Corps* (Nigeria's version of the Peace Corps), and was also the draftsman for the *Concert of Medium Power*, and was also a supporter of Nigeria's Nuclear ambition. His reputation and democratic credentials were somewhat tainted when he called for a coup d'état against the

administration of Ernest Shonekan. Also, but for historical circumstances, he most likely would have been Nigeria's foremost Foreign Minister. Akinyemi was brilliant, competent and farsighted. He still is.

Why he (Bolaji Akinwande Akinyemi) has not been returned to the Foreign Ministry is beyond my wits. There is precedence in such appointment and reappointment. General Ike Sanda Nwachukwu was Nigeria's Foreign Minister from 1987 until 1989, and again from 1990 until 1993. Of all Nigeria's top diplomats, Dr. Ibrahim Agboola Gambari, Minister between 1984 and 1985, has served in the United Nations system the longest.

Since flag independence, Nigeria has had twenty External Affairs Ministers. Of these, two have been women -- Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala and Dr. Joy Ogwu -- both of whom had about the shortest and most uneventful tenures, one year or less. Other External Affairs Ministers have been Nuhu Bamalli, 1964-1966; Henry Adefope, 1978-1979; Ishaya Audu, 1979-1983; Emeka Anyaoku, 1983-1983; Rilwan Lukman, 1989- 1990; Mathew Mbu, 1993-1993; Babagana Kingibe, 1993- 1995; Tom Ikimi, 1995-1998; Ignatius Ollisemeka, 1998-1999; Sule Lamido, 1999-2003; Oluyemi Adeniji, 2003-2006; and Ojo Maduekwe, 2007-.

Between 1999 and 2007, with Olusegun Obasanjo as the President, External Affairs Ministers were nothing more than the President's companions on foreign trips. President Obasanjo micromanaged Nigeria's foreign affair the same way he micromanaged the energy sector. But during the tenure of Jaja Nwachukwu, Arikpo Okoi, Joseph Garba and Bolaji Akinyemi, the world knew who Nigeria's External Affairs Ministers were. These diplomats were visible and were of substance. They were bright and had panache. They articulated Nigeria's foreign and national security policies. Fortunately for the country, the heads of government they served, for the most part, allowed these Ministers a free reign. Recent External Affairs Ministers and their ministries have been operating without clear vision and without claws and fangs. As a consequence, Nigeria's role and place within the global arena have diminished.

Almost one year into the administration of President Yar'Adua, the External Affairs Minister Chief Ojo Maduekwe, seems to be Missing-In-Action. If Yar'Adua is anything like his predecessor, then, Maduekwe will have no prayer, no voice and no significant role in shaping and in executing the country's foreign policy. As far as domestic matters goes, no one is quite sure where the President is headed; same is true of his international agenda. Even so, one is interested in knowing what the scope of involvement of this President will be. So far, nothing impressive has been articulated, and nothing significant has been ventured.

Mr. Sabella Ogbobode Abidde

Sabidde@yahoo.com