



# A Rational Actor Model in the Study of the Comparative Foreign Policy of Nigeria towards the Niger Republic under President Muhammadu Buhari's Military Regime and Civilian Administration

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## Abstract

The study is a comparative analysis of the foreign policy posture of President Buhari's military and civilian regimes towards Niger Republic. The study adopts a diachronic qualitative approach which relies on content analysis of data collection from written secondary sources. The main objective of the paper is to interrogate the continuity and change in Buhari's first administration of Nigeria as a military dictator (1983-1985) and his second administration as civilian President (2015-Present). Anchored on the Rational Actor Model (RAM), the study argues that though Nigeria has always enjoyed cordial diplomatic relations with Niger Republic since 1960, the current warm relationship with Niger under President Buhari have deepened. The study further contends that when compared with his military regime era, President Buhari's current foreign policy posture towards Niger could be interpreted as paradoxical. The study examines different bilateral relations initiated under Buhari from 1983-1985, and 2015-present to understand the continuity and change. Hence, unlike the Buhari's military regime foreign policy posture towards Niger which was largely ad hoc, hostile, and reactionary marked by sustained border closure; his regime's foreign policy since 2015 has been characterized by personal friendship and questionable provision of development assistance and as well as mutual consular and security cooperation. The paper concludes that this shifting stance in foreign policy towards Niger is attributable to the prevailing domestic economic circumstance, regime type, security considerations and international system. The study hopes that by using a di-

achronic qualitative approach which relies on content analysis of data collection from written secondary sources, it would contribute to our understanding of the dynamic of Niger-Nigeria relations.

### **Subject Areas**

Foreign Policy Analysis, Comparative Foreign Policy

### **Keywords**

Foreign Policy, Rational Actor, Hostile Relations, Cordial Relations, Border Closure, Niger, Nigeria

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## **1. Introduction**

Foreign policy has remained an indispensable instrument by which a sovereign state relates to/and with other states that involve interactions between state and non-state actors in the international system. [1] James Rosenau conceives foreign policy to be authoritative actions taken by governments in an attempt to either maintain the desirable aspects of the international environment or to amend its undesirable aspects. [2] Foreign policy comprises a set of expressly stated objectives or blueprints by which a state seeks to pursue and actualize its specified national interests within the international system. It consists of strategies that guide a state's interactions/relationship with other states and to a lesser extent, nonstate actors economically, politically, socially and militarily in a bid to protect its international and domestic interests [3]. Being a purposeful thought-out activity that is articulated in a plan and programs of action, foreign policy therefore, connotes a rational pursuit of a country's national objectives which express its external attitude or behaviour. [4]

Foreign policy is not formulated in a vacuum. There are domestic and external factors or variables that serve as determinants of a foreign policy. Generally speaking, domestic factors that shape foreign policy are the character of the state, geography, demographics, political system/structure, type of government, economic capabilities and resource endowment, [5] leadership, economy, military capability, historical values, national interest, media and public opinion, pressure groups, and others. In the context of external factors, the determinants of the foreign policy include intentions of other states, consideration regarding immediate neighbors, national security, membership of international institutions, international law, opinions and actions of great powers, etc. [6] In the context of this study, the character of the state which connotes the multicultural nature of the Nigerian state whereby it shares ethnic and cultural values and ties with neighboring African countries astride the national borders, such as Fulani, Hausa, Kanuri with Niger/Chad Republics, Yoruba with Benin Republic, and Ejagham/Efik and Mangas with Cameroon etc., influenced to a large extent Nigeria's foreign policy principle of Afrocentrism and good neighborliness. In

terms of geography, Nigeria shares about 1500 kilometers and resource endowments such as oil, river course and dam for agriculture and electricity, as well as booming agro-livestock cross-border trade and markets. Politically speaking, the personality, character and quality of the leader, the type of government such as military dictatorship and democracy, the need to regulate or facilitate the movement of people and goods across borders, as well as security considerations at a point in time influence Nigeria's foreign policy decisions and posture towards Niger. [7]

A major external variable that has influenced Nigeria's foreign policy decisions towards Niger is its membership of the international organizations such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the bilateral Nigeria-Niger Joint Commission (NNJC). [8] On account of leadership and type of government, foreign policy of Nigerian state has continued to change in context and content. That is to say, the type of government and personality of Nigerian leaders influence the foreign policy decisions and where the pendulum of its Afrocentric foreign policy swings. This ranges from moderate, radical to reciprocal cum cordial foreign policy postures towards its immediate neighbors. President Buhari regime's foreign policy posture witnessed the two poles of foreign policy decisions towards the neighboring countries overall, and Niger Republic in particular. His first outing as a military leader exhibited a hostile foreign policy posture towards Nigeria's immediate neighbors including Niger Republic. However, on his return as a civilian President, Buhari embraced accommodative and cordial foreign policy towards its immediate neighbors, a radical shift from his military regime's era despite a brief period of border closure from August 2019 to April 2022 in a phased reopening exercise which started on December 16, 2021 [9]. Apart from the general cordial and warm relations, the Buhari civilian regime has cultivated with Nigeria's immediate neighbors as a whole, since his election in 2015, President Buhari has accorded more and special attention to Niger Republic by making the latter enjoy closer socio-political and economic ties and assistance far more than the other neighboring countries of Chad, Benin Republic and Cameroon. The study goes beyond the examination of the changed hostile posture from President Buhari's military regime era to the friendly disposition towards its immediate neighbors during his present civilian administration, with a focus on understudy why the regime gives selective and special attention to the Niger Republic amongst all other immediate neighbors of Nigeria.

## 2. Statement of the Problem

President Muhammadu Buhari is an example of a two-time head of state of Nigeria, first as a military dictator, and presently as an elected civilian President. During his military adventure, Buhari's foreign policy posture towards Niger was tough and hostile culminating in strict border closure and friction between the two countries, even though he was accused of supporting the Nigerien Idi

Oumarou to become the Secretary-General of the defunct Organization of African Unity (OAU) in place of Nigerian Ambassador Peter Onu was then the interim Secretary General. [10]

On assumption of office as civilian head of State, President Buhari began a foreign policy of rapprochement with Nigeria's neighbors through series of shuttle diplomacy. However, what seems to be an obsession with Niger has sparked off interpretations from different shades of foreign policy analysts. There are three contending schools of thought seeking to rationalize or oppose President Buhari's current policy towards Niger Republic. The first group representing mainly career diplomats views the present Buhari's foreign policy towards Niger merely as a continuation of Nigeria's age-long policy of good neighborliness; the second group sees it as a mark of democratic governance that has made the President thread a liberal path of bilateral security and economic diplomacy across the 1500 km border with Niger. [11] The third school of thought explains Buhari's foreign policy towards Niger as 'cronyism' and economic profligacy in favor of his Fulani kinsmen astride the Niger border. The study seeks to systematically synthesize these nuanced perceptions of the change in Buhari's foreign policy towards Niger with a view to finding a common ground and presenting a better understanding of the *raison d'être* for the differences in his foreign policy posture towards Niger during the pre and fourth republic civilian administration.

### 3. Objectives of Study

The objectives of the study are to:

- 1) Explain President Buhari's foreign policy posture towards Niger Republic during his military regime era.
- 2) Analyze the foreign policy of Buhari towards Niger Republic as the present civilian President since 2015.
- 3) Ascertain the striking differences between the military and civilian regimes foreign policies of President Buhari towards Niger Republic.
- 4) Identify the factors responsible for the latest change in President Buhari's foreign policy towards Niger Republic.

### 4. Theoretical Framework: Rational Actor Model

The Rational Actor Model (RAM) of foreign policy decision-making emanated from the work of von Neumann and Morgenstern in the 1940s. It has its roots in microeconomics. [12] RAM has also been associated with Hobbesian description of man as a rational being. In the process of time, the principle of RAM was introduced into the mainstream of Classical Realism in international relations. [13] Here the decision maker is assumed to have the ability to rank preferences "according to the degree of satisfaction of achieving these goals and objectives". [14] Furthermore, the rational actor or the decision maker ought to identify alternatives and their consequences and select from these alternatives in an effort to maximize satisfaction. Within this scenario, the decision maker should be able

to access a set of objectives and goals.

Seen as a linchpin of the foreign policy decision-making model by Paul MacDonald (2003), the rational actor theoretical approach has been useful in understanding the goals and intentions behind a foreign policy action. [15]

The tenets of this model are the assumption that the main actor in foreign policy is a rational individual who can be relied on to make informed and calculated decisions that maximize value and perceived benefits to the state. The rational actor model therefore depends on individual state-level interactions between nations and government behavior as units of analysis while assuming that complete information is available to policymakers for optimal decision making. It also assumes that actions taken in all instances are both consistent and coherent. [16] For any meaningful decision to be made by the rational actor, there are four major steps to be taken in the process: problem identification, definition of desired outcomes, evaluation of the consequences of potential policy choices, and making the most rational decision to maximize beneficial outcomes or expected utility. [17]

Rational Actor Model has been adopted for the present study as the most widely cited foreign policy analysis approach. It is useful to understand the goals and intentions behind a foreign policy action. Besides, as a 'prominent mainstream theory of foreign policy, it has powerful explanatory potential'. [18] Though, the model has been criticized by some pockets of critics on the grounds that: it may not give account of instances when complete information may not readily be at the disposal of the actor; secondly, rationality is relatively subjective, and thirdly, existence of factors that might inhibit rational decision making; it has to its credit the potent utility value for S. Shahryarifar, A Defence on the Prominence of Rational Actor Model within Foreign Policy Analysis, *Khazar Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 19(1), pp.22-29. analyzing foreign policy decisions in this study, on the following grounds: the Rational Actor model is quite useful and instructive in comparative analysis of President Buhari's military and civilian regimes' foreign policy actions and posture towards Niger Republic. The model is found to be appropriate in that it explains the different rational actions undertaken by the Buhari-led regimes under different political ecologies and circumstances. Thus, given the type of government, command structure of the military government and political and economic exigencies of the time, the Buhari-led military administration chose a radical and introversive nationalist "Concentric Circle" foreign policy posture which involved closure of the borders against Nigeria's immediate neighbours in the bid to protect the political and economic sovereignty of the country, thereby derogating Nigeria's foreign policy principle of good neighborliness. Again, on his return as the democratically elected President, given the available information at his disposal, the different governance and political structure, the nature of the transnational security challenges, as well as the need to cooperate with other countries, especially the immediate neighbours in the concentric circle to solve the coun-

try's economic and security challenges, he as a rational actor chose to cultivate cordial diplomatic relations with his immediate neighbors and beyond. The Buhari-led civilian administration jettisoned the radical approach to foreign relations and chose to apply a flexible and gradual response posture towards Niger Republic bearing in mind that the personality and idiosyncrasies of the leader also affect foreign policy decisions.

### **5. President Buhari's Foreign Policy Posture towards Niger during the Military Era**

Military regimes usually come into power through a coup d' état; by pushing away a democratically elected civilian administration, or by overthrowing a democratically elected government. In the case of the Buhari regime, the military coup forcefully overthrew the democratically elected civilian administration of Alhaji Shehu Shagari in December 1983. Typical of foreign policy under a military regime, Buhari's policy revolved around his personality as the head of state. He had the prerogative of accepting or refusing inputs from bureaucratic institutions such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other relevant agencies of government. Though the foreign policy posture appeared to be quicker due to the penchant for little or no broad consultation and consensus building, [19] decisions taken under this military regime also appeared to be rash and tough.

When the Buhari regime came to power, it tried to redefine the concept of Africa as the centerpiece of Nigerian foreign policy by introducing a more nationalist and inward-looking foreign policy. As expressed by Ibrahim Gambari:

...The old concept of Africa being the centerpiece of our foreign policy was under General Buhari, giving way to the new expressed in a clearly set out scale of priorities for our foreign policy endeavors. According to General Buhari, a pattern of concentric circles may be discernible in our attitude and response to foreign policy issues within the African continent and the world at large. At the epicenter of these circles are the national economic and secularity interests of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, which are inextricably tied up with security, stability and the economic and social well-being of our immediate neighbors. One of our principal priorities is to put on a more constructive footing in relations with our neighbours with whom we share identical goals of regional stability and peace. [20]

In view of the above, it is pertinent that Nigeria's priority under the Buhari military regime was national interest in place of the big brother posture as the country could not afford to compromise its national interest even at the cost of conflict with its neighbours. [21] Thus, unlike the previous foreign policy decisions, the military foreign policy posture of Buhari regime tilted towards cost-benefit approach whereby Nigeria's relations with immediate neighbors revolved around rational decisions of gains and losses.

President Buhari's foreign policy posture towards Niger could be located

within the regime's general foreign policy posture towards Nigeria's immediate neighbors. As soon as the Buhari junta took over powers, in 1984 the regime dispatched Major-General Domkat Bali led-delegation to the Niger Republic, Benin Republic and Cameroon, the four border countries with Nigeria to give them assurance that the new government is still committed to fostering relations with them while seeking their cooperation towards the enhancement of Nigeria national security, check cross-border smuggling and prevent hostile action against Nigerians living in their respective countries. The presidents consulted were Mathieu Kerekou of Benin, Paul Biya of Cameroon, Seyni Koantche of Niger and Tahiru Ginaso of Chad on 11-17 January 1984. [24]

The above consultations were the best relations the Buhari-led junta could have with these neighbouring countries; the rest was a frosty relationship. A few months after the visits to the leaders of the four border countries, Nigerian borders were closed between April 25 and May 6, 1984. The foreign policy decisions of the regime were dictated by two major factors: these were security and economic considerations. On account of security, religious crises that occurred in Yola, Adamawa state that claimed the lives of over 100 military and police personnel as well as more than 1000 civilians attributed to the menace of immigrants from neighboring countries. Speaking on behalf the federal military government, then minister of internal affairs, Brigadier Muhammadu Magoro openly heaped the blame of religious crises and other forms of insecurity on foreign nationals residing in the country and directed the closure of Nigeria borders with neighboring countries. Sequel to the border closure, armed military officers mounted at the border posts to forestall illegal entry into the country. Furthermore, over 700,000 immigrants were ordered to leave Nigeria, these were the major factors for the strained relations between Nigeria and its immediate neighboring states [22].

Economically speaking, the minister of external affairs justified the closure Nigerian borders with the four immediate neighbors on account of curtailing excessive cross border smuggling which tended to overshadow the legitimate commercial and trade relations between Nigeria and these countries. It was even alleged that Nigerian currency was trafficked across these borders. Besides, the borders were shut to stop the Nigerian politicians who were accused of grounding the economy from escaping with their loots from the national coffers through the porous borders. Thus, the borders were closed to look inwards and as well-set Nigeria's trade relations on a positive frame with neighbouring countries. [23]

The prevailing closed border policy had tremendous adverse impact on the border countries including Niger Republic which was not given any special treatment. In fact, the border closure adversely affected the economy of Niger being a landlocked country that depended on Nigeria for supplies of petroleum products. The economic difficulties experienced by Nigeria's immediate neighbors prompted the presidents of Benin, Niger Republic, Chad to visit Nigeria in

an attempt to secure special concession and waiver from the Buhari government all to no avail. Nigerian government vehemently reiterated that the borders would only be re-opened when all the anomalies surrounding the border closure were corrected. On the whole, the regime of Buhari did not reopen the land borders until it was overthrown in 1985. [24]

Buhari-led military regime's insistence on the closure of Nigeria's borders elicited a special diplomatic tour by the Nigérien President Kountche to Nigeria in order to persuade the government of Nigeria to reconsider the policy, as it affected the country severely in so many ways. First, Niger is landlocked and depends on Nigeria for Gas and Petroleum. Besides, the country and Nigeria share an economic cooperation known as the Nigeria-Niger Joint Commission on Economic Cooperation which is located in Niamey the Niger capital with a Nigerian as the secretary general. Socio-culturally, both countries also share cultural ties as about fifty percent of the people of Niger speak Hausa. Niger citizens approximately 100,000 of the 700,000 undocumented aliens were expelled from Nigeria alongside Ghanaians, Chad and Cameroon on May 12, 1985, without notice. [25] These immigration and border actions taken by Nigeria created a strained relationship between the country and other ECOWAS member states and called into question Nigeria's leadership in ECOWAS, because the actions seemed to have derogated the goal of ECOWAS towards facilitation of free movements of citizens of member states. [26]

## **6. Foreign Policy of Buhari towards Niger as the Civilian President**

The foreign policy decision-making of a democratically elected president is a different ball game given the character of the leadership, and the prevailing environment in which the decision is taken. In the first four years in the life this administration, the overall main foreign policy thrust included: improving relations with its neighbors to jointly fight Boko Haram which took a transnational dimension, rather than take unilateral approach of the past. The present regime rather than antagonize the West and the international community, decided to partner with United States (US) and other world powers to support the government in the fight against terrorism, corruption, improve Nigeria's economy by reaching out to other nations such as China for the needed foreign exchange and infrastructure. [27]

A practical way of counter-terrorism of Buhari-led civilian administration has been to create and a Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) which must be forged by an alliance with other neighbouring African countries given that the Boko Haram terrorism has taken a transnational dimension as it carries out attacks beyond Nigeria into the neighboring countries. Buhari-led civilian government realized the need to involve other neighboring countries by soliciting contribution of their soldiers to form Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) which was charged with the responsibility of insurgency in the Lake Chad re-



gion. In spite of setbacks, which, however, is not the main issue of this paper, the MNJTF made some meaningful advances in curtailing the activities of Boko Haram as member countries contributed to the war against Boko Haram in Nigeria. [28] Our major concern here is that on assumption of office, President Muhammadu Buhari made his first trip across Nigerian borders to the Niger Republic on June 3, 2015 in which the Cameroonian President attended. The focus of the trip was on counter-Boko Haram summit which was aimed at deliberating on the regional offensive against the group. During the summit, the Nigerian President, Mahamadou Issoufou committed his country's resolve to assist Nigeria in tackling the increasing regional threats of Boko Haram. It was also agreed that MNJTF headquarters be relocated from Nigeria to N'Djamena in Chad, and appointment of a Nigerian as the commander of the Force. There was a follow up of the summit with a visit to Chad on June 4, 2017; followed by a bilateral meeting with President Paul Biya of Cameroon. Irrespective of the fact that Benin Republic was not directly affected by the insurgent activities of Boko Haram, Buhari visited Benin Republic and the visit was reciprocated by Benin President, Boni Yayi who contributed the country's troops to the MNJTF to combat terrorist activities in the country. [29] It is within this milieu of liberal foreign policy approach that was laced with sustained shuttle diplomacy by President Buhari to his West Africa neighbours in an attempt to counter the activities of Boko Haram [30], that the favorable policy towards Niger Republic could be located. Part of President Buhari's active role in ECOWAS Member states includes, playing a key role as the chief mediator in resolving the constitutional impasse in Gambia, where President Yahaya Jammeh initially refused to give up power to democratically elected president Adama Barrow, which he succeeded in leading ECOWAS that persuaded former president Jammeh to concede power and stepped aside for Adama Barrow. [31] Thus, the cardinal objective of President Muhammadu Buhari's foreign policy is to pursue its national interest by maintaining good relations with its immediate neighbors.

The Buhari civilian administration on re-election in 2020, unveiled nine priority areas that are encapsulated in 'Nigeria First' as the new foreign policy thrust of the government. The Minister of Foreign Affairs, Geoffrey Onyeama, made this known while briefing the diplomatic corps in Abuja. According to him, the key areas include building a thriving and sustainable economy; enlarging agricultural output for food security and export; attain energy sufficiency and power and petroleum products; expand transport and other infrastructure development; expand business growth, entrepreneurship and industrialization; expand access to quality education, affordable healthcare and productivity of Nigerians; enhance social inclusion, reduce poverty, build systems to fight corruption; improve governance and create social cohesion and improve security for all.

Onyeama further stated that the civilian regime under President Buhari would pursue a realistic foreign policy that will reflect domestic realities of the

country, which he referred to as a ‘Nigeria First Policy’. This appears to be adoption of another type of a concentric circle approach whereby after Nigeria, the next priority in the concentric circle would be Nigeria’s contiguous neighbors such as Benin, Cameroon, Chad and Niger which share border with Nigeria that our allies in the battle to defeat terrorism. The next in the row is Nigeria’s commitment to the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), followed by full engagement with the African Union (AU) at the continental level.

The special foreign policy posture of the Buhari regime towards Niger Republic metamorphosed into the gestures expressed below. It is within this new framework of foreign policy of active engagement with its immediate neighbors that Buhari’s civilian regime pays attention to Niger Republic. Thus, since 2015, Niger Republic is believed to have received more attention from the Nigerian government and enjoyed a more special, closer relationship with Nigeria than other African countries.

The special foreign policy posture of the Buhari regime towards Niger Republic metamorphosed into the gestures expressed below.

Apart from other diplomatic gestures such as being the first country Buhari visited on assumption of office and other reciprocal visits and recognitions, there are concrete developmental assistance made by Buhari regime not enjoyed by other neighbouring countries. These include:

- 1) Construction of a 284-kilometre worth of \$2 billion rail line from Kano to Maradi in Niger Republic.
- 2) Nigeria signed MoU to import fuel from Niger Republic in November 2020.
- 3) Nigeria and Niger Republic signed deal to build \$2 billion refinery and pipeline in 2018.

Other diplomatic overtures include: Buhari naming Abuja major road after Niger Republic President, Mahamadou Issoufou as the mark of deep appreciation for the maintenance of a brotherly relationship between Nigeria and the Republic of Niger and in recognition of the Nigerien President’s significant role in the promotion of peace in Africa”. Mahamadou Issoufou of Niger made series of visits to Nigeria before handing over to his successor while the successor, President Mohammed Bazoum called on Buhari shortly after taking over power on April 2, 2021. He later paid a courtesy call on Buhari, as part of a two-day first official working visit to Nigeria, on April 19, 2021. Despite Nigeria seeming intractable security challenges, Buhari vowed to defend Niger Republic from Boko Haram; called Nigerien President on phone to condole with him over terror attacks on his country. Also, President Buhari was awarded Niger Republic’s highest national honor of Grande Croix Des Order National Du Niger in March 2021 etc. While receiving the award, Buhari commended Issoufou for “consolidating” the good relations between Nigeria and Niger Republic. “There is a spirit of good neighborliness between us.” Similarly, while assuring Bazoum that his administration will do all it takes to secure the two countries (Nigeria and Niger

Republic), Buhari said some Nigerians and Nigeriens are people with similar cultures, languages, and ways of life. “We also share about 1500 kilometers of land border, so we cannot ignore each other”. [32]

## **7. The Striking Differences between Buhari’s Military and Civilian Regimes’ Foreign Policy**

There is a sharp contrast between the foreign policy under Muhammadu Buhari’s military and civilian regime. Under the military regime, General Buhari pursued a more radical foreign policy within the framework of dictatorship. During his military dictatorship, Buhari pursued a nationalist foreign policy based on concentric circles as expressed above without bulging. In other words, any country that was not economically and politically functional or has utility value to Nigeria was not regarded by the regime. So, the regime at that time was enmeshed in a self-conceited national interest without minding the cost. Having seen the Nigerian immediate neighbors as conduits for smuggling and trafficking of Nigerian currency and goods, as well as escape routes for indicted corrupt Nigerian leaders of the ousted second republic, he deemed it fit that the only remedy was to close the Nigerian borders directly. [33] In terms of age and experience, the Buhari of 1984 was in his early thirties, and given his military background which was preoccupied with the use of force in place of application of gradual and minimalist diplomatic approach to problem-solving is one of the striking differences in his foreign policy posture.

During his present civilian regime, there was a change in the personality of President Buhari and his foreign policy posture. It could be recalled that since after his military experiment, he has consistently been involved in active politics where he has associated with civilians and drafting of campaign manifestoes of political parties. For instance, since 2003 he has taken part in electioneering campaigns as the presidential flag bearer of three political parties; first as the presidential candidate of the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) in 2003; followed by the Congress of Progressive Change (CPC) in 2011; and finally the presidential flag bearer of the All Progressive Congress (APC). Within this period, his worldview about politics and foreign policy began to change. He had received a new orientation about diplomacy and art of negotiation to the extent that he had to travel to the same Britain that he nearly succeeded in smuggling out Alhaji Umaru Diko from with consequent diplomatic face-off to convince them of his newly imbibed liberal values. Thus, prior to the 2015 election that brought him to power, Buhari had to deliver a lecture at the London Chatham House where he reeled out his newfound liberal political and economic orientation. Coupled with his age in his seventy and in the age of globalization, President Buhari could not afford to play isolationist foreign policy even with Nigeria’s immediate neighbors given the transnational nature of Boko Haram terrorism, which needed the cooperation of these neighbors to fight. Given these scenarios, President Buhari maintained good relations with its neighbors to fight Boko Haram insurgency. [34] Thus, the focus of the nine-point foreign policy (as stated earli-

er) as expressed by the Buhari-led civilian regime appears to be a revised version of concentric circle [35] and requires cooperation, cordiality and shuttle diplomacy and not unbridled radicalism and reactionary posture as was the case of his military hay days. Overall, the character of the leader and the context of the foreign policy decision-making go a long way to determine the content and posture of foreign policy as can be observed from the two different regimes of the Buhari administrative circle.

Though Nigeria closed its borders in August 2019 due to a lack of compliance by its neighbouring countries to rules of engagement on cross-border trade, however, unlike the 1984-1985 border closure regime, which was never opened until the regime was overthrown, the Buhari civilian regime began to reopen the border in December 2020. The foreign policy regime of the democratically elected administration of Buhari is guided by the constitutional provisions as enshrined in the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, which places Africa as the centre of Nigeria's foreign policy. [36]

The above is a departure from the military era when the constitution was suspended, and military decrees were framed by the military as the regime deemed fit. So, it was possible to enact a radical foreign policy decree as the regime was not amenable to political influences arising from checks and balances and debates at the National Assembly (the Legislature), judicial interpretations, the influence of the press and public opinion, and re-election bids. Buhari under a multi-party democracy has transformed from a dictator to a democrat having been elected as a president and is now poised to address the perennial socio-economic and political challenges without the same frequency of draconian policies of border closure and expulsion of aliens. The Buhari-led civilian administration has become more strategic and pragmatic in his nationalist approach to fiscal policy measures, investment drive and collaborative fight against insurgency with immediate neighboring countries quite different from his heydays of military regime's unilateral border closure strategy. [37]

Given the new focus on fostering cordiality with neighboring countries, Nigeria earned about \$823.06 million from exports to ECOWAS countries and the tune of \$2.72 billion from shipping out of products to Africa in the first quarter of 2020 alone. In the second quarter of 2020, an estimated 149.3 billion worth of goods were exported to ECOWAS countries. [38]

## **8. Factors Responsible for the Latest Change in President Buhari's Foreign Policy towards Niger Republic**

There are three contending schools of thought seeking to rationalize or oppose President Buhari's current policy towards Niger Republic. The first group representing mainly career diplomats views the present Buhari's foreign policy towards Niger merely as a continuation of Nigeria's age-long policy of good neighborliness; the second group sees it as a mark of democratic governance that has made the President thread a liberal path of bilateral security and economic

diplomacy across the 1,500 km border with Niger. The third school of thought explains Buhari's foreign policy towards Niger as 'cronyism' and economic profligacy in favor of his Fulani kinsmen astride the Niger border.

#### **The Good Neighborliness Policy School**

This school consists of the government officials and diplomats who justified the various support and assistance, including the donation of ₦1.14 billion (\$2.7 million) worth of 10 luxury vehicles and other special economic and commercial concessions given to Niger by President Muhammadu Buhari's civilian administration as a continuation of Nigeria's Afrocentric foreign policy and good neighbourliness. [39] Most international relations scholars have argued that Nigeria cannot afford to be an island unto itself, hence the dire need to assist its immediate African neighbors and beyond.

According to Akinterinwa, other factors might lie in the historical ties at both governmental and nongovernmental levels where both governments relate through Niger/Nigeria Joint Commission, established in 1971, which has been driving the relationship between Nigeria and Niger Republic; ethnic affinity as the same families live astride the border from Sokoto area down to Borno with non-existent border controls; and the fact that unlike the other Nigerian neighbors (such as Cameroon and Benin) which have had border disputes with Nigeria, Niger Republic has never had territorial dispute with Nigeria.=

Also, although Africa remains the centerpiece of Nigeria's foreign policy, in historical terms, various Nigerian Presidents have in the time past focused their attention more on one neighboring country than others. For example, during President Olusegun Obasanjo's administration when Benin Republic enjoyed a special relationship with Nigeria to the extent that it was said that Benin Republic had become another state in Nigeria. According to Igali, some other Presidents emphasized Ghana while others focused attention on Chad, yet others such as General Ibrahim Babangida, focused on improving relations with the littoral country of Equatorial Guinea. In the 1960s, Nigeria had a special relationship with Cameroon, which led to a reciprocal non-visa travel arrangement. [40]

On the part of the Democratic Liberal-Bilateral Security and Economic Diplomacy School which consists of government officials and a section of diplomats who see the Buhari government's romance with Niger Republic as a mark of charting a new liberal security and economic diplomacy architecture in the interest of both countries. For instance, while signing the cooperation on crude oil export from the Republic of Niger and construction of refinery facilities in Katsina, President Buhari believes that the projects constitute a "win-win" for both nations [41]. The Nigerian minister of State for Petroleum Resources, Timipreye Sylva on his own part described the MOU to import fuel from Niger Republic as a means of encouraging intra-regional trade. He further analyzed the economic value of the above project. According to him, the Soraz Refinery in Zinder, Niger Republic, has an installed capacity to produce 20,000 barrels per day while the country's domestic requirement was just 5000 barrels per day, thereby resulting

in a surplus of 15,000 barrels per day, which will be shifted to Nigeria. [42]

On account of the construction of the rail line from Nigeria to Niger Republic, President Buhari said that the new rail line would generate more revenue for Nigeria while also enabling the people of Niger Republic to enjoy affordable transportation while the Minister of Transportation, Rotimi Amaechi, expressed that the railroad would enable Niger Republic to import and export goods through Nigeria instead of Benin Republic, Ivory Coast, Ghana and Togo. [43]

As for the Ethnic Cronyism and Economic Profligacy School, which consists of mainly foreign policy analysts, opinion molders, activists, civil society organizations etc., believe that the recent foreign policy trajectory under President Buhari is an admixture of the President's Fulani ethnic affinity astride Niger-Nigeria border and age-long profligate foreign policy of Nigerian leaders. This is also described as "cronyism". A notable proponent of this school, Festus Adedayo decried the donation of ₦1.14 billion luxury vehicles to Niger aimed at shoring up its security in the face of 'excruciating hunger and seemingly intractable insecurity occasioned by terrorism, militancy, farmer-herder violent clashes and all forms of banditry in Buhari's home as "profligacy, indiscretion and misplaced priority. Adedayo continued that Buhari's act of profligacy could be traced to the post Nigerian civil war Petro-dollar reckless spending by successive Nigerian regimes when oil royalties and taxes from multinational oil companies rose to \$1 billion by 1975. Having devised the foreign policy of Africa as the centerpiece of foreign policy, the successive Nigerian leaders began to spend recklessly to justify the policy. Sequel to this, in 1972, Nigeria signed a pact with Niger Republic to supply its 30,000 kilowatts of electricity from the Kainji Dam hydroelectricity, even though Nigeria's local needs were not met. Also, in 1974, Nigeria sent millions of naira worth relief assistance to Niger at a time the later was ravaged by drought etc. This has been possible because Nigeria's foreign policy decisions are heavily left to the whims and caprices of the executive arm of government which is driven according to the personal mindset of the chief executive. This explains why Buhari capitalized on it to propagate his cronyism in an unwholesome manner to spend stupendously to construct a major road into his ancestral country home, and justifies the billions he has sunk into Niger by citing the spending spree of previous administrations on neighboring African countries in the spirit of brotherhood for example. [44]

An analyst, Ikechukwu Amaechi went as far as describing Niger Republic as one of the 37<sup>th</sup> state of Nigeria under the Buhari civilian regime because ironically, Niger seems to enjoy more federal attention than some of the Nigerian states, enjoy more rights than most Nigerians.

Amaechi further argued that the undue preference given to Niger by Buhari could be traced to his military days as Nigerian head of state when he backed a Nigerian Fulani extraction, Ide Oumarou against the Nigerian Ambassador Peter Onu, for the post of the Secretary-General of the defunct Organization of Afri-

can Unity (OAU). Peter Onu of Nigeria was the Acting Secretary-General of the OAU, yet in spite of the support given by African statesmen like Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, the then Major-General Buhari not only campaigned against but voted against Peter Onu of Nigeria. This made Buhari the first Head of state in African history to vote against his country's candidate in favor of his tribesman across the border.

Amaechi reiterated that it is mere economic profligacy for President Buhari-led administration to borrow \$1.9 billion from Chinese government to finance the Nigeria-Niger Republic railway project when most parts of Nigeria were not factored into the rail project. He cited other examples to show that Buhari's special interest in Niger is because of his Fulani ethnic affinity. First, while campaigning for his reelection in 2019, the governors of Zinder and Maradi from Niger Republic were among the dignitaries that graced his mega rally in Kano. Secondly, immediately after his victory at the 2015 general election in Nigeria, the first country Buhari visited was Niger Republic. Moreover, during that visit to Niger Republic, President Buhari was presented with the gift of a white horse and a sword which is the symbol of welcome for a returning successful and victorious warrior or a great son. On August 3, 2022, when Niger Republic marked its 62<sup>nd</sup> Independence anniversary, the Niger President, Mohammed Bazoum honored six Nigerians: Jigawa State Governor, Mohammed Badaru, Zamfara State Governor, Bello Matawalle; Aliko Dangote, Chairman of Dangote Group, Chairman of BUA Group, Abdulsamad Rabiu, State Chief Protocol, Lawan Kazure, and the Senior Special Assistant to the President on Domestic Matters, Saiki Abba, who were all first cousins of the President Bozoum like Buhari [45]. Furthermore, the Director of the Centre for China Studies in Nigeria, Charles Onunaiju observed that though the concept of 'neighborhood diplomacy' stipulates that the Nigerian government should maintain cordial relations with all neighboring countries which are critical for trade and security reasons, however, the country under Buhari should not just concentrate on Niger Republic more than other countries. He reiterated that it is not proper for the Nigerian government to 'over-concentrate' on Niger Republic given the fact that "the entire Sahel region is in turmoil, so it is incumbent on Nigeria's leadership to maintain cordial relations with not just Niger Republic but also Chad and Cameroon. Thus, over-concentration on Niger Republic raises many questions on Buhari's ethnic interest in the country.

## 9. Conclusion

The study is set to examine the Buhari military and post military regimes' foreign policy towards the Republic of Niger. It was observed that under the two regimes, Niger Republic experienced different foreign policy postures under the same person. The military regime's policy towards Niger was very hostile and remained so until the regime was overthrown. However, during the civilian era, the Buhari administration did not only accord Niger a warm relationship but

special attention far above other neighboring countries of Nigeria. The study revealed that three schools of thought have emerged to explain the reasons for the latest change in the Buhari's posture towards Niger. These were the good neighborliness school, the democratic liberal-bilateral security and economic diplomacy school, and the ethnic cronyism and economic profligacy school. As a matter of synthesis, based on the views of these schools of thought, the study concludes that the views of these three schools of thought on Buhari's different foreign policy postures towards Niger Republic are reflections of the various factors that influence the foreign policy decisions of a leader. Thus, in as much as the leader is a rational actor, sometimes his personal idiosyncrasies and the prevailing political and economic climate influence his foreign policy decisions.

### Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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