

“Nigeria's Peace Policy in Chad”

BOLA A. AKINTERINWA

Nigerian Forum, May-June 1987, Nos 6&5

Chad is of primordial importance in Nigeria's foreign policy consideration for many reasons. In the first place, the persistence of the civil war in the country continues to constitute a grave problem to Nigeria. Chad has been the arena of direct 'bataille' between Chadians who do not seem to know their onions themselves by allowing the deepening of their crisis, and also the theatre of indirect war between foreign powers. The importance results from the fact that Nigeria considers that the worsening situation in Chad may sooner or later be generalised, thereby affecting her security interests etc hence, perception of threat to her political stability. In this way, Nigeria has been put in a position where she had to monitor and react to the day-to-day situational fact of the Chadian crisis. This, in one sense, helps to make Nigeria's African policy, and particularly her policy toward Chad more dynamic and important.

There is the need to mention that the war in Chad might have not been of importance as such had there been no factor of geographical proximity. With the intensification of the war, there has been an atmosphere of insecurity, poverty and economic development in Chad itself, a situation which obliged many Chadian refugees to seek survival in Nigeria.

Their coming to Nigeria gives birth to problems of immigration, border and nationality conflicts. In fact, when Nigeria did open her land borders with the neighbouring countries, that of Chad remained closed. Apart from Nigeria's problems of hospitality (food, medical care, finance etc), Nigeria has also been obliged to deal with the warring foreign interventionists which is time consuming. The time which should have been used to seek economic assistance for Nigeria had to be spent on a sort of shuttle diplomacy and persuasions here and there. This, again, means finance. In fact, the summary of Nigeria's problems is contained in one statement issued in Lagos by the Ministry of External Affairs on Tuesday, March 4, 1986: "These developments are as much threat to the stability of Chad as they are to the security of Nigeria for, another round of civil war in Chad which, from all indications, portends to be more ferocious than ever, would send thousands of Chadian refugees into Nigeria with serious economic, political and security consequences for this nation."

Secondly, even if there is no war of this intensity in Chad, there is the need for Nigeria to seek peace there because of her policy of good neighbourliness. Additionally, Nigeria has common socio-cultural links with Chad. Nigeria's claim to black African leadership cannot be helped if Nigeria adopts a hostile policy. More serious will even be the threat perception. The better economic relations and development which Nigeria wants for Africa as a whole will not be helped, especially that Chad is a land-locked country. In view of this, peace in Chad cannot but be of interest to Nigeria.

Thirdly, Nigeria does not favour the presence of any foreign troops on African soil in general and around her in particular, not only for reasons of stability and security but also as a way of ending all forms of colonialism or neocolonialism. In other words, as a means for respect and dignity for Africa and Africans Interest in peace in Chad to encourage the withdrawal of foreign troops there is therefore indispensable for Nigeria.

In the face of all these considerations, Nigeria strongly believes in paving way for a lasting peace. But how? Under what conditions and at whose expense? It is pertinent to examine more closely Nigeria's peace policy at this juncture.

Nigeria's peace policy of Chad is based on the belief that only a round table conference in which all the Chadian warring factions will be involved would solve the problem. In the words of Nigeria's Foreign Affairs Minister, Professor Bolaji Akinyemi, "we see the only hope for peace in a round-table conference for all the Chadian parties." According to the Minister, Nigeria's official attitude towards the recurring hostilities in Chad will continue to be that of an "honest broker" and that "we are not going to wash our hands off the crisis. We cannot."

In this case, Nigeria wants to be an "honest broker." That is, a neutralist mediator in one sense. This policy of neutrality may have the advantage of not becoming the friend of one, and the enemy of the other, hence room for future maneuverability. On the other hand, neutrality may cause very serious damages if and when active support should have been given to one faction whose line of thought is identical to that of Nigeria, and is not given. Let us assume there are two Chads like the two Vietnams, the two Germanys and the two Koreas etc. tomorrow what will the thinking of Nigerian government be by then? The non-commitment to any faction will have been late then. Besides, it does not mean the favoured and the unfavoured faction will, because of this non-commitment, be friendly with Nigeria tomorrow. Nigeria has not, because of French role during the civil war, refused to entertain very good relations with her. On the contrary, Nigeria had collaborated in the past with France in an effort to find a solution to the Chadian feud. It appears therefore that the goodness of the policy of trying to be a friend to all is not better than the uselessness of not getting involved at all, simply because both policies cannot achieve the aim of bringing about peaceful settlement of the dispute.

Following the resumption of hostilities in February 1986, Professor Akinyemi visited Libya, France and also had a six-hour deliberation in Chad. He described this trip as "one of the most successful and positive in terms of the outcome so far since we started on this enterprise." But when interviewed on the feasibility of a round table conference, the Minister said: "I don't think we have got to that stage yet."

This is an indication that bringing different factions with different convictions to accept or forge a common interest may not be easy after all.

There is the need to recall that the constitution and failure of the GUNT following the Kano conferences showed diversified interests. Each faction wants its conviction respected by others. This explains why the two leading factions, the governmental one led by President Hissene Habre and the Goukouni Weddeye's group, adopted the policy of seeking continued foreign assistance and protection. Hissene Habre called on France while Goukouni Weddeye invited Libya, which like France, has vested interest already. The pro-capitalist stance of President Habre also helped him a lot in having United States' massive aid.

In the context of Nigeria's peace policy in Chad, if Nigeria really desires a round table conference, Nigeria should seek the co-operation, assistance and concessions of the foreign interventionists because, without them, Hissene Habre and Goukouni Weddeye cannot be in a position of continued combat readiness. Perhaps one should ask the extent to which a round table conference can be feasible without the tacit approval of the foreign 'intruders' in Chad.

The invited France and Libya are actively involved in Chad for known strategic interests with which Nigeria cannot cope. The objective of Libya's support for Goukouni Weddeye is to see whether it will be possible for her to legitimize the annexation of the Aouzou strip (annexed in 1973) and as well as annex the totality of the Boukou Ennedi-Tibesti region of Chad. Libya justifies her claim of ownership of this region by the Rome Treaty of January 7, 1935 by which France ceded the Aouzou strip to Italy and which cannot be considered as valid in this case because of its non-ratification. Colonel Gadaffi's commitment to Islamic expansionism can also be compelling a reason to back up Mr. Weddeye.

In the case of France, the support for Hissene Habre can be said to be as a result of French foreign policy of not recognizing regimes but states and the Franco-Chadian defense pact. Nonetheless, the real motivation for serious French involvement seems to be strategic and economic considerations. Chad is an important source of strategic raw materials.

Besides, French military presence in Chad will enable France to directly contain Nigeria's eventual hostility toward the Francophones in general. Although this involves confrontation with Libya, with which, according to France's Foreign Minister, France wants "to have normal relations". In other words, France is fighting Libya by necessity, and to a limited extent. France is not too hostile to Libya like the United States which is known to be fighting Gadaffi's presumed international terrorism and which wants to contain Libya's Sovietized Communism. This is why French involvement in Chad has been more of reprisals: France often reacts to Libyan initiated attacks.

As a matter of fact, Libya and France reached an Agreement on November 15, 1984 at Crete on the technicalities of the withdrawal of their troops, but without the understanding of the Chadians themselves. Libya appeared to have not respected this Agreement. Both countries often accused each other of violating the Crete Agreement, and, as a result, have adopted an identical policy: No withdrawal of troops unless the other does so first.

Faced with this situation and the complexity of the interests of the foreign interventionists, Nigeria's policy of 'favour all' Chadians without serious negotiations with these 'invited' but 'dangerous' foreigners cannot succeed. It might be because Nigeria sees the Chadian conflict mainly as a political one that she wants the Chadians alone to sit down and discuss their future. To see it this way is to see the problem only from the angle of Chad, whereas the present state of the conflict has an extra-Chadian dimension, and hence, a political solution cutting across Chad's international boundaries. In one sense, the yet-to-succeed Nigeria's "honest brokerage" can be ascribable to the limitation of the round table conference to the Chadians alone.

Nigeria's peace policy here can succeed provided that the round table conference is held on two different levels: one with the foreigners, with UN designated observers. This first round of talks must lead to the withdrawal of all foreign troops in Chad. The second one should be for the Chadians. The purpose should not only seek to appease them to forget their past grievances, but one which will emphasize the need for unity and work out the modalities for their peaceful coexistence. The mediators and observers should involve Africans alone.

There is again one fundamental problem which Nigeria's policy of Chad had indirectly raised and which must be settled before any round table conference can be feasible. It is the touchy issue of status. Hissene Habre invited France. Goukouni Weddeye called in Libya. Who has the right or more right to invite foreigners or seek foreign assistance? This is an important point in the uncompromising attitude of Hissene Habre and Goukouni Weddeye. It is a known fact that, by international definition, it is the legitimate and effective government in Chad that has the right. How this legitimacy or effectivity is determined is another problem entirely. But what is noteworthy here is the implication of Nigeria's peace policy on the legitimacy of the Government of Chad. In fact, it indirectly delegitimizes the N'djamena government considering Nigeria's policy of state and not regime recognition.

In the first case, Nigeria's call for round table discussions, ideal as it may be, places Goukouni Weddeye on the same level of status with Hissene Habre. Nigeria, by implication, is saying that Mr. Weddeye has the same right as Mr. Habre who sees himself as the President of all the Chadians, the 'rebels' inclusive,

and, as a result, wants to dictate the terms of the Peace Agreement. France also, believing or not in the constitutionality of the Habre government, but hiding under the pretext of the defence pact with Chad and not with Habre (State and not regime recognition) gives the N'djamena government active support. Apparently therefore, could it be said that Nigeria's peace policy in Chad has the purpose of lending support at the same time to the French and Hissene Habre, on the one hand, and Goukouni Weddeye and Libya, on the other? If it is so, does it mean Nigeria supports the continuity of the crisis since the leaders of the two main factions have, by implication, the same status?

Since the Chadian crisis has started, Nigeria's declaratory and attitudinal policy towards Chad revolves round the idea of not making one faction a friend and the other, an enemy. Does it mean that Nigeria has not been able to judge the situation and ascertain who is more correct, or who is at fault or who is not reasonable with his demands, and, as a result, support righteousness without any iota of partiality? Is Nigeria saying that the warring factions all have a justifiable reason to fight? Is it not possible to determine who will be more useful to African cause and in fostering more cordial relations between Nigeria and Chad in the foreseeable future to start with?

It seems Nigeria's favour-all policy can only prolong the war in Chad. Firstly, as long as the tendency to settle the more than two-decade old conflict by force continues to exist, and Nigeria, consequentially, continues to live in an atmosphere of insecurity and continued threat perception, but without throwing her heavy weight on one side, the war cannot but continue. The position of Nigeria as a sub-regional power should be reckoned with here.

Secondly, Nigeria's policy has been based on the probability that sooner or later the Chadians will recognize the necessity to come to terms with each other. It, one way or the other, under-estimates the possibility of an eventual geographical repartition of the country into, at least, two main parts by then. It is very likely that if a stronger faction cannot easily and clearly emerge, the status quo may be maintained in the future: that is, the consolidation of their present acquisitions. If this happens, Nigeria's policy will have then bagged another failure because such situation will negate Nigeria's strong belief in the sanctity of African countries international frontiers. By then, the implication is that it means the nearness of Libya's influence or geographical proximity to Nigeria.

Nigeria will have the Libyan 'resolution' to cope with in addition to the problem of French military presence in the neighbouring countries. The fact that France and Nigeria also believe in the territorial integrity of Chad may bring both countries closer to each other. But this may also be seen as Nigerian 'collusion' with foreign interests against African State, Libya on the long run. Whatever the situation, war cannot but be enhanced in this case. The likely solution therefore, is for Nigeria to re-examine her peace policy of Chad.

The focus of the peace policy can either be on how to settle the conflict without the foreign interventionists, which is more of a myth, or on settling it with them, along with the Chadians at an agreed price, which is more feasible.

Nigeria can be a friend to all but cannot be a good one to all at the same time. It is unthinkable to believe that Nigeria can please everyone in Chad at any given time. The fact that the current legitimate government of Chad had at different times accused Nigeria of being used as a recruitment centre for anti Hissene Habre elements, is an evidence of little or no confidence in Nigeria, how much less, confidence in her peace initiative. It should be noted here that Nigeria had been obliged to "re-assure all concerned of its determination to ensure that both Nigerian air and land spaces are not violated by any of the parties in the Chadian conflict" as a demonstration of impartiality.

In sum, if Nigeria still believes in a round table solution, her policy should be geared towards supporting substitutes to both Hissene Habre and Goukouni Weddeye. This is very necessary when one remembers that both of them once belonged to the same political camp in the past, that Goukouni Weddeye was the first legitimate President before the American aided OAU, with French support technically unseated him and paved way for Hissene Habre, and that the litigious issue now in Chad is more of personality clash than of real political grievances. In this case, their non-preparedness to make concessions constitutes an obstacle to peace in Chad. Mr. Habre is not prepared to discuss unless he is firstly acknowledged as the legitimate President of Chad by the GUNT led by Goukouni Weddeye. In addition, the N'djamena government refuses OAU as a good peace mediator because of what it considered the organisation's connivance with Libya. If OAU is not accepted to Mr. Habre, it means a lot. This again argues in favour of the need to settle the problem on the levels of the fighting factions, as well as their supporters. The success of Nigeria's Peace Policy of Chad will therefore largely depend on what she is able to do in initially bringing France and Libya to come to terms and later in uniting all Chadians to accepting the need for a peaceful Chad. Apart from this, supporting the most reasonable faction is another alternative.