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Nigeria's Membership of the Organisation of Islamic Conference: A Study of the Role of Personality in Foreign Policy

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Abstract

Across many fields of human endeavour, leadership and its personality traits have long been recognized as an important variable that influence the success and failures of events. Also, the course of history from the days of yore till date is determined by the decisions of political leaders. Leaders and the kind of leadership they exert shape the way in which policies are made and the consequent behaviour of states either in the domestic or foreign domains. This assertion underscores the fact that individuals are not mere pawns on the chessboard of politics but active agents of political change, actors and authors of the drama of history. This paper examines the role played by few political elites during the Babangida's regime in Nigeria's diplomatic initiative to upgrade Nigeria's membership status in the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC). The paper submits that policies and consequent behaviour of states in municipal and global politics are the results of personal actions and dispositions of leaders.

Introduction

Foreign policy is a set of principles that defines the objectives a given state pursues in the course of its interaction with other actors in the international arena. It denotes the strategy or planned course of action formulated by political elites aim at achieving national interests of states in global politics.

In the realm of foreign policy analysis, the impact of personality looms large because decision making is the result of human agency. Put differently, it is individuals who make decisions and not state as such. Therefore the study of personality remains an important variable in understanding foreign policy behaviour. This is because the goals, abilities

and foibles of leaders are crucial to the intentions, capabilities and strategies of a state. In truth, individual decisions reflect the values and beliefs of the decision makers. Also, the personality factor plays a greater role in the formulation of foreign policy of state especially when the political structures or institutions in such states are new, when the state is in crisis or unstable, or when such structures collapse.

Founding fathers of states like George Washington (USA), Jomo Kenyatta (Kenya), Mahatma Ghandi (India), Abubakar Balewa (Nigeria), Lenin (Russia) has great impact because they led in the early years of their nation's lives, when institutions and practices were being established. General Yakubu Gowon, Adolf Hitler, Franklin Roosevelt and Mikhail Gorbachev had more influences on the foreign policy of their states because their states were in political and economic crises when they were in power. Political leaders also affect the course of events when they have few institutional constraints. In military or dictatorial regimes, top military leaders are relatively free from domestic constraints such as social inputs, political oppositions, constitutional regulations and thus are able to chart courses, formulated and implement foreign policy relatively unfettered. General Babangida in Nigeria is a clear example. Furthermore, the specifics of situations also determine the role of personality in foreign policy. Political leaders personal traits have more influence or outcomes when the foreign policy issues are peripheral and the issues are not routine, that is, standard operating procedures are not available, and when the situation is ambiguous and information is unclear. Crisis situation in particular, where information is in short supply and standard operating procedures inapplicable create scenarios in which decision makers personal characteristic count most. (Mingst 1999:206)

This paper examines the relevance of personality in foreign policy. It highlights the role played by few foreign policy elites in diplomatic initiative made by Nigeria during the Babangida's regime towards upgrading her membership status in the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC).

To achieve this aim, the paper is structured into four parts. Following the introduction is the origin and objectives of the Organisation of Islamic Conference and the assessment of Nigeria's membership in the Organisation before 1986. Part three analyse the rationale behind Nigeria's decision to upgrade her membership status in the organisation and the key elements and actors behind the decision. Part four is observation and

conclusion.

Historical Background and Objectives of OIC

The origin of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) could be traced to 1969 when the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, was set on fire allegedly by Israeli government agent. That incident prompted violent reactions and outrage in many moslem countries. That incident prompted a summit, the first of its kind at Rabat, Morocco with 24 Islamic Heads of state in attendance in September 1969. (Akindede, 1975:491). One of the outcome of the summit was a resolution which enjoined Islamic government all over the world to consult together with a view to promoting close cooperation and mutual assistance inspired by the teachings of Islam. It was also agreed that the foreign ministers of the participating countries should be charged with the responsibility of working out modalities for the realisation of the goal of closer cooperation among Islamic government (Bangura, 1989:130).

Thus in March, 1970, as a follow up to the 1969 summit, Foreign Ministers of Islamic nations held a meeting in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia and another meeting in December, 1970 in Karachi to finalise plans for the establishment of the Organization in May, 1971. The Organization Charter which was adopted in July 1972 by thirty six Islamic Nations at Jeddah, Saudi Arabia signaled the birth of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) (Akinyemi, 1979:110).

Aims and Objectives

As embedded in its Charter, the aims and objectives of the Organisation of Islamic Conference are:-

- To promote Islamic solidarity among member states,
- To consolidate cooperation among members states in the economic, social, cultural, scientific and other vital fields of activities and to carry out consultations among member states in International Organisations.
- To eliminate racial segregation and discrimination and to eradicate colonialism in all its forms.
- To take necessary measures to support international peace and security founded on Justice;
- To coordinate efforts for the safeguard of the Holy places and support

the struggle of the people with a view to safeguarding their dignity, independence and national rights, and

- To create a suitable atmosphere for the promotion of cooperation and understanding among member states and other countries.

These broad aims and objectives are to be achieved on the principles of:

- Total equality between member states.
- Respect of the right of self determination and non interference in the domestic affairs of members states.
- Respect of the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of each member state.
- Settlement of any conflict that may rise by peaceful means such as negotiation, mediation, reconciliation and arbitration and;
- Abstention from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity, national unity or political independence of any members State (Garba, 1989:79).

As spelt out in the Charter of the Organisation, the body has the Conference of Heads of State as the supreme organ. The Conference of Heads of State meets in summit every three years on rotational basis. There is also the Conference of Foreign Ministers, comprising Foreign Ministers or the representatives of member state. This body meets annually to consider means of implementing the policies and decisions of the Organisation.

Below this organ is the Secretariat. This body serve as the Executive arms of the Organisation. The Secretariat is headed by a Secretary General who is assisted by four Assistant Secretaries general. The fourth organ is the Specialised Committees. These include:-

- Al-Qu Committee on Jerusalem (1975)
- Islamic Commission for Economic, Cultural and Social Affairs (1970).
- Permanent Finance Committee for Scientific and Technical Cooperation (1981), Standing Committee for Economic and Trade Corporation (1981) and Standing Committee for Information and Culture (1981)

Another organ of the conference are the associated institutions. These are;

- Islamic Capital Organisation (1978).
- Islamic Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Commodity Exchange (1979).
- Islamic Development Bank, (1981);
- Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (1980);
- Islamic Ship-owners Association (1981), and
- Islamic Broadcasting Organisation (1975).

The Organisation has subsidiary organs. They are;

- Islamic Solidarity Fund (1974)
- Islamic Foundation for Science and Technology (1975)
- Research Centre for Islamic History, Art and Culture (1976)
- Statistical Economic and Social Research Training Centre for the Islamic Countries (1977).
- Islamic Centre for Technical and Vocational Training and Research (1979)
- International Commission for Islamic Heritage (1980)
- Islamic Commission for International Crescent (1980)
- Islamic Civil Aviation Council (1982) and
- International Islamic Law Commission (1982) (Garba, 1987:80).

A Brief History of Nigeria's Relations with the OIC

Having traced the origin, objectives and organs of the Organisation, this parts focuses on the history of Nigeria's link with the OIC before 1986. The history of Nigeria's association with the OIC cannot be fully appreciated without understanding the links between Islamic groups in Nigeria and their counter parts in other parts of the globe; particularly in the Middle East. The most important of these links is the one forged between the governments of the defunct Northern region and Islamic regimes in North Africa and Middle East. As the result of this link, the late Sir, Ahmadu Bello was one of those charged with the responsibility of looking into the possibility of the creation of a permanent forum at which Islamic government could interact on a regular basis. A report, to which Sir Ahmadu Bello contributed was submitted to the sixth session of the Moslem World Congress held in 1966.

Given the long established ties between Nigerian Moslems and their fellow moslems in other part of the world, one can appreciates the delegation of Nigeria Moslems led by Abubakar Mahmoud Gumi to Rabat with the support of the then Sultan of Sokoto, the Late Sir. Abubakar III, to participate in the 1969 summit of Islamic leaders and pledged the support of Nigeria's Moslem population for the effort being made to form the International Islamic Organisation that came to be known as the Organisation Islamic State [OIC] (Newswatch, 24 February, 1986).

Nigerian Moslem population shared in the outrage that swept the Moslem world, following the burning of the Al-Aqsa Mosque, an incident which prompted the 1969 Rabat Summit and gave impetus to the formation of the OIC. However, the Gumi delegation to Rabat did not have the support of the Nigerian government under General Yakubu Gowon. Anxious to clear all doubts about the Gumi delegation, an anxiety made inevitable by the fact that Nigeria is a secular state, the government acted immediately through a press conference that the presence of some Nigerians in the Conference did not in any way represent a declaration directly or indirectly of Nigeria's intention to become a member of the Organisation of Islamic states. In an urgent message sent through diplomatic channel, to King Hassan of Morocco, General Gowon stressed that the Gumi delegation was a private one which was on its own and which did not in any form represent the Nigerian people and government. Consequence of Gowon's message, the delegation was denied accreditation at the Rabat conference and was allowed to observe the proceedings (Akindele, 1975:116).

One can argue that General Gowon's message to King Hassan in 1969 set the tone for Nigeria's 15 year observer status in the OIC when the Organisation was formally inaugurated in 1971. The message was clear on the fact that Nigeria had no intention of becoming a full-fledged member of the organisation, a position which was retained by the Murtala/Obasanjo regime (1975-1979) and the Shagari administration (1979-1983) (Paden, 1986:14).

It seems however, that concerted effort to change Nigeria's observer status in OIC began in late 1983 immediately after the overthrow of the Shagari led civilian government through a military coup of December 31, 1983. As the Buhari's military junta took over, powerful moslem groups in Industrial and banking sector lobbied the new military regime of General Buhari to upgrade Nigeria's status in the OIC (Newswatch Feb. 1986).

To encourage the government to reach a speedy decision in favour of Nigeria's full membership of the OIC, vague promise of Islamic financial assistance were made at a time there was a stalemate in the negotiation between Nigeria and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) over Nigeria's application for a loan of \$2 billion, which statement led to the blockade of its credit lines to the country by Western banks and the withdrawal by Western expert credit guarantee agencies of insurance cover on export destined for Nigeria. There was, therefore, an acute shortage of basic commodities in the country with the accompanying inflationary spiral that it generated (Olukoshi, 1989:45).

However, the Buhari's administration treaded cautiously on issues which had the potential of dividing the country. In response to the pressure of the pro OIC lobby group that Nigeria's status should be upgraded, General Buhari sent a memo to the Ministry of External Affairs requesting advice on the issue, including an assessment of the merit and demerit of upgrading the country status in the OIC and the likely consequence of that action. Prof. Ibrahim Gambari, who was the Nigerian Minister of External Affairs at the time, argued in his reply to General Buhari against the alteration of Nigeria's observer's status in the OIC, citing the provision of Nigerian Constitution for the maintenance of the secularity of Nigerian State. He also noted that it was an issue that could divide the country and thereby distract from the cruel task of economic and political reconstruction (Olukoshi, 1985:46).

However, General Buhari reaction to the advice of his Foreign Minister was not clear, thereby leaving room for wild speculations. Some media report had it that Buhari had concluded plans for Nigeria's upgrading of her role in the OIC to that of full membership and that the visit of General Tunde Idiagbon to Saudi Arabia in 1985 during the month of the Holy Pilgrimage was meant to pave the way for a state visit by Buhari during which Nigeria's full membership of the OIC would be announced. (Newswatch, Feb, 1986). This appear to be more speculative than real. Whatever the case, the coup of August 27, 1985 put an end to Buhari's regime.

Nigeria's Full membership of the OIC

On August 27, 1985, there was a change of government in Nigeria via a coup that replaced General Buhari with General Ibrahim Babangida as

the Head of State and Government. As with the experience during Buhari's regime, the lobbying group capitalized on the effort for a life line for the Federal Government in the face of a very unhelpful Western Financial Community which insisted on all manner of conditionalities before assistance could be forth coming. The view was strongly canvassed in many circles that Nigeria could and perhaps should call the bluff of the Western financial institutions and seek alternative sources of finance for the country's economic recovery. The new government, in its attempts to come to grips with the country's worsening economic crisis, decided to explore all possible sources of external financial support. Thus the new government in a memorandum to the Ministry of External Affairs, the second of its types on the subject, sought the advice of the Ministry on the issue of whether Nigeria should or should not become a full member of the OIC.

In a reply to the Government memorandum, the Ministry of External Affairs argued against full membership and urged that the country's observer status in the OIC should be retained, thereby underscoring the submission on the subject by Prof Ibrahim Gambari. Gen. Babangida was however, not swayed by Akinyemi's submission. In the meantime, the OIC secretariat sent out invitations in December 1985 to members to attend the Organisation's Ministerial meeting scheduled for 6th to 10th January, 1986 at Fez, Morocco. The invitation to Nigeria was sent to the Ministry of External Affairs, which in turn, sent a telex message to the Nigerian Ambassador in Morocco to make arrangement to observe the proceedings, not knowing that General Babangida had made up his mind and single handedly decided that Nigeria should become a full member of the OIC (Olusanya & Akindede, 1990: 497).

On January 1, 1986, the Ministry of External Affairs was instructed by the Head of State, Gen. Ibrahim Babangida to arrange diplomatic cover for the Nigerian delegation to the Fez Ministerial meeting. The six man delegation led by Late Alhaji Rilwanu Lukman left Lagos for Morocco on January 8, 1986 for the conference. The Fez Conference opened on January 6, 1986 as scheduled with 44 member countries in attendance as full participants, while Afghanistan and Nigeria Ambassador occupied the Observer seat in compliance with the directive telexed to him by the Ministry of External Affairs, and was not aware of the impending arrival of Nigeria's delegation. However, on January 7, 1986, with a signal sent to Fez

about the Nigeria's delegation that was about to leave for Morocco, security was stepped up at the Conference centre while arrangement were made to transport the arriving Nigerian delegates from Fez airport to the venue of the Conference. The Nigerian Ambassador in Morocco, besieged by Journalists about news of Nigeria's impending full membership, confirmed that he had had communication with Lagos some hours earlier, although he refused to disclose the mission of the delegation that was being expected. The Lukman delegation arrived in Fez on January 8, 1986 and participated in the on-going ministerial meeting for the first time on January 9, 1986. It was during the morning session of the Conference on January 9, 1986 that Nigeria's formal application for full membership of the OIC was tabled. The application was given speedy consideration by the Foreign Ministers, who also decided to waive the clause requiring fresh applicants for membership of the Organisation to wait for one year before such application is considered (Olusanya and Akindele, 1990:497).

At about 5.00pm on January 9, 1986, Journalist covering the Conference were invited to the Conference hall to witness the process of Nigeria's formal admission as a full member (Olusanya and Akindele, 1990:497).

First, it was required that the Nigerian application should be sponsored by existing members. Syria, Sierra Leone, Pakistan and Senegal acted as co-sponsors, with the representatives of these countries speaking glowingly in turn about Nigeria's positive role in African and World affairs. Then the Conference Chairperson, who was the Morocco's Foreign Minister, proceeded by reading his address by which Nigeria was formally admitted as a full member of the OIC. He traced the history of Nigeria's association with the Organisation and praised the decision to assume full membership adding "Your seat has always been reserved and we hope you will apply your consistent zeal for the achievement of the aims and objectives of the OIC". (Olusanya and Akindele 1990:497).

With these words, Nigeria was formally welcomed as a full member of the organisation to standing ovation from all the delegates at the meeting.

In response to the speech of the Moroccan Foreign Minister, Late Rilwanu Lukman who headed Nigeria's delegation noted Nigeria's long association, spanning a 15 year period with the OIC, during which the country played an observer role. He argued that it was normal after such a long association for the Nigerian Government to decide to seek full

membership of the Organisation. Lukman also thanked the delegates for the prompt and special consideration given to the Nigerian application and pledged that the country will play its role in the Organisation properly. Soon after, the Nigerian flag was hoisted (National Concord, Jan. 1986).

Government Reasons for Nigeria's Full Membership of the OIC:

Nigeria's application for full membership of the OIC has been officially justified on various grounds.

One reason advanced by Babangida's regime was the need to explore all available avenues for salvaging the economy of Nigeria and arrest the economic meltdown. The OIC has as one of its aims the promotion of economic cooperation among its members and given that the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) – one of the associated institutions of the OIC extends interest free loans to its clients, it was thought within government circle that Nigeria should seek ways of taking advantage of that facility. This was the economic argument canvassed by the Babangida's regime for Nigeria's full membership of the Organisation.

The second reason advanced by Babangida's regime in the justification of Nigeria's full membership of the OIC was in terms of the opportunity such membership could afford the nation to realize some of its most vital foreign policy objectives. This according to their argument was so especially as all the members of the OIC, except Turkey, are non aligned countries whose support Nigeria can seek for the purpose of realizing its vital goals in the International system. According to General Babangida, "The OIC is a forum in which we (Nigerians) can mobilize support for the battle against racism and colonialism, as well as advance the interest of our nation" (Newswatch, Feb. 10, 1986:23). One of the aims of the OIC is to combat racist and colonialist oppression all over the world and support liberation effort directed against colonialism and racism.

However, no matter how truthful and sincere the government may have been in this explanation of the decision to upgrade the country status to full membership of the OIC, the emotion laden debate that the decisions generated completely overshadowed the official view of government. The tone and nature of the debate degenerated into a Christian versus Moslem shouting contest.

The government of the day did not help matters as her slow response to questions on the country's exact status in the OIC indirectly

fuelled the suspicion that something sectarian was going on. When government confirmed what took place at Morocco and reasons that informed such decision, many Nigerians saw the explanation as mere after thought designed to defuse an impending crisis and save her face. Even after the Head of State inaugurated a panel headed by the then Minister of Internal Affairs, Colonel John Shagaya to study the implications of Nigeria's full membership of the OIC, the depth of feelings on both sides of the religious divide on the issue was not assuaged (Olusanya & Akindede, 1990:499).

This situation remained so even after a National Committee on Religious Affairs was established in the office of the Head of State to advise government on religious matters. It was only the passage of time that healed the minds of people, a healing process that was greatly enhanced by the fact that the country was only represented by Nigeria Ambassador during the summit of Islamic Head of Government that took place in January, 1987 at Kuwait, a representation that was only to observe proceedings (Newswatch, 7 July, 1986:13).

The Role of Personality in Nigeria's Membership of the OIC:

The delegation from Nigeria to Islamic leaders Summit at Rabat, Morocco in 1969 was a watershed in Nigeria's membership of the Organisation of Islamic Conference. Its import was the pledge of support of the country's Moslem Community for the effort made to form an International Islamic Organisation that came to be known as 'Organisation Of Islamic Conference' [OIC]. This delegation was not an official but a private one led by Abubakar Mahmoud Gumi, encouraged and supported by the then Sultan of Sokoto, Late Sir Abubakar 111. Nigerian government reaction through a diplomatic note to King Hassan of Morocco, stating clearly that the presence of some Nigerians at the Conference did not in any way represent Nigeria's delegation nor Nigeria's intention to become a full member of the Organisation underscores the above position. [Newswatch, May, 1984]

However, concerted effort to upgrade Nigeria's membership of the OIC began in 1984 when some influential Nigerian moslems lobbied the military junta of Gen. Buhari to upgrade the country's membership of the Organisation in order to assess the needed financial lifeline from Islamic Development Bank, in the face of the stalemate in Nigeria's negotiation

with International Monetary Fund for a loan of two billion dollars. [Newswatch, May, 1984.] Gen. Buhari's military government while taking time to consider this option, was replaced by another military government in August, 1985, led by Gen Babangida. The change of government did not deter the lobby group towards the attainment of their goal, rather it gave them impetus because of the dwindling fortunes of the country's economy, the desperate move to revamp the economy and the stringent conditionalities of the IMF. The group made the government to believe that the only alternative to IMF loan was a financial assistance from the OIC, a facility that the country can asses at ease once her membership of the Organisation is upgraded to full membership. Against this background, the military government sought the advice of the Ministry Of Foreign Affairs on Nigeria's full membership of the Organisation. However, the Ministry reply was against the full membership ,status but for the maintenance of the statusquo. Despite this professional advice, the military government brazenly disregarded the advice and in January 1986, sent an official delegation led by Late Rilwanu Lukman, in company of Abubakar Alhaji, Abubakar Ahmed, Ibrahim Dasuki and Mahmoud Gumi to the OIC Ministerial meeting at Fez, Morocco. Its was the Lukman delegation that formalized Nigeria's full membership of the Organisation.

Taking into consideration the due process of decision making in relation to Nigeria's external relations, the above analysis elicits some questions such as:

Who took the decision to upgrade Nigeria's membership of the OIC?
Did the decision pass through due process?
If no, why did Gen. Babangida and his cohorts take the decision, not minding the sensitivity of the issue?

To answer these questions, the paper observe that the decision to upgrade Nigeria's membership of the OIC, from observer to full membership status was the product of idiosyncratic factor in foreign policy. Using Magaret Hermann Personality Factor theory, the paper assert that considering one of the Gen. Babangida personality traits, the belief in his ability to control event and be on top of situations, which is one of the six personality traits of independent oriented[military] leaders, he did not care to consult nor allow the relevant governmental organs to be involved in the decision making. This truism depict the extent the discretions of political

elites and leaders determine or influence state policies, either in the domestic or international domains. In the extant case, it was Gen, Babangida and few moslems that took Nigeria to the OIC

Conclusion

The above analysis was Nigeria's long road to Fez in upgrading her membership of the OIC. It underscores the importance of individual level analysis of Foreign Policy. Also, it lend credence to the fact that the Foreign Policy milieu of Nigeria, like other countries is esoteric, a secretive affairs restricted to the world of diplomats, foreign policy elite and politicians in power.

Though in many instance, when decisions are made, the secrecy involved does not arouse public suspicion and outcry, but the OIC case generated serious reaction and heated up the polity. The tight lid of secrecy that was maintained by the government until the issue got to the public domain through foreign media and the evasiveness of state officials and diplomats contributed to the air of bellicose and suspicion that pervaded the country.

The obvious issue here is that despite the calls by scholars, and analysts for the democratization of the Foreign policy making apparatus, this very important area of politics is still and will continue to be dominated by few personalities that are in power at any given time, and its mode of operations continue in secrecy.

However, it must be admitted that the democratization process as a matter of deliberate policy, will ensure that the various but relevant bodies will have input into the decision making, thereby ensuring a robust and well thought out policies. It will also be a means the government of the day can educate its citizenry on her policies and programmes in the international plane, and guage the true feelings and reactions of the people. Above all, it would necessarily help in the attainment of the goals of the government. Despite the benefits that may accrue to the state in democratising the decision making process, the situational reality remains that the business of foreign policy formulation and implementation, though democratize cannot for obvious reasons of security and national interest be thrown open for public debate and participation, especially on sensitive and delicate cases. The home truth is that few trained persons will continue to dominate the foreign policy milieu and their idiosyncratic traits will continue to

influence and shape the policies and programmes of the state. This fact underscores the popular saying that men (individuals) are the agents of changing society, vectors and means of social changes, actors and authors of the drama of history.

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