



# Nigeria's Diplomatic Initiatives and the Liberation of Angola: 1960-1978

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## ABSTRACT

One of the main tasks that Nigeria set for herself at independence in October 1960, in the area of foreign policy was the vigorous pursuit of the total decolonization of Africa and the dismantling of apartheid in South Africa. Nigeria firmly pursued and won these battles through finances, alliances, meetings and aid. The confidence which the African countries reposed in Nigeria resulted in conferring on her, the status of the continent's mouthpiece. Indeed, the application of vibrant diplomatic skills in the pursuit of the task of decolonization by the Nigerian government could be aptly viewed from the efforts of the activist regime of General Murtala Mohammed between July 1975, and February 1976, which resulted in liberation of Angola from the claws of the Portuguese colonialism. Although the diplomatic engagements did not result in immediate economic gains for Nigeria, it strengthened Nigeria's image as the "giant of Africa". This paper assesses Nigeria's diplomatic engagements toward Angola's liberation and suggests that Nigeria should mainstream economic dimension in her diplomatic relations with Angola on the basis of national interest while still focusing on her Afrocentric foreign policy posture for the good of the continent. The paper adopts a historical descriptive methodology.

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## Introduction

Although there have been variations in style from one administration to another and despite the frequent changes in leadership and alternation between military and civilian regimes, Nigeria's foreign policy concerns have remained fairly consistent, though some issues have received greater emphasis at specific points reflecting the demands of the time, interests, and shifting alliances at the national, regional and global levels than some. The concerns that have dominated Nigeria's relations, both at the bilateral and multilateral levels includes: the protection of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Nigerian state; respect of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of other states, including the total political, economic, social and cultural emancipation of Africa; support for the self-determination of all peoples, including an unflinching commitment of the elimination of colonialism, apartheid and racism around the world; promotion of international co-operation and understanding in the economic, social and political fields, enhancing the dignity and promoting the welfare of African peoples and African descent around the world; and, finally, redressing the imbalances in the international power structure which have tended to stultify and frustrate the proper and orderly development and maturation of the developing countries of the world (Uya, 1992).

Before her independence on the 1st of October 1960, Nigeria was colonized by Britain for about a century. During this period, Nigeria was systematically linked to Britain and the West economically, politically, and to a certain extent culturally. After independence, Nigerian leaders showed little desire to break these historical ties and identify fully with Africa, or to explore links with the Communist and Socialist states.

Admittedly, time was needed for Nigeria's British entanglement to be slackened. But the point being made here is that whereas it was in the national interest of Nigeria to diversify its external links, the country's leaders showed no inclination to do so (Imobighe, 1983).

However, Akpan-Umana (2000) has argued that over the years, Nigeria has always been a staunch believer in African unity and that she recognized the obvious fact that there was strength in unity, but her approach to the question of unity differed substantially from that of the radical states like Ghana and Algeria. For quite some time after independence, Nigeria was called Africa's moderate. Her response to the Pan-African movement was rather hesitant and cautious. When she became involved in African affairs, it was generally in response to the initiatives mounted by other countries such as Ghana.

Once Alhaji Tafawa Balewa was swept out of power as the Prime Minister in January 1966, the lukewarm attitude to the issue of decolonization changed. General Ironsi's regime initiated a policy of boycott and confrontation towards South Africa and because of Portuguese brutal colonial policy in Africa, Nigeria closed down Portuguese diplomatic mission in Lagos. Thereafter, Portuguese were declared prohibitive immigrants in Nigeria. General Ironsi even further banned Portuguese ships and airplanes from Nigeria (Ajala, 1989 and Akpan-Umana, 2000). Nigeria's experience during her Civil War helped in putting Africa at the centre of country's foreign policy. Indeed, the firm support for Nigeria's existence as a corporate entity exhibited by the Organization of African Unity impressed General Gowon to the extent that he declared Africa as the cornerstone of Nigeria's foreign policy (Imobighe, 1983).

The third phase of the Nigeria's military handling of diplomacy is described as the period of dynamism.

Like Gowon, Mohammed/Obasanjo accorded Africa and African problems a central position in their administration's foreign policy. The foreign policy machinery inherited from General Gowon was restructured and a radical foreign policy formulated. To fulfill the Afro-centric policy, the administration increased Nigeria's financial and material contributions to the liberation movements on the African continent and recognized the *Movimento Popular des Africanos de Angola* (MPLA) as the legitimate government of Angola (Okoro, 2002).

The Angolan liberation was a major issue that opened the diplomatic window for Nigeria to display her brilliance and demonstrate her belief in the liberation of Africa. The episode pitched Nigeria against the interest of a superpower - the United States of America and brought Nigeria to the centre stage of global diplomacy.

For proper understanding of the episode, the paper is structured into seven sections. Section one is the introduction, section two discusses the Portuguese colonial enterprise and the rise of liberation movements in Angola, section three examines Nigeria's foreign diplomacy during the administration of Prime Minister Tafewa Balewa, section four considers the contributions of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) now African Union (AU) to the liberation struggle, section five discusses Nigeria's role in the liberation struggle from the military regimes of General Aguiy Ironsi in 1966 to that of Generals Murtala Mohammed/Olusegun Obasanjo in 1976, section six admonishes on the need to mainstream Nigeria's national interest in diplomatic engagements, while section seven is the conclusion.

### **The Portuguese Colonial Enterprise and the Rise of Liberation Movements in Angola**

According to Portuguese accounts, Diogo Cao reached the coast of Angola while exploring the West coast of Africa in search of the route to India in the second half of the fifteenth century and became friendly with the chief and by extension the indigenous people. In 1491, Portuguese missionaries arrived and the chief and a few of his subjects embraced Christianity. The next chief, Affonso I, also became a Christian and exchanged ambassadors with King Manuel III, then King of Portugal and welcomed Portuguese missionaries, traders and artisans (Uwechue, 1996). The Portuguese used the foothold to acquire land from the indigenous people, but above all for the purchase of ivory, gold and other African products, and later for the purchase or seizure of captives whom they sold into slavery across the Atlantic, particularly to Brazil. The Portuguese also mounted military expeditions against resisting African communities, and many wars resulted, notably in Central and Northern Angola. Much ruin and destruction followed in the wake of these intrusive Portuguese (Davidson, 1974).

By the middle of the nineteenth century, there were about 2000 Portuguese in Angola. In 1885, when the Scramble and Partition of Africa was at its peak at the "share-out" Congress of Berlin, Portugal, being a small power, had no chance of getting a sizeable slice of Africa unless it secured great-power protection. This the British provided, finding a convenience in having a junior partner whom they could always control if they wished. In securing Angola, the Portuguese were obliged to give King Leopold of the Belgians, then "owner" of the so-called Congo Free State (which became Belgian Congo in 1908), an outlet to the Atlantic Ocean at the mouth of the Congo River. Having secured an empire on paper, the Portuguese had to conquer most of it. From the 1890s, they set

out on military expeditions through the vast territories awarded to them at the Berlin Congress. This cost them much effort, great expense, and many lives, although not nearly as many lives as it cost the Africans whom they attacked; and not until the early 1920s did their "occupation" become relatively complete. Unlike in Mozambique, where a large region was "farmed out" to concessionary interest organized on something of the same pattern as the British South African Company in Southern Rhodesia, Angola came directly and fully under Portuguese rule (Davidson, 1974).

According to Davidson (1974) the Portuguese colonialism was extreme in its methods and demands, the reason being that, from the beginning, it was a "poor man's colonialism", projected by a very backward country with little capital and less industry, and with half its own population still illiterate, the Portuguese colonial enterprise had to rely on primitive methods of exploitation, backed by an often desperate effort to "stay on top", somehow no matter what disasters this violence might invite. Despite the pretence of the "civilizing mission", Portugal so plundered her colonies that the Scottish explorer and missionary, David Livingstone, urged Britain to take over Portuguese colonies where:

Not a single native has been taught to read, not one branch of trade has been developed; and wherever Portuguese power, or rather intrigue, extends, we have that traffic (slave trade) in full force which may be said to reverse every law of Christ and to defy the vengeance of Heaven (Livingstone, 1886: 636).

Portugal expectedly regarded Livingstone's remark as a pretext for Britain intention to grab her territories (Ojigbo, 1979) and continued with her harsh colonial policies. The scenario attracted the resistance of the Africans, consequently, the first indigenous political association in Angola was the *Liga Angolana*, formed in 1913. It demanded economic and social advancement for Angolans within the Portuguese colonial system. In 1929, another organization, *Gremio Africano* (GA) was formed. Its name was later changed to *Associacao Regional dos Naturais de Angola* (ANANGOLA). In October 1956, Viriato de Cruz, launched the Angolan Communist Party (PCA), the PCA merged with other radical groups that had emerged in the country to form the *Partido de Luta dos Africanos de Angola* (PLAA). In December, 1956, a new organization, the *Movimento Popular de Libertacao de Angola* (MPLA), was formed with Ilidio Tome Alves Machado as president. These movements began in exile, at first, mainly in Europe (Uwechue, 1996).

Among the many political movements launched after the (MPLA) were *Movimento de Independencia Nacional de Angola*, formed in 1957, but later merged with MPLA; and the *Uniao das Populacoes de Norte de Angola* (UPNA) formed in July 1957, by Manuel Barros Necaca and his nephew, Holden Roberto, who later became its leader. In December 1958, the (UPNA) changed its name to *Uniao das Populacoes de Angola* (UPA). In 1966, another political party was formed known as *Uniao Nacional Para a Independencia Toal de Angola* (UNITA) was formed by Jonas Savimbi and others who had broken away from (UPA) in 1964. The UPA joined with the *Partido Democratico Angolano* (PDA) to form the *Frente Nacional de Libertacao de Angola* (FNLA) with Holden Roberto as its leader. All these political movements operated mostly from outside country because of the restrictions on political activities in Angola (Uwechue, 1996).

Indeed, while in exile in Leopoldville (Kinshasha), Dr. Agostinho Neto tried unsuccessfully to unite the MPLA and

the UPA; in March 1962, the UPA joined with *Partido Democrático Angolano* (PDA) to form the Frente Nacional de Libertação de Angola (FNLA). In April, 1962, the FNLA announced the setting up in Leopoldville of *Governo Revolucionário de Angola no Exílio* (GRAE) that is (the Revolutionary Government of Angola in Exile) under Holden Roberto as Prime Minister. Dr. Neto was elected President of MPLA at the movement's first national conference in Leopoldville in December 1962. In June 1963, the government of Congo-Kinshasa (Zaire) accorded official recognition to the GRAE as *de jure* government of Angola in exile and ordered MPLA to close its head offices in Leopoldville (Uwechue, 1996).

All the movements sourced for and acquired external allies which provided them with arms and other assistance, with superpower rivalry coming directly into the political equation. The MPLA received the backing of Soviet Union and Eastern bloc, while the United States of America decided to give backing to FNLA, having identified the MPLA with the progressive movements in Africa. The Cold War politics continued to shape United States attitudes towards Angola for a long time (Abegunrin, 2003).

As the events unfolded, series of attacks were carried out by the movements; it is generally believed that the military impact of all the movements was limited until the early 1970s. After the Portuguese Armed Forces Movement (AFM) overthrew the 48 year-old dictatorship then led by Marcelo Caetano in April 1974, the new military government in Portugal offered to hold a referendum to find out the wishes of the people of Angola. The Portuguese government also called on the liberation movements to order a cease-fire and participate in legal political activities in preparation for the proposed referendum. The MPLA and FNLA rejected the offer and demanded immediate independence (Uwechue, 1996). In August 1974, the Portuguese government declared that it recognizes the right of the people of Angola to self-determination and independence. It also declared its willingness to implement the United Nations decisions on the issue.

#### **The Balewa Era and the Liberation Struggle: 1960-1966**

Although the international community was already up in arms against all forms of colonialism, racial discrimination and apartheid, by the time Nigeria became independent in 1960, her approach to those evils of the time was greatly influenced by her own evolutionary road to freedom. There was no doubt whatsoever that Nigeria was totally opposed to those evils. The fact that Nigeria joined all other freedom-loving member states of the United Nations in December 1960, to adopt the memorable resolution on "the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples" was a clear indication of her commitment. Further proof of Nigeria's commitment was given when Alhaji Balewa, declared at the Summit of African States, which founded the Organization of African Unity (OAU) that "on the question of colonialism and racial discrimination...we in Nigeria will never compromise (Ajala, 1989).

Meanwhile, African's yearnings for independence had gathered momentum, Nigerian leaders were conversant with the tragic events that erupted in Congo-Leopoldville (now Zaire), immediately the colonial authorities - Belgian government was forced to grant independence to that territory without preparing the Congolese for it.

The Nigerian leaders who had adopted evolutionary approach to their country's independence became convinced

that if the colonial authorities had taken pains to prepare the Congolese properly over a period of time, the sad events in the country would have been avoided. They took their experience and the experience of other territories in the former French territories as confirmation of their conviction. Armed with this belief, Nigeria struck to the "gradualist" (moderate) approach to decolonization. Nigeria was not concerned about when all the colonized African countries became independent as long as they were well prepared for it. For this reason, Nigeria did not agree with the decision taken at the 1958 All African Peoples Organization Conference, held in Accra, Ghana, which stipulated that total decolonization should be achieved in Africa at latest by 1963. Instead, Nigeria proposed 1970 as the deadline for the exercise (Ajala, 1989).

Ajala (1989) also notes that instead of yielding to the appeals for much more radical approach, Nigeria embarked on a policy of moral persuasion. Nigeria ignored the liberation movements while the Foreign Minister, Dr. Jaja Wachukwu, started holding talks with the colonial authorities in effort to persuade them to grant independence to their African colonies. He held three such talks in 1961 with the Portuguese Foreign Minister in New York. Such talks which were of course doomed from the outset to fail, had to be abandoned. While the Portuguese authorities ignored Nigeria's approach, it intensified repressive measures against the nationalists in the Portuguese African colonies. Consequently, the nationalists had no choice but to turn to the use of arms in their legitimate struggle for self-determination. While some African states were already giving material aid to these freedom fighters, Alhaji Balewa, warned the other African Heads of State about "the danger of giving indiscriminate help to nationalists which might lead to the abrupt termination of colonial rule instead of gradual transition from colonial rule to independence".

In furtherance of such policy initiative, the Nigerian Prime Minister, in April 1962, refused to offer assistance to Holden Roberto of the FNLA, who sought support for the Angolan cause. However, as the search for African unity intensified and the undeclared struggle between Nigeria and Ghana over the leadership of Africa was seething to the surface, Nigeria's policy towards the liberation movements took a new turn. With the formation of the OAU, which made the liberation of the entire continent its priority, Nigeria adopted a new posture to aid the liberation movements in achieving their goals. For instance, Balewa promptly made Nigeria the biggest contributor to the organization's liberation fund; and also became a leading member of the liberation committee. Furthermore, Nigeria intensified diplomatic efforts against colonial and racist minority regimes at the UN and other international fora. By 1965, the Balewa's government was gradually becoming receptive to the idea of assisting the liberation movements with arms, ammunitions and men (Ojigbo, 1979, Akpan-Umana, 2000).

#### **The Organization of African Unity and the Angolan Liberation Struggle**

As noted earlier, both the FNLA and MPLA were originally involved in the struggle of Angola's independence. UNITA was later added when Jonas Savimbi, who was formerly the Foreign Minister in the Government-in-Exile (GRAE) resigned and founded the movement. Prior to the resignation of Savimbi, the OAU Liberation Committee recommended that "all African countries (should) officially recognize the provincial Government-in-Exile headed by Holden Roberto. The crisis in the leadership of the government in GRAE caused the eventual de-recognition of

the GRAE by the OAU Liberation Committee. As the events were unfolding and it was becoming clear that the FNLA-GRAE could not justify the claims that earned it recognition in the first place, some OAU member-states called for a reassessment of the situation on ground in Angola. In the end it was discovered that while the FNLA-GRAE was living on spurious claims, the MPLA had concrete evidence to show that it was actually engaged in fighting the Portuguese in the territory (Ajala, 1989).

Although the de-recognition of the GRAE did not take place until 1971, the MPLA had in the process become a force to be reckoned with and consequently qualified for the OAU assistance. By the time the Portuguese coup took place in April 1974, the three Angolan liberation movements were receiving financial, material and diplomatic support from the OAU. Shortly after the coup, General Yakubu Gowon, Nigeria's military ruler, who was the Chairman of the OAU sued for unity among the three nationalist movements. The OAU intensified efforts so that transition to independence in the country might be peaceful. However, the three movements did not show enough commitment for such an ideal situation. To complicate matters further, some world leaders that had all along been instrumental in assisting Portugal to thwart the aspirations of the Angolan people suddenly became determined to provide their surrogates in Angola with substantial assistance so that these might come to power. As a result, the more the African states tried to bring the three Angolan liberation movements together to form a government of national unity in order to avoid chaos in the country, the harder these powers intensified and perfected their own plans to sabotage the efforts of the African states. The agents of subversion succeeded and a civil war soon broke out among the three liberation movements (Ajala, 1989).

#### **Nigeria's Role in the Angolan Liberation: From Generals Ironsi to Mohammed/Obasanjo's Regimes**

As indicated earlier, the soldiers who assumed the reins of power after the ouster of Alhaji Balewa were not arch-conservatives like Balewa of Northern People's Congress (NPC). Indeed, the lukewarm attitude to the issue of decolonization changed dramatically. General Ironsi, who was the Military Head of State between January and July, 1966, rejected the Portuguese colonization of Angola and took drastic diplomatic actions against the country. The Gowon's administration which lasted from July 1966 to July 1975, opposed to the Portuguese colonization of Angola and handsomely contributed to the elimination of alien rule in the country. In 1973, General Gowon was elected the OAU Chairman at the Addis Ababa, thus, the position further gave Nigeria the vantage position from which it coordinated the African resistance to colonialism. However, General Gowon was still perceived as too moderate and gradualist, preferring the collective approach rather than allowing Nigeria to seize the initiative which its size, wealth and influence provided. This was probably responsible for the slow pace of action. It is remarkable that Nigeria, which hitherto did not seriously endorse armed struggle, suddenly became its most important advocate. It not only embraced all the liberation movements on the continent regardless of their ideological orientations but also allowed their leaders and officials to visit Nigeria and act previously unthinkable under Balewa's regime (Fawole, 2003).

Initially, Nigeria had no special interest in Angola other than the promotion of national aspirations for freedom and national independence from Portugal, which was considered a

recalcitrant colonial power. Nigerian elites never accepted the Portuguese official policy which regarded its African possessions as part of the Portuguese metropolis. Nigeria had no economic or security interest in Angola. The main interest of Nigerian leaders then was to promote the rapid decolonization not only of Angola but also of other African countries under alien rule. By 1975, however, Nigerian policy makers had begun to show serious concern about South Africa's role in Angola. South Africa military thrust deep into Angola was viewed by Nigeria as a security threat to all viable African states which supported Southern African liberation movements. In the perception of Nigerian leaders, if South Africa had succeeded in installing a pliable government in Angola, its next targets would have been Mozambique and ultimately Nigeria. South Africa's military adventure in Angola was, therefore, seen as a design to abort the liberation struggle in the entire Southern African region and subject viable African countries to South African's will (Sotunmbi, 1990).

Moreover, Nigeria stood firm against any attempt, then championed by Frente de Libertacao do Enclave de Cabinda), for Cabinda, the oil rich enclave being coveted by Zaire, to secede from the Angolan mainland. Such an action was unexpected from Nigeria which had waged a civil war over a similar problem. The overthrow of the nine-year old regime of General Yakubu Gowon on the 29th of July, 1975, brought into power a more dynamic and radically inclined military ruler in the person of General Murtala Mohammed. He had, as second-in-command, General Olusegun Obasanjo. The duo complemented each other because of shared values and attitudes towards national issues. Both men were fiercely nationalistic and stubborn in their commitment to actualizing their perception that Nigeria had an "ordained" role to play in African politics, and were passionately committed to uplifting the dignity and integrity of the black man. This was the duo that shaped Nigeria's foreign policy and external relations between 1975 and 1979, after which the military handed over power to civilians. That period is commonly referred to in the literature as the "Mohammed/Obasanjo regime" because Mohammed's six-month tenure dove-tailed into Obasanjo's period, and because of the perceived continuation by Obasanjo of the domestic and external policy thrusts that both men had charted for the regime at its inception in 1975 (Fawole, 2003). Shortly after Mohammed assumed power in July 1975, the country's clear and uncompromising stand on the political conflict in Angola was the first evidence of its foreign policy. As noted, Nigeria under Gowon had not taken sides in the Angola conflict, but rather encouraged the three Angolan liberation groups – the (MPLA), the (FNAL), and the (UNITA) – to collectively agree on a government of national unity and to work together for the benefit of all the Angolan people. The Nigerian government, however, did not approve of the Soviet and Cuban military's support of the MPLA, because all forms of foreign intervention were seen as obstacles to the formation of a unified government. Nevertheless, it did understand that Soviet aid in the form of money, equipment, and manpower had made and continued to make possible the MPLA's armed struggle against Portuguese colonialism, and that Cuba was not out to colonize Angola (Abegunrin, 2003).

Having made its stand absolutely clear Nigerian Federal Commissioner for External Affairs, Brigadier Joe Garba, first embarked on a shuttle diplomacy to some countries directly involved in the Angola problem namely: Zaire, Congo,

Tanzania and Zambia (and also Uganda, whose President Idi Amin was the Chairman of OAU at that time). The four countries were known mentors of each of the liberation movements. However, Garba discovered that apart from Congo, none of the movements had a phalanx of one movement, but instead, representatives of all three. In Zaire, he held long discussions with FNLA representatives, who assured him that the best solution was a government of national unity. In addition he met with the Head of State General Mobutu Sese Seko and diplomatically convinced him to align his stance with that of Nigeria. In Congo Garba held talks with Prime Minister Henri Lopez, on behalf of President Marine Nguabi, because, Lopez was pro-MPLA, the engagement in Brazzaville was hitch free (Abegunrin, 2003).

In Zambia, Garba met the representative of MPLA, Olga Liara and representatives of other movements. He later held talks with President Kenneth Kaunda, who told him that the hope for peace in Angola was a government of national unity. In Tanzania, the discussion with President Julius Nyerere revealed that he too like Kaunda of Zambia, preferred a government of national unity because he feared that there could be an outbreak of a civil war when the Portuguese must have relinquished power and there was no functional government. The meeting with Idi Amin in Uganda revealed that he too envisaged sending OAU peace-keeping force to Angola after independence to avert war. On its part, Nigeria in the process, offered to host the leaders of the three movements in Lagos so that the modalities might be worked out for bringing about the envisaged government of national unity. In order that this objective might be achieved, Nigeria even suggested that Angola's independence be postponed for three weeks (Ajala, 1989 and Garba, 1991).

However, the foreign intervention in Angola, particularly by apartheid South African regime, completely changed the situation and necessitated an urgent review of the Nigerian foreign policy on Angola. Three factors that led to the change in Nigeria's Angola policy were: first, South Africa's deployment of an invasion force into Angola with plans to overrun the most patriotic of the Angolan liberation movements, the MPLA, and install the puppet reactionary groups of the FNLA and UNITA in power. The second factor was attempts made by the Western economic interests that had exploited Angola during colonial times "to continue to avail themselves of Angola's peoples even after their independence". Thirdly, Nigerians as a whole wanted to throw her weight behind the MPLA, despite U.S. pressure placed on the Nigerian government to maintain neutrality. Consequently, Nigeria declared open support for the independence of Angola and recognized the MPLA as the country's legitimate government, on the 26th of November, 1975. Nigeria assisted it in its struggle to unify the country and defeat the racist South African invaders and their collaborators. The Mohammed's administration also immediately reversed its opinion on Soviet and Cuban support for the MPLA, acknowledging that aid had been legitimately requested by Angola and was unlikely to undermine the country's independence. Nigeria quickly declared her full support for the MPLA, contributed material and diplomatic assistance, and launched an energetic and forceful campaign to secure the OAU support for the MPLA (Abegunrin, 2003).

Joseph Garba recalled that on the 23rd of November, 1975, he summoned Donald Easum, the American Ambassador to Nigeria to his office after receiving information that South African troops had advanced from

Cunene River and were moving rapidly toward Luanda and directed him to contact his government for the immediate discontinuation of the invasion. The provocation by South Africa immediately attracted the decision of the Head of State General Mohammed and his close ally to direct the recognition of MPLA (Garba, 1991).

The Mohammed government's swift action received widespread endorsement from Nigerians who saw their country beginning to take the lead as they expected it to be doing since independence. The euphoria that followed that action could only be understood from the point of view of a country that had been perceived by its citizens as destined for a leading and prominent role in African affairs but which could not live up to this billing in the 1960s because of the extreme conservatism and pro-Western inclination of the immediate post-independence rulers (Fawole, 2003).

Once the recognition of MPLA was done by the Nigerian government, an outright grant of 24 million Dollars was made to the organization. Military hardware from rifles to MiGs, supplies from clothing to composite rations, were sent in ever-increasing quantities. In addition, a young Foreign Service Officer, who, because of his knowledge of Portuguese had been sent to open a Legation in Luanda, was immediately elevated to the post of Ambassador. Nigeria officials began effective shuttle diplomacy to secure recognition for the MPLA. The Angolan authorities were also promised additional 100 million Dollars as interest free loans for development (Garba, 1991).

Nigeria's unilateral action generated strong diplomatic currents in the international scene and swift action needed to be taken. President Said Barre of Somalia, then a "socialist" and a strong supporter of the MPLA, had asked the OAU to convene an extraordinary summit to discuss the Angolan issue. The difficulty he had securing the two-thirds majority of the OAU's 44 member states mandatorily required for such a meeting shows ambivalence throughout Africa about the whole Angolan episode. When he finally had that majority in late December, only eight Heads of State indicated that they themselves would lead their countries delegations. Nigeria was not one of the countries. However, unfolding events influenced General Mohammed's personal attendance of the Addis Ababa summit. While in Addis Ababa, the Nigerian delegation engaged in a round of quiet lobbying efforts on behalf of MPLA before the official commencement of the meeting. Nigerian delegation diplomatically targeted a few key countries and held discussions with them (Ojigbo, 1979, Garba, 1991).

On the 3rd of January 1976, the American Ambassador to Nigeria delivered a letter addressed to the Nigerian Head of State from the United States President, Mr. Gerald Ford (the letter went to many African countries), sharing, unsolicited, President Ford's views about Angola. Its tone was patronizing, its theme anti-Soviet. It disclaimed any knowledge of or responsibility for South Africa's actions, and urged another round of "negotiations among the Angolan groups". It concluded by saying, "we cannot, however, stand idly by if the Soviet and Cuban intervention persists", and hoped to "continue to exchange views on this". General Mohammed was livid about this diplomatic development.

Not only did the government take the unprecedented step of releasing the Ford's letter to the press, later that evening, the government issued a strong response to it, calling it a "gross insult and overbearing directive", in sum, telling the Americans to go to hell. This was the climax of a series of

events that worsened relations between Nigerian government and the United States of America (Garba, 1991 and Abegunrin, 2003).

The hallmark of the diplomatic engagement took place during the Extraordinary Session of the OAU held in Addis Ababa, on 11th of January, 1976. Gen. Mohammed's made what has been termed a "flamboyant appearance" and "Nigeria's finest hour in regional diplomacy". His speech at the summit was powerful, pungent and even magisterial. He stated:

It is in consideration of the unedifying role which the United States of America has played in the African liberation struggle that the Nigerian Federal Military Government took very strong objection to the patronizing interest which President Ford suddenly developed in the Angolan situation. It should be made clear that African memory is not as short as the American government thinks; we are intelligent enough to draw distinction between foreign advisers from friendly countries invited by patriotic forces to assist in maintaining national sovereignty and defend territorial integrity and those racist adventurers who take upon themselves to invade African countries in order to undermine their independence and exercise neo-colonialist influence. This is the crux of the Angolan question. On the one hand is the MPLA whose record in the struggle against Portuguese imperialism is impeccable and whose government in Luanda has been recognized by 23 African countries. The Nigerian Federal Military government being deeply convinced that the MPL is the most dynamic, most nationalistic of all the nationalistic movements representing the interest of the Angolan people, and convinced that it possesses the attributes of an effective government, joined other African countries in according it recognition. It is the duty of the session to complete the process undertaken so far by individual governments by unanimously according the recognition of our organization to the government of the MPLA. (Nwachukwu, 1991: 38).

General Mohammed added:

On the other hand are FNLA and UNITA, two movements which no doubt played their part in the liberation struggle but which have forfeited their right to leadership of the Angolan people by joining hands with neo-colonialist adventurers and racist soldiers of fortune including the apostles of apartheid, in a determined effort to destroy the sovereignty of Angola. After the moral and material support which Nigerian gave to the Angolan liberation struggle, the Federal Military Government cannot support any movement that seeks to hand the fruit of Angolan, indeed, African labour to the enemies of Angola and Africa. It is mark of the disrepute in which the FNLA/UNITA front has thrown themselves by their unpatriotic association with the notorious subverters of African independence and the band of racists in Pretoria, that not African country has accorded them recognition (Nwachukwu, 1991: 38).

He also observed that the Angolan situation was a reflection of the stormy history of the African continent – "a history which is mostly the making of outsiders. There is hardly any of our countries which, having emerged from colonialism to independence has not been subjected to subversion and other covert activities to promote instability". He observed that such a situation of political chaos helps to keep the countries weak and underdeveloped, to the delight of the neo-colonialists who can always point to the instability of the Africans to rule themselves.

He implored the summit further thus:

In the circumstance...this assembly has before it a clear choice. It should endorse the MPLA, as the only government of Angola and invite its President, Dr. Agostinho Neto, to take his place of honour among us...the OAU should use its good offices in consultation with the Angolan government to effect national reconciliation of all the people of the country...Mr. Chairman, Africa has come of age. It is no longer under the orbit of any extra continental power. It should no longer take orders from any country, however powerful. The fortunes of Africa are in our hands to make or mar. For too long have we been kicked around; for too long have we been treated like adolescents who cannot discern their interests and act accordingly. For too long has it been presumed that the African needs outside "experts" to tell him who are his friends and who are his enemies. The time has come when we should make it clear that we can decide for ourselves; that we know our interests and how to protect those interests; that we are capable of resolving African problems without presumptuous lessons in ideological dangers, which more often than not have no relevance for us, nor the problems at hand. (Nwachukwu, 1991: 39)

The trenchant speech notwithstanding, the Angolan imbroglio could not be resolved at the summit as the countries present split up evenly at 22 countries for and 22 countries against recognizing the MPLA government. After the summit, Nigeria had to engage in a high-profile diplomatic offensive to persuade the dissenting states, a measure which succeeded in getting more states to support the Angolan government. More countries were won to Nigeria's side to the extent that the OAU accorded formal recognition to the People's Republic of Angola on the 11th of February, 1976, only two days before the bloody coup in which General Mohammed was killed (Fawole, 2003).

The Obasanjo's administration continued the tradition of Nigeria's active support for the MPLA. Thus, later in 1976, Nigeria played a key role in getting the Gulf Oil Corporation, an American multi-national corporation to resume operation in Angola. In its early days, one of the most important objectives of MPLA government was to secure recognition from the Ford's administration and this was not forthcoming; as such the Angolan government wanted the next best from the USA recognition which was for Gulf Oil to resume operations in Cabinda, the Angolan enclave. It therefore sought Nigeria's assistance. In response, the Nigerian government calmly suggested to Gulf Oil that it would be in its best interest to resume operation in Angola – or have its operations in Nigeria closed down. As would be expected, this promptly brought the President of Gulf Oil to Nigeria to determine if the threat was a serious one; General Obasanjo confirmed to him that Nigeria was serious, and graciously offered him an escort to proceed to Angola to negotiate with the authorities. Considering the importance of their Nigerian operations, Gulf Oil was persuaded that it was in their best interest to resume their Angolan operations. With the help of Nigeria, oil operations resume in Angola and net royalties was paid the next day (Ojigbo, 1979, Nwachukwu, 1991).

Nigeria promised to assist Angola with C-130 aircraft, frozen meat and other essential needs. At this time, Nigeria was spending vast sums to import chilled meat from Argentina to satisfy the urgent needs of Nigerians. Part of the package included Nigerian Airways direct flights to Launda, in order to give Angolans an air outlet. From the beginning, these flights were to run at a loss to the Nigeria government because there were not many Nigerians flying to Angola, nor were there



many Angolans, other than officials, flying to Nigeria. This aircraft flew almost empty every time. Because of the economic implication, the Nigeria Airways approached the Angolan government to grant Nigeria transit rights to Zambia, from where the airways might be able to make some profit on the return trip by routing the flight through Nairobi. The Angolans refused, on the excuse that they too had an interest in the route. However, the flights continued. It was not until 1978, that the government authorized Nigerian Airways to withdraw from the route. Despite the huge Nigerian investment, when Angola launched its own airline, it flew, not through Lagos, but to Lisbon; and if Nigerians wished to go to Angola, they had to fly first to Portugal (Garba, 1991).

One of Angola's greatest resources was fish off her coast, and Nigeria had envisaged that Nigerian fishing trawlers would be allowed to fish there. When the time came to formalise agreement, the Angolans put obstacles in the way. Delegation after delegation went to Angola only to have inconclusive discussions. Instead, exclusive fishing right was given to the Russians. Above all, Angola did not react until after three weeks after the assassination of General Mohammed on the 13th of February, 1976. Even though the Nigerian authorities knew that President Neto overflowed Nigeria's territory twice during the sad period, on his way to and from Guinea and Guinea Bissau, his first outing since Angolan independence, but he did not deign to stop in Lagos to share Nigeria's sorrow. With General Obasanjo's assumption of office as the Head of State, the Minister of External Affairs, made a visit to Angola to "see the country for which Nigeria had done so much" shockingly, President Neto refused to grant him audience., possibly because Nigeria was not considered as sharing Communist orientation with the Angola (Garba, 1991).

#### **Mainstreaming national Interest in Diplomacy: Lessons from the Angolan Experience**

More than half a century after Nigeria's independence, the philosophy underpinning Nigeria's diplomacy has not changed significantly. The missing skill still remains the mainstreaming of Nigeria's national interest in its external relations. Despite Nigeria's huge sacrifice in peace keeping in Africa, little attention has been paid to economic benefits hence; the African markets are dominated by foreign powers from Europe, America, Asia and even Middle East.

The scenario projected above is not different from Nigeria's indifference to rich resources in other African countries that have benefitted greatly from supreme sacrifices by Nigeria. These include Gabon, Angola, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Congo and Mozambique. What Nigeria has always had in return is xenophobia – hostility against Nigerians and their business interests. From official trade and investment statistics, there is actually little or no relationship between Nigeria and African countries. No one should be quick to blame the countries for not having deep economic relations with Nigeria, but the truth is that Nigeria has failed to employ government-to-government mechanisms to attract patronage to its markets and opportunities (Akpuru-Aja, 2012).

Akpuru-Aja (2012) adds that resources of the world are open to exploitations by nations or countries that connect national interest with the conduct of foreign policy.

The conduct of Nigeria diplomacy has been more politically focused rather than economic utility. There is the need for a reconstruction of such "diplomatic regime" by making such enterprise "value added" within the framework of Afrocentrism. (Akpuru-Aja, 2012). Nigeria has to diversify

her mono-crop economy, become export oriented to take advantage of the vast emerging African market.

#### **Conclusion**

Nigeria's diplomatic engagements which resulted in the liberation of Angola was moderated by her foreign policy posture which in turn was influenced by the leadership of the country. During the era of Alhaji Tafawa Balewa, the gradualist approach to the liberation agenda was adopted. All through the early 1960s, Nigeria seemed to play second fiddle to Ghana, a fellow former British colony that had carved a niche in radical Pan-Africanism from the late 1950s. Prime Minister Alhaji Balewa was no match to the more charismatic and flamboyant Ghanaian leader, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah who sought to make his country the giant of Africa. This development was unacceptable to Nigerians who were convinced that their country was "manifestly destined" to lead Africa. Even though Ghana was by the mid 1960s no longer a credible rival to contend with, Nigeria's General Gowon was rather cautious and conservative, eschewing highly contentious or controversial foreign policy that could pitch it against other states and the country was still deeply pro-West (Akpuru Unama, 2000 and Fawole, 2003).

The Mohammed/Obasanjo's regime began an era of activist and dynamic foreign policy since Nigeria's independence in 1960. The Mohammed's regime is perhaps best remembered for its stand on the Angolan problem. This was the first evidence that Nigeria had come of age, and also one that has been the most celebrated in the vast literature on Nigeria's foreign policy. The unilateral recognition of the MPLA as the legitimate government in Angola attracted the displeasure of the United States of America and some other African countries.

Nigeria deepened the diplomatic strategy and ensured that a substantial number of African countries granted recognition to the MPLA and eventually the OAU. The sudden recognition of the MPLA was evidence that Nigeria was willing to live up to that long-conceived regional leading role. The regime suddenly began adding colour to a rather drab image and Nigeria gained world attention as the African giant that had woken from deep slumber. The busy schedule of its External Affairs Commissioner, junketing around the world in high-profile diplomatic engagements underscored the new found activism. In other words, it was the Angolan problem that gave the regime its high profile in international diplomacy (Fawole, 2003). Nigeria's diplomatic initiatives was widely applauded, for instance, Tanzanian former Foreign Minister, Ibrahim Kaoma, declared at the 26th Ordinary Session of the Council of Ministers of the OAU in Addis Ababa on the 22nd of February 1976, while paying tribute to the slain Nigerian leader, General Murtala Mohammed thus: "let us make no mistake, the position of Nigeria in Angola played a very decisive role in the turn of events in that country" (Ojigbo, 1979). Nigeria has to strengthen its African policy in the era of globalization which is an offshoot of colonialism but in doing this national interest should be mainstreamed into its diplomatic baggage.

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