

**PRESIDENT BUHARI'S FOREIGN ENGAGEMENT AND NIGERIA'S DOMESTIC PROBLEMS**

**EZE R. C. (Ph.D)**

**Department of Political Science  
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka,  
Anambra State, Nigeria.**

**Agena James E. (Ph.D)**

**Department of Political Science,  
Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki,  
Ebonyi State, Nigeria**

**ABSTRACT**

*It is an obvious fact in International Politics that domestic issues (national interest) determine and shape a country's foreign policy. This becomes more real when the present administration in Nigeria is taken as a point of departure. Coming on the heels of the "change" platform, Buhari identified the core problems of Nigeria to be in the areas of insecurity, corruption and a battered economy during his campaign for the office of the president in 2015. This study has as its major objectives, x-raying how these core problems have been solved especially judging from the numerous foreign engagements of President Buhari administration. The paper reveals that while the administration has significantly made impressive impact in the areas of security and war against corruption, the performance in the economic sector is dimly poor. The paper therefore recommends a more robust economic policy through the engagement of economic experts and industrialists to lend a helping hand in the troubled economic sector as a way of guaranteeing good living standard of Nigerians.*

**Key Words:** Foreign Engagements, Domestic Problems, Insecurity, Corruption.

**INTRODUCTION**

Nigeria, just like other developing countries the world over is been faced with numerous challenges ranging from high level of insecurity to that of a depressed economy. Succeeding administrations in the country especially with the return to democratic governance in 1999 have evolved various strategies aimed at proffering solutions to these problems to no avail. The problems in Nigeria become more intense during the build-up to the 2015 general elections in the country, where there was high level of insecurity as a consequence of the activities of the Boko Haram terrorists especially in the North-East part of the country, the preponderance of corruption is so alarming that it almost became an institutionalized way of conducting government and private businesses, all with its concomitant consequence in the economy of the country. That was the existing order in Nigeria in the build-up to the 2015 general election that was seen as a straight contest between the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the coalition of parties under the aegis of All Progressive Congress (APC). The 2015 general elections campaign especially for the presidency was acknowledged as the fiercest in the history of party politics in Nigeria. The campaign saw to the use of unprintable words by the two strongest parties (PDP and APC) to the contest especially about their rival presidential candidates, Goodluck Jonathan of the PDP and Muhammadu Buhari of the APC. Equally, party stalwart strongly supported their candidates and political party. Momudu (2016:8) stated thus about the candidature of Muhammadu Buhari:

*Buhari had crisscrossed several political parties. He had been called unprintable names including religious bigot, ruthless*

*dictator, certificate dodger and forger, terrorist and so on. Those who would ordinarily not support Buhari all lined up for him. Buhari was repackaged and rebranded as a born again democrat. The recklessness of the PDP government and the war of attrition which ravaged the ruling party made Buhari's xxxxxxx a lot sleeker this time. What was thought impossible in the past ignited and exploded at home and abroad. Buhari was funky-fied and he became a brand we all identified with proudly.*

It could be stated that before the 2015 general elections, Muhammadu Buhari had contested for the presidency three times in 2003, 2007 and 2011. In all these elections, he had been randomly defeated due principally to the fact that more Nigerians see him as a man who truncated democracy in 1983 as a Military General when he overthrew the civilian administration of president Shehu Shagari and therefore cannot be trusted heading a democratic Nigerian government. With the kind of opinion that most Nigerians hold about Muhammadu Buhari, it is common knowledge that selling his candidature to Nigerians would not be an easy task. The parties under the aegis of APC to contest with the PDP that has been in power for sixteen years created a tensed political atmosphere in the country especially the campaign process. Nwaneri (2016:12) aptly described the APC campaign in the following words:

*The dynamism Buhari and the APC leadership introduced in the 2015 presidential campaign saw the former military ruler extending his campaign beyond the northern part of the country, perhaps for the first time since 2003 he started vying for the country's to job. His campaign train which took off from Port Harcourt, Rivers State on January 6, 2015 criss-crossed 35 out of the 36 states in the country and the Federal Capital Territory except Yobe State due to the security situation in the North-East then.*

The campaign process saw Buhari and the APC identifying the three core areas where the problems in Nigeria is more severe and they include, in the areas of insecurity, corruption and a crippling economy with high level of unemployment seen among the worst the world. As a consequence, Buhari and his party (APC) made several promises and commitment to providing the much needed panacea when elected in power to manage the affairs of Nigeria. Buhari eventually won the 2015 presidential election in Nigeria, his opponent and incumbent president Goodluck Jonathan conceded defeat and even congratulated his challenger and winner thereby history as the first presidential election in Nigeria where the incumbent was defeated by the opposition.

The excellent performance of the opposition party (APC) in the 2015 presidential election could be said to be a product of two factors:

- a. *The many years of PDP misrule which had seen the economy nose-dived, the precarious security situation that got to an alarming proportion especially the Boko Haram insurgency in the North-East and the Niger Delta Militants in the South-South and equally corruption in all sectors of the economy especially among the country's leadership and these are having overbearing burden on the people.*
- b. *The campaign promises of the APC where the party promised to provide the much needed panacea in the areas of insecurity, corruption and the economy especially creating jobs for the battalion of unemployed youths in the country.*

The government of president Buhari as a way of making good her campaign promises had travelled to many countries of the world engaging in various agreements to solve the nation's problems, albeit drawing criticisms from the citizens over the president frequent foreign trip. Okeyemi (2016) opines that the "president has been facing a lot of criticisms for number of foreign trips. So far president Buhari has visited 22 countries between May 2015 to January 2016". However, the extent to which these foreign engagements have translated in providing the much needed solutions to the problems of the country remains topical.

### **BUHARI AND 2015 CAMPAIGN PROMISES**

It is today an established fact that the 2015 general elections in Nigeria saw to the emergence of the strongest opposition party in the history of party politics in Nigeria. Little wonder the opposition party (APC) went ahead to make history winning the presidential election thereby breaking the records of being the first opposition party to defeat an incumbent in Nigeria's political history. However, achieving this feat by the APC came with numerous campaign promises which Nigerians heralded especially judging the high level of disenchantment with the PDP that have been in power for sixteen (16) years and had little to show in terms of development. Three core issues were central to the 2015 general elections campaign and they unarguably are in the areas of security, corruption and the economy. While the government tried to justify what they have been able to achieve in these areas, the opposition (APC) picked holes in all policies of government at the time and marshalled out strategies that they would adopt if voted into power to solve the numerous problems that the country was facing and Nigerian bought into the position of the APC thereby voting the party into power. It will therefore suffice to x-ray the 2015 campaign promises of Buhari and his party (APC) as a way of making an informed opinion about the government under the current leadership of Muhammadu Buhari. In its editorial of 28<sup>th</sup> May, 2015 the Vanguard Newspaper observed the Buhari campaign which ran on a "change" mantra made numerous promises which at some point became too good to be true. The paper catalogued Buhari campaign promises thus:

**On Politics and Governance:** He opined that Nigeria needs fundamental political reform and improvement in governance, more transparency and accountable and promised the following in this area:

1. Initiate action to amend the Nigerian constitution with a view to devolving powers, duties and responsibilities to states in order to entrench true federalism and the federal spirit;
2. Attract the best and brightest of our sons and daughters into our politics and public service by aggressive recruitment of private sector people, academics and professionals within;
3. Strengthen INEC to reduce, if possible, eliminate electoral malpractices in Nigeria's political life;
4. Prevent the abuse and misuse of executive, legislature and public offices, through greater accountability, transparency, strict and implementable anti-corruption laws, through strengthening and sanitising the EFCC and ICPC as independent entities;
5. Amend the constitution to remove immunity from prosecution for elected officers in criminal cases;
6. Restructure governance for a learner, more efficient, and adequately compensated public sector for robust job creation programmes to employ the teeming youths;
7. Require full disclosure in media outlets, of all government contracts over ₦100 million prior to award and during implementation at regular intervals;
8. Reform and strengthen the judicial system for efficient administration and dispensation of justice with the creation of special courts for accelerated hearing of corruption, drug trafficking, terrorism and similar cases of national importance;
9. Fully enforce the freedom of information Act, so that Government held data sets can be requested and used by the public and then such data sets can be published on regular basis;

10. Amend the constitution to require local government to publish their meeting minutes, services performance data, and items of spending over N10 million. (Vanguard Newspaper, 28<sup>th</sup> May, 2015, p.4)

Also reflecting on the campaign promises of General Buhari, Buari (2016: 12-15) captured what Buhari promised Nigerians in the following areas:

**On Boko Haram:** Muhammadu Buhari stated as follows:

*Our government will bring to an end the menace of Boko Haram terror that is plaguing the society. Nigerians are turning into refugees in their country and this is totally unacceptable. An APC government will stabilize security in the country.*

Speaking at Chatham House in London on 26 February, 2015, Buhari promised that if he wins the world will stop worrying about Nigeria. In his words: Let me assure you that if I am elected president, the world will have no cause to worry about Nigeria as it has had to recently; that Nigeria will return to its stabilizing role in West Africa; and that no inch of Nigerian territory will ever be cost to the enemy because we will pay special attention to the welfare of our soldiers in and out of service, we will give the adequate and modern arms and ammunition to work with, we will improve intelligence gathering and border controls to choke Boko Haram's financial and equipment channels, we will be tough on terrorism and tough on its root causes by initiating a comprehensive economic development plan, promoting infrastructural development, job creation, agriculture and industry in the affected areas. We will always act on time and not allow problems to irresponsibly fester, and I, Muhammadu Buhari will always lead from the front and return Nigeria to its leadership role in regional and international efforts to combat terrorism. (Tukur, 2015:6)

**On Corruption:** Buari opined that General had a reputation as a fighter against corruption during his time in charge of Nigeria from 1983 – 1985. In 2015 he restates his determination to fight corruption thus:

*On corruption, there will be no confusion as to where I stand. Corruption will have no place and the corrupt will not be appointed into my administration. First and foremost, we will plug the holes in the budgetary process. Revenue producing entities such as NNPC and Customs and Excise will have one set of books only. Their revenues will be publicly disclosed and regularly audited. The institutions of state dedicated to fighting corruption will be given independence and prosecutorial authority without political interference. We will stop corruption and make the ordinary people, the weak and the vulnerable our top priority.*

**On Economy:** Buhari said that the Nigerian economy is too reliant on oil and gas. He claimed that the development of the agricultural sector and the revival of the textile industry would contribute to helping the economy move forward. According to (Kalzeni, 2015:10) Buhari during his campaign in Owerri promised that industries will be revitalized while soft loans will be given to small and medium enterprises, aside from other infrastructural development and that in Birnin Kebbi, he promised party supporters that “ending current epileptic power supply will boost the economy and attract domestic and foreign investment”.

Also lending his voice on the campaign promises during the 2015 elections in Nigeria, Nwadinobi (2015:12) stated inter-alia:

*During the campaigns leading up to the 2015 general elections in Nigeria, politicians made campaign pledges in different quarters as is always the case. The current ruling party, the All Progressive*

*Congress (APC), who wrestled power from the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) after sixteen years in power, had as their party slogan “change” which also showed in the numerous campaign promises that was made by them to Nigerians. As strange as it seems, the campaign promises of the APC at some point became too good to be true and Nigerians wonder if they will be able to deliver on their promises.*

### **PRESIDENT BUHARI’S FOREIGN ENGAGEMENTS AND DOMESTIC PROBLEMS**

While campaigning for the presidency in 2015, Muhammadu Buhari identified Nigeria’s domestic problems to be in the areas of security, corruption and the economy. When he eventually won the 2015 presidential election and was consequently sworn in on the 29<sup>th</sup> day of May, 2015, the president moved immediately to tackle the Nigerian challenges in the areas identified.

#### **Security**

The security situation was bad especially the activities of the Boko Haram terrorists when Buhari was sworn-in on 29<sup>th</sup> May, 2015. At his inaugural address on the 29<sup>th</sup> day of May, 2015, president Buhari took the first bold step at fighting the insurgency thus:

*the most immediate is Boko Harma’s insurgency. Progress has been made in recent weeks by our security forces but victory cannot be achieved by basing the command and control centre in Abuja. The command centre will be located to Maiduguri and remain until Boko Haram is completely subdued. (Eta, 2015:12)*

To further show the resolve to defeat the Boko Haram terrorists, president Buhari’s first foreign visit after his inauguration president was a trip to Niger, Chad and later Cameroon, the three countries that were worst hit by the Boko Haram activities to seek joint cooperation in the fight against insurgency. Okoli (2016:10) lends credence to this when posited as follows:

*No doubt Buhari’s first trip outside Nigeria mirrors the depth of his concern for the problem which Boko Haram has constituted in the past far years and which also intensified after his assumption. His trip to Niger and Chad, two of the countries worst hit by the Boko Haram insurgency, showed that he understands the regional dimension that the insurgency has assumed, and that for any effort by Nigeria to yield positive results, it must seek the cooperation of its neighbours.*

Another action which president Buhari took immediately was the re-organization of the command structure of the armed forces through the appointment of new service chiefs and strengthening the Multi-National Joint Task Force in the fight against Boko Haram.

For fielding (2016:10-12) President Muhammadu Buhari has faced an imposing array of security and other challenges since his historic election win in March, 2015. However, one notable positive development has been a revamped counter insurgency campaign against Boko Haram extremists in north-eastern Nigeria and the Lake Chad stretching into Cameroon, Chad and Niger. He went further to itemize Buhari’s strategies in the fight against Boko Haram thus:

- ❖ First, following years of failed attempt at regional operation planning intelligence sharing, Buhari has worked far more effectively with his Chadian, Nigerien and Cameroonian neighbours. The regional Multi-National Joint Task Force (MNJTF) framework has allowed joint operations between these countries, while Chadian and Nigerien troops have been permitted to intervene on Nigerian

territory in the Lake Chad area. This resulted in the gradual recapture of nearly all of Boko Haram-controlled territory, which at its peak in 2014, covered an area the size of Belgium.

- ❖ Buhari has replaced the upper echelon of the military hierarchy, moved its anti-Boko Haram command headquarters from the capital Abuja to Maiduguri in Borno state, and investigated more than 30 companies and officers for corruption in the security budget and these have prompted the United States to expand military aid, which was restricted due to human rights concerns under his predecessor Goodluck Jonathan.
- ❖ Last but certainly not least, more effective cooperation with local vigilante groups known as the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) has increased the army's intelligence gathering capabilities, operational reach and overall momentum.

Also in his foreign engagements as a way of tackling the country's security challenges, Buhari visited, United States and Germany where he secured the assurances of their leaders about their desire to assist Nigerian in the war on terrorism especially the Boko Haram scourge. President Francois Hollande in a speech during Buhari's visit to France observes that Boko Haram's declaration of allegiance to the Islamic states poses a major threat to West African countries security and must be taken at face value. In his words "we know Boko Haram is linked to Daesh (Arabic acronym for the Islamic state) and so receives help and support from this group, the fight against Boko Haram is the fight against Daesh' (Siobhan, 2015). The French president promised to assist Nigeria in the war against Boko Haram and equally encourage former French Colonies like Chad, Niger and Cameroon already fighting Boko Haram alongside Nigeria to show more commitment in the war. The President's trip to United States and Germany got the assurances of the countries to assist in the war on Boko Haram. In the United States, a promise to proscribe the heavy laws that has prevented US from selling weapons to Nigeria was made but more specifically, they promise to assist Nigeria in providing more military trainers and expand the intelligence sharing with the Nigerian military for early defeat of Boko Haram and in Germany, the government offered to support Nigeria in the war against terrorism with mine detectors, radar equipment and a held hospital. Chancellor Merkel further pledged increased involvement of Germany in supporting Internally Displaced Person (IDPs) and the reconstruction of their destroyed communities. (Shehu, 2016:7)

### **Corruption**

If there is any problem in Nigeria where there is unanimity of opinion among Nigerians about its existence and the danger it had brought to the society, then it is corruption. It has been variously described, a standard way of behaviour among Nigerians; a statecraft; the fifth estate of realm at the verge of overtaking the first; the face of Nigeria and Nigerians internationally and above all a unique leadership style. Successive administrations in Nigeria have waged unsuccessful war on corruption.

The Buhari's administration came on board in 2015 with a great mindset to fight the corruption cankerworm in Nigeria and there is no doubt that the present administration in Nigeria has given corruption the strongest and greatest war in Nigeria's political history. At least for the first high profile Nigerians are being investigated, arrested and prosecuted for corruption with the Dasukigate (2.1 billion dollars meant for security misappropriated by Dasuki, the former National Security Adviser) being the most high profile being engaged by the Buhari's administration.

The international dimension which corruption has taken in Nigeria is seen from the standpoint of high number of Nigerians who have deposited much of the proceeds of corruption in different countries of the world especially those in leadership position. As a result of this, the war against corruption cannot make any meaningful headway without equally engaging it from the international front. Buhari's international engagements especially as it concerns the way on corruption saw many countries pledging to assist Nigeria in the corruption fight and equally a sincere promise to repatriate stolen funds in their countries back to Nigeria. The commitment of countries to help Nigeria in the corruption fight was due

principally to the vigour Buhari is waging war on the pandemic and his posture as incorruptible. In an address during the London anti-corruption summit in May 2016, Buhari further solicited for partnership of the international community in the war on corruption. In his words:

*we are favourably disposed to forging strategic partnership with governments, civil society organisations, organized private sector and international organizations to combat corruption. Our sad national experience had been that domestic perpetrators of corrupt practices do often work hand in hand with international cartels. This evil practice is manifested in the plundering and stealing of public funds, which are then transferred abroad into secret accounts. I therefore call for the establishment of an international anti-corruption infrastructure that will monitor, trace and facilitate the return of such assets to their countries of origin. It is important to stress that the repatriation of identified stolen funds should be done without delay or preconditions.*

(www.opengovpartnership.org of 12 May 2016:12)

Equally, realizing the new trend among Nigeria corrupt citizens to acquire properties and keep cash in Dubai, United Arab Emirate, president Buhari made a trip to the Islamic country to obtain their commitment in helping Nigeria in the corruption, this international engagement paid off with the signing of bilateral agreement. According to Ibekwe (2016:3),

*the United Arab Emirate (UAE) has become a Mecca for Nigeria's wealthy who are drawn by the expensive high rise properties, glitzy malls and ritzy hotels in the oil rich country. A security source who has been investigating the pattern of Nigeria's investment in the country estimates that at least \$200 billion allegedly stolen from the country's treasury by former government officials is believed to have been stashed in banks and invested in properties in Dubai and Abu Dhabi, two of UAE's most prominent cities.*

### **Economy and Job Creation**

Nigeria operates a mono-economy based on oil. President Buhari took over the presidency when the price of oil was at its lowest ebb and this was to practically affect the performance of the economy. There were more job losses and soaring prices of goods and services. As a way of tackling the problem in this sector which is the life wire of Nigeria, president Buhari visited Saudi Arabia and Qatar as part of his efforts to resolve the low oil prices.

*Nigeria, Africa's highest producer of oil, depends on it for 70 percent of its revenue. It is also one of the lesser influential countries. Buhari met with Saudi's King to discuss on how the oil production in OPEC members could really favour Nigeria, seeing that Saudi was an influential member. It remains to be seen if Saudi would listen to the demands of president Buhari.*

(www.venturesafrica.com of 29 February, 2016:1)

However, apart from the many foreign trips of the president, his call for investors to invest in Nigeria, nothing much has been engaged internationally over the economy. This has obviously led to the current recession ridden Nigerian economy with the concomitant effect leading to soaring prices of goods and services and the highest unemployment status of Nigerians since the attainment of nationhood.

### GAINS FROM BUHARI'S FOREIGN ENGAGEMENTS

There are divergent opinions regarding the various international engagements of president Buhari while one school of thought sees president Buhari's foreign diplomatic shuttles since coming to power in 2015 as very rewarding the other school sees the frequent travels of the president as a waste of scarce resources that could have been channelled into certain troubled sectors of the economy to improve the living conditions of Nigerians. Leading the debate on the gains of president Buhari's foreign engagements, the minister of foreign Affairs, Godfrey Onyeama in a town hall meeting organized by the federal government to access its activities in her 11<sup>th</sup> month in office stated thus:

*When the president assumed office, the problem at hand was how to get the confidence of neighbouring countries to support the war on terror, so what he did was to travel to Chad, Cameroon and other neighbouring countries to seek coalition and now, we can all see the results the country is recording against Boko Haram. The president's trip to China was to attract the much-needed investment in agriculture and solid minerals as well as other important sectors of the economy, which had elicited investment commitments from the Chinese government and investors. (Adamu, 2016:4)*

Also in the same page with Adamu over the gains of Buhari's foreign trips, Igboeli (2015:12) unequivocal stated thus:

*naysayers are quick to forget that the president's foreign trips have opened up a new vista for Nigeria in terms of support for the country's prosecution of the war against terrorism. Nigeria which was shunned by the western powers, today is prepared to receive manifold forms of aid spanning from military equipment, intelligence sharing, funding, training; again such trips afford investors and businessmen the opportunity to have first hand information about the investment opportunities available in the country.*

However, a political activist, Olisa Metuh does not agree with those in positive tune with the president's frequent foreign visits. According to him "A country where there is no petrol, no electricity and where salaries are delayed, require the presence of its leader at home to address these problems. (Olisa, 2016) Another strong critic of the government of Buhari is Ayo Fayose, the governor of Ekiti State. Lending his voice over the frequent foreign trips of the president, speaking through his Media Adviser, Lere Olayinka, Fayose said:

*Foreign countries won't solve our problems for us and the president's incessant foreign trips are already bleeding the economy with about one million dollars being spent per trip. The president should rather listen to more of us who criticise him instead of those hailing every of his wrong steps either because of what they intend to gain or for fear of persecution. (Rotimi, 2016:34)*

With today's globalized world, foreign engagement by leaders is another feature of foreign policy making and no leader the world can afford to isolate his state in the comity of nations. There is no gainsaying the obvious that the president's foreign engagements has paid off in the areas of security especially with the declination of Boko Haram and the conquering of its Sambisa Forest headquarters; repatriation of looted funds and commitments of some other countries yet to do so to follow suit, there



may be light at the end of the tunnel. However, it should also be noted that the frequent trips has not fare well in the area of the economy thereby bring much hunger to the land.

## CONCLUSION

It is prerogative of leaders to engage in foreign policy which is normally influenced by domestic policies. Buhari's foreign policy has significantly shown some positives in the areas of security and the war on corruption but dismally poor in the area of the economy. While there are still much to be done in the areas of security and war on corruption, the non-performing economy needs much to be desire. It is therefore recommended that more vigour be employed in the war on terrorism and corruption while experts in the economic sphere should be hired by government to bring the economy back on track. There should also be strong foreign engagements to woo investors in the country especially with the security situation in the country.

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