



## The Press and Nigeria's Foreign Policy: A Content Analysis of Selected Issues (1985 – 1995)

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Objectives of this study include but not limited to ascertaining the extent to which the press contributed to the formulation and implementation of some foreign policies during the period under study, scrutinizing the nature of publications on the foreign policies by Nigerian press during the period under review and bringing to light, the relationship between media ownership structure and press performance in foreign policy issues. This study examines the extent (using directionality, frequency and content categories) to which the press contributed to foreign policy issues during the period under review, with regards to the selected foreign policy initiatives. The study is based on historical, content analysis and case study design. The study examined six privately-owned newspapers and magazines and also two government-owned newspapers. The population of the study was drawn from newspapers published in Nigeria between 1985 and 1995. Namely, The Daily Star (now defunct) Daily Times, The Guardian, National Concord (now defunct) However, a total of 300 editions of three newspapers and two magazines published within the period of the study (African Guardian & African Concord) were content analyzed. From the research questions, findings indicate that the press played a significant role in the three foreign policy issues. In the three issues examined, the press had a total of 21 publications, it is clear that the press through news stories and commentaries enlightened the people and contributed immensely to the implementation or otherwise of the loan policy under Babangida's regime. ). Invariably, the press forced the government to drop the idea of Nigeria joining the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) for that period.

*Keywords:* Press: Nigeria, Foreign Policy

### BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The contribution of the press in policy formulation and implementation is acknowledged by policy makers, observers and implementers (Goldstein, 2003). In the area of Nigeria's foreign

policy, the press is expected to play the role of critical observers, critics and analysts since foreign policies are strategies used by governments to guide their actions in the international arena (Idowu, 2000). The press aggregates the totality of actions, inactions or reactions of governments at international scene because it has always been recognized by politicians and others active in public life as an important organizer of opinion (Babangida, August 13, 1992).

Naturally, the formulation of any foreign policy takes into account the interest of both local pressure groups and the masses represented by the press. The press during the period under review, may have performed such duties in the area of foreign policy. This is because the press at various times may champion the cause for the withdrawal of unfavourable foreign policies, while supporting those policies that are acceptable to the public. "In foreign policy, Babangida administration tried in three significant initiatives: the Technical Aid Corps and the strengthening of ECOWAS and the Liberian initiative which created ECOMOG" (African Concord, August 13, 1992). Unfortunately, there is always the tendency for Nigerian government to exclude the opinion of the citizens in foreign policy formulation and implementation. This is because of penchant of the nation's leaders to become autocratic even when elected by the people. In Nigeria, the intervention of the military into the political system came with a greater tendency to rule without regard to constitution, public opinion and without publicist inclinations. To this regard, Nigeria's foreign policy within the period of 1985 – 1995 may not have evolved through a democratic process.

However, despite the nature of government in power, Nigeria's foreign policy thrust is one which sees Africa and African affairs as the mainstay of the country's foreign policy. Also, it is a known fact that the press as an institution performs a very vital role in the life of every nation. It is on the basis of that, the role of the press in the making of Nigeria's foreign policy can be examined. The question then is, did the press play any role in Nigeria's foreign policy issues within the period from 1985 to 1995? Again what was the nature of press reports on some selected foreign policy issues within that period? Finally, since media-ownership structure can play a role in the extent and nature of press reportage on national or international issues, did that reflect in the press coverage of the selected issues within the period of this study? There is the need to examine whether the formulation of these selected policies may have taken into account the interests of both local pressure groups which usually includes the press.

## **Statement of the Problem**

Did Nigerian press play any role in the making of Nigeria's foreign policy between 1985 and 1995? The role of the press in Nigeria's foreign policy making has been said to be prone to faulty and impressionistic analysis which has been attributed to the nature and secrecy which dominate foreign policy making machinery (Okengwu, 1987). Nevertheless, the role of the press in relation to foreign policy should not be seen as publicity alone. Rather, the press is always expected to do more to educate or inform the public about foreign policy issues. Also, the press is expected to present the country's foreign policies in more analytical and interpretative writing for better understanding. Unfortunately, role of the press in foreign policy making is constantly ignored by the government and policy makers. This study examine the extent, using (directionality, frequency and content categories) to which the press contributed to foreign policy issues during the period under review, with regards to the selected foreign policy initiatives.

## **Research Objectives**

The main objective of the study to assess the role of Nigerian press in the process of foreign policy making within the period under study; the other objectives of the study include:

1. Ascertaining the extent to which the press contributed to the formulation and implementation of some foreign policies during the period under study
2. Examining the nature of publications on the foreign policies by Nigerian press during the period under review

3. Finding out the relationship between media ownership structure and press performance in foreign policy issues.

## Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

RQ1 Did the press contribute to Nigeria's foreign policy issues within the period under review?

RQ 2 What are the directionality of press reports on the selected foreign policy issues?

RQ3 Did ownership structure affect the pattern of press reports on the selected foreign policy issues?

## Literature Review

The study of foreign policy can be done in subsystemic manner which entails looking at the placement and actions of states regarded as the fundamental way of understanding foreign policy analysis (Hellmann & Urretarazu <http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com>). Also, the changing nature of foreign policy do recognize the structures, actors and problems of foreign policymaking with particular focus on the changing international environment (Hill, 2010). For the role of groups and individuals decision-making, influence of culture and identities within the international systems have been seen as essentials in understanding foreign policy analysis (Hudson, 2007). To this effect, Nigeria's foreign policy can be affected by the extent of press support or lack of it (Akinterinwa, 2010). It has been argued that stable international system is maintained when states do not profit from attempts to change a given equilibrium or hierarchy of prestige (Robert, 1981). Within Nigeria and indeed Africa and Asia, several military attempts at regime change can be regarded as disorientation of existing political equilibrium for which the foreign policies of most of these countries suffered a great setback.

Several scholars have provided different ways of analyzing and understanding foreign policy. For instance, news approaches to foreign policy focus on foreign policy bureaucracies, the state, globalization and change (Alden & Amnon, 2012); cognition, culture, identity, domestic and foreign sources of foreign policy (Neack, Hey and Hancy, 1995); the ability of the state apparatus to extract resources from the society for international purposes, (Zackaria, 1998); statesman as strategic actors seeking to simultaneously satisfy the competing demands and constraints placed upon by domestic and international audiences (Evans, Jacobson and Putnam, 1993) and the realization that actions of states are not measured by distribution of power resources but rather by the way in which states see each other (Wendt, 1999).

## The State and the Press in Nigeria

The functioning of any nation-state is a product of the structures that make up such state. No state or government can operate in isolation. There is usually interaction between the political, economic and social structures. The press has remained a very important structure in any society, providing information on both local and world affairs. Over the years of press existence, it has been ascribed with different names and power. For instance, it has been called the "fourth estate of the realm", (MacBride et al 1980) the conscience and "the defender of the common man" (Time International, 1986). From its origin in the middle of the nineteenth century to the present, the Nigerian media has had a tradition of being outspoken. As Burns notes; the press has been called in the Fourth Estate of the realm and it is no historical accident that the particular term was coined to designate the political role of the press towards the end of the eighteenth century (Maduka, 1984). Although, some people still believe that the press can use such power in the negative (Ghandi in Kamath, 19). The expectation of great persuasive power from the media has been largely misplaced (Mille, 1980). For Instance, the multiplication of

newspapers has produced a radical revolution of our government by increasing the number of those who exercise some sort of judgment on public affairs (Usman, 1999 p.145). But such public judgment as expressed by press should be applied with restraint in handling of local issues as well as matters affecting the nation's relation with other countries (Ogene, 1983).

The press has been recognized world over, as a powerful institution from the early days of organized human existence (Idang, 1980). Such recognition has led to postulation of different theories to explain the role and power of the press in different societies (Odunewu, 1994). Also, communication policies and press laws have been put in place to structure the relationship that should exist between the press, the citizens and the government (Sessay, 1985).

### **Nigeria's Foreign Policy in Perspective**

Many foreign policy experts have tried to classify African nations' foreign policy as: core or vital interest; medium or middle range interests and long or short range interests (Offiong, 2000, p.137). However, these foreign policy initiatives are subsumed under strategic interest that determine the policy thrust and values which governments of different nations represent. Most foreign policy values are nationalistic or ideological. To this end, Nigeria's foreign policy revolves around:

- a. Defense of all African countries, sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity;
- b. Creation of the necessary political, social and economic conditions in African and the rest of the world with the intent to facilitate the realization of the objective (a) above;
- c. Promotion of self-reliance and rapid economic development in Africa and the rest of the developing nations;
- d. Promotion and defense of justice and respect for human dignity, especially, that of the black man anywhere in the world (Osuntokun, 1989).

The above foreign thrust justifies the involvement of Nigeria in conflicts resolution in African continent and the enormous resources she has committed to peace-keeping missions in the continent. However, understanding the different levels of policy formulation and implementation (both at the primary, secondary and the tertiary levels) can help foreign makers appreciate and recognize the role of the press in foreign policy formulation, implementation and evaluation. Every foreign policy issues can be looked at from "the what" "the how" and why perspectives (Osoba 1985, p5). "The what" aspect looks at some foreign policy issues: the how question identifies and examines the process through which these policies are formulated and later converted to government policies and why question tries to describe the country's external behaviour and what is responsible for such behaviour. Therefore, Nigeria's foreign policy is about what the country does in her relationship and in her dealing with other nations. The study of the nation's foreign policy examines how the nation's programmes, actions and reactions affect other nations and how other nation's actions and reaction can affect the country. To this end, Africa's problems and their solutions have constituted the basis of Nigeria's foreign policy.

### **The Press and Nigeria's Foreign Policy**

Osoba (1985) argues that the right or wish of the press to know and inform the public is what those in authorities consider inimical to state security. Nevertheless, Aluko (1985) asserts that foreign policy is putting a country into communication with the rest of the world. It is a political necessity for all modern states (Anyikwa, 1989). If foreign policy entails communication, the press must be involved. Therefore, foreign policy is about the nature and source of information; how such information is gathered and transmitted, the channels of communication and how information affects decision making. In other words, its focus is on how the different units of international political systems communicate (Nnoli, 1989, p.327).

It has been observed that the role of the media in Nigeria's foreign is not well-focused due to poor facilities and lack of national communication policy (Nnoli, 1989; 327). However, it should be noted that the press played a good role in apartheid South Africa. But still, it is argued that

the Nigerian press does not represent local news very well and lacked the necessary materials for projecting a positive image of the country abroad. Therefore, the Nigerian press, it is concluded, has been “unable to put the nation’s foreign policy activities in proper perspective. Also, despite all the nature of trade relation between Nigeria and African countries or countries of Europe, the country still suffers from negative publicity from the press of these countries (Ibie & Abitudu, 1982, p.322). And this is where Nigerian press could make a positive impact”.

Although, Africa is the corner stone of the country’s foreign policy, reporting of Africa in Nigerian newspapers has the nation’s portrayed in an inconsistent degree of commitment. To this end, Asobie (1989) assert that the role of the press in making of foreign policy is hampered by the underdeveloped nature of our communication system.

Even when the media is expected to be responsible for the external and internal publicity of Nigeria’s foreign policy, they still lack the basic orientation (Osutokun, 1989). Commenting on the role of the press in foreign policy, Osuntokun concludes that even the officialdom recognize and confirm the usefulness of having a newspaper which, though sympathetic to the government, is not tied to the government ownership, on editorial opinion. Once the domestic policies are well informed through the press participation in their formation, then the foreign policy of the country would take cue from what the domestic policy is. To Osutokun, the media constitute one of the important elements of decision making in Nigeria polity because of the information they provide to the public who may know nothing about serious and fundamental issues of our time.

Also, Ogene has the same view about the role of the media in foreign policy. To him, the media is important and play critical role in transmitting information to the public and the way and manner such news is presented can make a lot of difference in terms of people’s interpretation of the policy. Hence, news commentary on radio or television and stories in newspapers depicting alternative policies in a positive light, can change people’s opinion on such policies (Ogene, 1983; 145). The press is the basic source of information about world affairs. While the press provides the necessary information for foreign policy formation, understanding and analysis, it is the individual minister or president that interprets such information within the concept of national interest. Nevertheless, the role of the press in foreign policy is critical since journalists do speak directly to policy experts and those in government circle. The benefit of reading newspapers or listening and watching broadcast news as either a secondary or primary source of information on foreign issues, to the government officials is so great. However, the role of the press in foreign can be insignificant when other factors which can help shape the opinions of government officials on foreign policy are put into consideration.

Even, the press is responsible for the external and internal policy publicity of the nation, most studies on Nigerian foreign policy making have shown little in terms of the role of the press in the making and implementing of foreign policies. Some of the studies have examined Nigeria’s media image of world affairs (Alozie, 2004; Dare, 1973), the influence of public opinion on foreign policy and inter-governmental relations (Ugboajah, 1984; Uche & Ngumoha, 2000). However, none of these studies has dealt with the use of the press as a source of information in foreign policy formulation or the press influence on the policy makers and the use of the press by government during international negotiations.

Moreover, the aspects that have been examined by researchers and foreign policy experts were not considered specifically in relation to the press. Therefore, there still exist some gaps to be filled, since the objectives of the country’s foreign policies are many and represent the composite desires and wishes of various interest groups, including the press. Hence, the involvement of the press in such issues as foreign policy becomes inevitable and imperative.

The test for any successful foreign policy lies in the principle governing selection of national objectives which are most often expressed by the press. The question remains, how did the press balance the interest of the nation during military regime of Gen. Ibrahim Babangida in terms of foreign policy issues? Whose responsibility was it to determine what should be reported and how was such news should be treated? When, if ever, did the press have an obligation to suppress information that is has obtained through official or unofficial channels (Baran, 2003)? Rather

than work at cross roads, the press and government are expected to work harmoniously towards the realization of Nigeria's foreign policy objectives. This, the press is expected to do without compromising any standard or ethical guideline.

### Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the development theory of the press. There is the assumption that the press function is a product of the economic and social developments of each country. Hence, for the third world or developing nations, the duty of the press is to aid in the development of the government. The development theory postulates that the press in any nation, especially, the developing ones, like Nigeria should be a conveyor of information, for social, political, economic and cultural development. Hence, the role of the press in foreign policy is to support government's efforts at formulating and implementing realistic and positive foreign policy.

This study is also based on the reflective projecture theory; which sees the press and indeed, the mass media as the mirror of the society (Aluko, 1981). It reflects the society's attitudes and value system. The press operates within the vision and image of the society. In relation to Nigeria's foreign policy initiative, the press should reflect the opinion of the masses and project same to the government officials. And it is expected that policies will be formulated and implemented along such popular opinion. The press plays a unique role as the conveyor of information in the modern state. "Even when the press is undersized, as in many third world countries, its role is enormous. Information and communication have taken such overwhelming importance that even in societies with privately-owned media system still imposes some degree of regulation. It can intervene in all kinds of ways, ranging from total political control to measures for promotion of pluralism" (MacBride *et al*, 1980; 13). The press may in certain places, be limited by self-censorship by the communicator (African Guardian, 1990).

### Research Methodology

The study is based on historical, content analysis and case study design. The study examined six privately-owned newspapers and magazines and also two government-owned newspapers. The population of the study was drawn from newspapers published in Nigeria between 1985 and 1995. Namely, The Daily Star (now defunct) Daily Times, The Guardian, National Concord (now defunct) However, a total of 300 editions of three newspapers and two magazines published within the period of the study (African Guardian & African Concord) were content analyzed. Using a systematic and purposive sampling techniques, each edition of the selected newspaper publication were examined for news, opinion articles letters – to - editor, features or cartons on the selected foreign policy issues and same was done to weekly editions of the magazine titles. This process though was not error proof but seemed to have yielded some positive results. The old editions of these publications were sourced from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Library with the assistance of librarians. However, in some cases some of the pages or editions of these publications were missing. It is not ascertained whether the missing editions or pages contained anything on the foreign policy issues we examined. A total of 21 newspapers and magazines publications were found to contain news or reports on the selected foreign policy issues. This accounted for qualitative presentation of our data on the assumption that the 21 publications (items) used are a representation of the press publications on the selected foreign policy issues.

The newspapers and magazines used in the research were chosen because of their high standard and wide circulation and their ownership spread (government and private ownership). A manifest content analysis of news stories editorials, features, opinion articles and news commentaries on three issues (OIC, IMF loan and ECOMOG) was done. The publications were content analyzed in terms of their directionality support or rejection of a foreign policy in relation to public opinion. Also, the publications were adjudged favourable or unfavorable when they

support or reject foreign policy issues in line with popular opinion (as expressed by the citizens with regard to Nigeria's national interests). Other criteria used included story placement, (front, back and inside page) and story types, (features, editorials, news, and opinion articles).

## Data Presentation

The press was on the 'offensive' during Babangida's regime over several issues, such as the government's economic policies; its treatment of the second republic politicians; its decision to join the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC); the handling of IMF loan debates, its handling of students' riots; its method of sacking ministers and state governors. Also, the murder, by parcel bomb, of Dele Giwa was criticized by the press. However, there were major foreign policy issues which attracted the attention of the press during Babangida's regime. Such issues included: Nigeria's involvement in peace keeping operation in Liberia, initiated by ECOWAS; Nigeria's membership of OIC and the debate on taking of IMF loan. These three foreign policy issues are discussed fully as case studies on the role of the press in the making of foreign policy under Ibrahim Babaginda's regime.

### The ECOWAS Peace Monitoring Group (ECOMOG)

Commenting on ECOMOG, *THE AFRICAN GUARDIAN*, August 24, 1992 wrote:

*"ECOMOG was conceived as a peace-making group to tackle the deep seated anger among the warring parties in the Liberian crisis and also; restore normalcy". (African Guardian, August 24, 1992)The magazine praised the idea but reported that:*

*"Today the initiators of the group are at pain deciding whether it should continue to remain so, or take more active part in the unending struggle against Charles Taylor's bellicosity"*<sup>33</sup>.

The magazine also reported the view of the interim president of Liberia, Dr. Amos Sawyer in which he urged ECOMOG to enforce action and separate the warring forces. Also, the view of the then Nigerian External Affairs Minister, Brigadier Ikechukwu Nwachukwu was reported by the magazine. At the end, the magazine urged ECOMOG to engage the main faction leader, Charles Taylor in a battle to enforce the 'Yamoussoukro Accord' or that ECOMOG should withdraw from Liberia. In an earlier edition, on October 29, 1990, *The African Guardian*, in a cover page story, stated thus: "the peace-keeping operation which was conceived to last for a few days is dragging for so long, costing Nigeria both men and materials". The magazine believed that; "Nigeria has woken into a real war. Hence, many indeed, believed we are at war, although the government insisted otherwise. The magazine went on to state that:

*The feeling was that once the better armed ECOMOG forces landed in Liberia, with those glistening arms and the dreaded power of the Nigerian Navy threatening from the sea, all the warring factions would abandon their arms and run. (African Guardian, 1990).*

But instead, "the prophecy of those regarded then as 'cynics' that Nigeria was entering a long struggle on Liberia was being fulfilled", the magazine concluded. *THE AFRICAN GUARDIAN* was worried about the number of casualties on the Nigerian side and also, with the nature of secrecy with which the Nigerian government is conducting the Liberian operation. According to the magazine; There is no state in the Liberian operation that does not give its fallen heroes in the war a state burial. The prevailing secrecy in the opinion of the magazine, "had left everything about 'ECOMOG' including the financial involvement in the operation to conjecture. Also, *THE AFRICAN GUARDIAN* published a story containing views of a cross section of Nigerians about ECOMOG in its cover page story entitled, "To Avoid Another Vietnam", The magazine wrote:

*There are periods in the life of a nation when it has to stand up to defend and protect the fundamental values that sustain it. Such times in history necessitate the mobilization of all the instruments and potentials of the*

*nation at its disposal in order to further the course of these principles  
(African Guardian, 1992)*

The magazine urged ECOMOG not to make the same mistake made by the USA in Vietnam, the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, the French in Algeria and the Japanese in Manchuria. At the end, *THE GUARDIAN* posed a question; whether it was worth sacrificing the entire sub-region for Liberia and installing an interim government without the necessary military and political clout to sustain such a government. Hence, it was the opinion of the magazine that ECOMOG should come to terms with Charles Taylor and prevent another Vietnam staring us in the face. *NATIONAL CONCORD*, in its Monday, November 1992 edition entitled "A Reinvigorated ECOMOG" argued that, ECOMOG should not just be given the task of a slave to perform, it should also be given the requisite facilities of a free born. That is the only way to assure the speedy execution of its mandate and the restoration of peace and sanity to both Liberia and the West African sub-region".

### On Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC)

The OIC is an organization of countries that have Islam as their official religion. Nigeria, an observer nation for over 17 years, decided in 1986 to apply for full membership of the organization. This action generated a lot of debates and controversies among the citizens. *THE DAILY STAR*, (Saturday March 22, 1986), in a headline entitled. "OIC An Arab Cause", wrote:

*The issue whether Nigeria should accept full membership of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) or should remain as an observer nation, the role she has played for the past 17 years or withdraw absolutely has been a matter of national debate and controversy. (see Daily Star, April 20, 1986)*

It was a matter for concern that Nigeria has been an observer country and recently applied for full membership of the organization, which has been accepted, without the majority of the citizens of this country being aware of either the existence of such a religious organization or the nation's involvement, the paper noted. To this effect, the paper argued that: "There is no special benefit which countries in this organization have and there is no doubt that OIC is an off-spring of Arabism, aimed at protecting the interest of the Arabs". Also, in March 28, 1986 edition, the *DAILY STAR* in an article entitled, "Who Took Nigeria into the OIC"? Ben Obiatuegwu wrote:

*The majority of Nigerians have been carried away by religious emotions and sentiments and have failed to appreciate the more fundamental issues raised by the country's controversial membership of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC). The issues go beyond sentiment and religion and could be as disturbing as they are subtle. (Daily Star, 1986)*

The writer questioned the rationale for Nigeria being a member of OIC, and concluded that the federal government had no right to take the whole nation into such an organization. The *Guardian* (Tuesday February 11, 1986) in an article entitled "Our Season of Dilemmas", Olatunji Dare wrote; "the controversy over Nigeria's membership of the OIC has spawned a new dilemma, deeper and more profound, than all the other dilemmas. At the centre of this dilemma is the press; its relationship to power and its role in human affairs".

The writer stated that: "In the moment of great national controversy such as OIC, what then, should be the role of the press? To whom should the press but be responsible and for what? In another article in *THE GUARDIAN* (Monday, February 10, 1986) entitled, "A Threat to Our Survival", Olajide Aluko wrote, "Nigeria was admitted as the 46<sup>th</sup> member of the OIC at Fez, Morocco on January, 1986, following an application by the Petroleum Minister, Rilwanu Lukman. This action had posed the greatest single threat to the survival of this country as an entity, since the end of the civil war. But it is doubtful if the country can survive a religious war". In the same edition of *The Guardian* in an article entitled, "IT Had Better Not Be", Simpson Aji argued that:

*Any move by government to take this country into the OIC without due recognition of the sensitivity of the issue cannot but be ill-advised, especially,*



*as it is bound to provoke a religious disaffection among a cross section of the Nigerian citizenry.*

The *Daily Star* (Sunday April 6, 1986) on the headline; “Implications of OIC for Nigeria”, wrote:

*Nigeria has had more turbulence than she can cope with. We should try as much as possible to avoid a religious crisis. We do not want a repeat of Maitatsine-like occurrence; neither do we wish to borrow a leaf from the fratricidal religious wars that characterize such countries like the Sudan, Ireland and Lebanon.*

Contrary to the on-going arguments against Nigeria’s membership of OIC, an article appeared in *National Concord*, entitled “OIC: A Moslem Viewpoint”. The writer contended that “the silent majority of Nigerians over the last few weeks have been subjected to a display of astonishing intolerance towards the Moslems by a section of the Nigerian press over Nigeria’s membership of the OIC. We cannot see any disadvantage which Nigeria will suffer as a result of joining OIC, the writer concluded.

*National Concord* (Tuesday February 4, 1986) in an article entitled :Nigeria and OIC”, Lateef Owoyemi wrote: “In my view, this debate on the OIC issue been dispassionately examined call for a change of *attitude* on the part of the Muslim Nigerians. It shows most clearly that, it is high time Muslim intellectuals, writers and leaders reasonably devised a forum in which they can meet regularly and pursue legitimate claims of Muslims”? *The Guardian* (Monday January 27, 1986), in a feature entitled, “What is the Organization of Islamic Conference”, examined the gains of Nigeria’s membership of the OIC. Also, *National Concord* (Friday January 24, 1986), in a feature entitled “Nigeria in OIC”, wrote a full page report on OIC, explaining the implications and gains of Nigeria’s membership of such an organization.

In reaction to all these views expressed in the papers, the federal government called for advice on the OIC row. *The Guardian* (Thursday January 30, 1986) wrote: “The government stepped into the OIC controversy on Tuesday, but only as a peace maker among contending interests”. (*National Concord* (Wednesday February 5, 1986). The paper reported President Ibrahim Babangida saying; “we wont allow religious crisis to becloud the sense of this administration”. Hence, the president inaugurated a committee to look into the crisis. in August 26<sup>th</sup>, 1986, *African Concord*, wrote that the president had acknowledged “the touchy and personal nature of religion to all Nigerians and was equally aware of the multi-ethnic and multi-religious nature of Nigeria”. Hence, the issue of Nigeria’s membership of OIC, was stepped aside.

## IMF Loan Debate

Due to economic hardship caused by the Shagari administration’s ‘Austerity Measure’, there was a fall in the living standard of most Nigerians. Therefore, when President Ibrahim Babangida came to power in 1985, there was the need to resuscitate the economy, which led to the decision by the administration to contemplate taking IMF loan. Such decision was subjected to public comment, to determine what the citizens felt it. The *African Concord* (February 20, 1986) reported about the anti-IMF posture of most third world countries. An alternative to IMF loan for Africa was suggested by the publication. The magazine quoted Ahmed Keddi, a member of the Schiller Institute as saying, “we have to realize a second independence, that is, to take up the challenge and unite our ranks against the new slavery to international financial institutions”. In a feature entitled “IMF Debate: A Unique Occasion for Nigerians”, *The Guardian* (Monday December 16, 1985) reported what Nigerians felt about IMF loan.

To this end, the paper stated that there is a wide opposition to the idea. *The Guardian* (November 18, 1985) in a headline entitled “No Running Away from IMF Loan”. Presented an argument by Louis Odi Mbanefo, that: “the country should take the loan. Mbanefo wondered why such issue as IMF loan should be thrown open to public debate. Also, Ogundare, S.O. in another

article in *The Guardian* (Monday, November 18, 1985), argued that Nigeria should take IMF since it will attract foreign investments.

On the contrary, *The Guardian* published a report on the outcome of the grand national seminar on “Nigeria, IMF Loan and the Year 2000 AD” sponsored by the Nigeria Insurance Company Limited. With the title; Nigeria Rejects IMF Loan”, *The Guardian* (December 14, 1985) gave a detailed report on IMF loan issue, including government stand. The paper went on to state thus: “Nigerians rejected the loan because they believe the IMF is an agent of neo-colonialism” (Daily Times, March 28, 1986).

*National Concord* (Tuesday, November 5, 1985) under the caption, “IMF loans as a Colonizing Instrument”, wrote: “the IMF is irrelevant to long term recovery and economic development of Nigeria” (Daily Star, March 22, 1986). To borrow from the IMF, even as a short term measure, is to further accelerate the patterns of consumption of Nigerians, the paper asserted.

The *Daily Star* (Tuesday, October 22, 1985) with the headline “Kalu, IMF and the Nigerian Economy”, wrote that: There is no doubt that many Nigerians are angry that the federal government is thinking about taking some loan from IMF and they have strongly held reasons for their anger (Daily Star, March 28, 1986). In the *Daily Times* (August 17, 1985), Umoh James Umoh wrote under the headline “We Can Do a Lot with IMF Loans”. Hence, IMF Loan can Help Revamp Our National Economy and Provide Jobs to Nigerians (Daily Star, 1986).

The *Daily Star* (October 16, 1985) under the caption “Enough of IMF Loan Debates”, wrote: The government should realize that this is an obligation of a responsible leadership to deliberately and purposefully fulfill the aspiration of the people. The decision to lead Nigerians to a better tomorrow should not be a topic for public debate, that is not binding on anybody (Daily Star, October 22, 1986).

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

### RQ 1: Did the press contribute to foreign policy issues during the period under review?

The answer to this question is that the press played a significant role in the three foreign policy issues. In the three issues examined, the press had a total of 21 publications, it is clear that the press through news stories and commentaries enlightened the people and contributed immensely to the implementation or otherwise of the loan policy under Babangida’s regime (see, *The African Guardian* August 24 1992). For instance, on the IMF and OIC policies, through widely published debates and opinion expressed by a wide range of the population, as published in the newspapers and magazines, the government was made to see how the people felt about either joining OIC or taking IMF loan. See *Daily Star* March 28, 1986, *The Guardian* Feb. 11, 1986 (Daily Times, August 17, 1985). In reaction to all the views expressed in this newspaper, the federal government called off the loan. Therefore, on the IMF loan, Babangida noted:

*After due consideration of all the opinions expressed by Nigerians and other residents as embodied in the interim report on the IMF loan, government has come to the conclusion that for now, the path of honour and the essence of democratic patriotic lies in discontinuing with IMF for support loan, this is clearly the will of the majority people on the issue (The Guardian, Feb.10, 1989).*

### RQ 2: What is the directionality of press reports on the selected Foreign Policy issues?

On the OIC, after much criticism from the press, the president warned that his administration would not allow Nigeria to be dragged into religious crises over OIC. However, the president accused the press of giving the issue unnecessary publicity (see *National Concord*, Feb. 5, 1986<sup>51</sup>, *African Concord*, Aug. 26, 1986). Invariably, the press forced the government to

drop the idea of Nigeria joining the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) for that period. On the issue (policy) of IMF loan, the Daily Times and Daily Star Newspapers supported the idea and wrote extensively on why the government should accept the loan. The papers were divided on the directionality of their reports on the issues; depending on the interests of the majority of the citizens,

### **RQ 3: Did press ownership structure reflect in the pattern of press reports on the selected issues?**

Again, on the issue of OIC, all the newspapers and magazines owned by the Muslim proprietors supported the idea, while those owned by Christian proprietors, including Christian states newspapers rejected it. For instance, the late M.K.O. Abiola's African Concord and National Concord Newspaper supported Nigeria's membership of the OIC because Abiola was a Muslim. (see National Concord, Feb 4, 1986). States made up of Christians like Enugu state had their papers reject the idea of Nigeria joining OIC (see Daily Star March 28, 1986 edition). From press publications the government was meant to see how the people felt about either joining OIC or taking IMF loan. For instance, on the IMF loan, Babaginda said:

*After due consideration of all the opinions expressed by Nigerians and other residents as embodied in the interim report on the IMF loan, government has come to the conclusion that for now, the path of honour and essence of democratic patriotism lies in discontinuing with IMF for support loan. This is clearly the will of the majority of our people on the issue (The Guardian, Feb, 10, 1986)54.*

The above statement by the former military president of the country shows that the press reports are read by those in authority and they can form basis for foreign policy initiatives. The decision of the then federal government not to take the IMF loan, is clearly based on the will of the majority of Nigerian citizens on the issues.

However, the Daily Times (a federal government owned newspaper) adopted a lukewarm attitude over the OIC issues and supported government on IMF loan. That shows ownership can be a factor in press coverage of foreign policy issues. Hence, all the privately – owned newspapers and magazines rejected the quest for Nigeria to obtain loan from IMF while government owned papers such as Daily Star and Daily Times supported the idea of taking the loan. However, it has been noted “the establishment of ECOWAS monitoring group (ECOMOG) during the regime of President Ibrahim Babangida was a clear demonstration of the unflinching commitment of regional peace and security (National Concord, February 10, 1986). At the beginning of the operations of ECOMOG, all the papers supported the idea. But when the operation in Liberia lingered with its financial implications and high causality level, the paper became unfavourably disposed towards the issue.

### **Discussions**

The press apart from its primary functions is now trusted with responsibility for socialization and motivation of both the society and individual (National Concord, February 4, 1986). In spite of the contributions of the press in opinion moulding, there exist very few studies in the contribution of the press to foreign policy. However, for the press to contribute significantly, to foreign policy formulation and implementation, it must adopt an accounts approach to foreign policy issues<sup>57</sup>. However, there have been persistent insinuations and aspersions cast on the press as a political vehicle to achieving the aspirations of a section of the country or, what has been referred to as the *Lagos/Ibadan Axis* press or *Mbati Press* (National Concord, November 16, 1992). Such remarks usually forcefully made are often not without the intent to confuse and trivialize national issues and the role of the press on such issues (National Concord, November 5, 1985).

One negative trait in Nigeria's foreign policy, according to Ishaku (1994: 10)

*Is the nation's inability to maximize the gains stemming from our support for causes abroad. We have the knack for losing foreign policy benefits or initiative immediately our friends abroad attain power. There is no consistency in policy or that some consistent policies were not followed up by the government or the press (The African Guardian, October 29, 1990).*

## CONCLUSION

Despite the political and economic problems that affect the press and indeed, the country within that period (1985 – 1995), the press still paid attention to foreign policy issues. This could be attributed to the fact that there is a link between domestic and foreign policies. Therefore, the press performed well on foreign policy during Babangida's regime.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the research findings, we recommend the following:

- (a) *That the press should play more significant role in enlightening the populace on government's policy initiatives.*
- (b) *That the government – relationship could be more cordial in order to encourage more access to information on foreign policy.*
- (c) *Nigerian press should be assigned a responsibility to publicize the nation's foreign policy initiatives. Like their American and British counterparts, the voice of Nigeria (VON) should begin to air programmes that project the foreign policy stand of Nigeria to all countries of the world.*

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